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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**Folly in the Garden:
The Religious Satire of Erasmus and Voltaire**

written by

John M. Beller

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

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3 December 2001

Folly in the Garden
The Religious Satire of Erasmus and Voltaire

John M. Beller
Ouachita Baptist University
Senior Honors Thesis

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Chapter One

Introduction and Satire

In his introductory editorial comments on Erasmus' letters, literary critic Robert M. Adams commented that "Like Voltaire, with whom it's commonplace to compare him, Erasmus was a prodigious correspondent."¹ Erasmus and Voltaire shared much more than an affinity for writing letters. A list of their similarities reads much like one of those supposedly "eerie" lists of coincidences between the presidencies of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. The dates of their respective births remain uncertain. Both may have been illegitimate during times when ancestry mattered a great deal, and neither was born noble. Both rose above their beginnings by means of education and ability and became internationally celebrated figures. Both wrote eloquently. Neither was English, but both adored England. Both traveled widely and consorted with the elite of the European political and intellectual community; and when favor turned to displeasure, both sought refuge in Switzerland. Both typified, in their lives and work, the major values and goals of the times in which they lived. Both died somewhat disillusioned. And, most importantly for this study, both Erasmus and Voltaire wrote remarkable satire.

Whimsical and critical, touching and biting, comical and compelling, the satirical writings of Erasmus and Voltaire are among the best the Western tradition has to offer. And while both wrote for an audience in a specific time and place, their words and

¹Robert M. Adams, ed. *Desiderius Erasmus: The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989, 228. (Hereafter referred to as Norton/Erasmus.)

themes remain timeless. In fact, they shared many topics and satirical targets in common; but while the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire criticized many of the same things, it is marked with distinctions of motivation and purpose that can be explained with reference to the authors' personal world view and the dominant attitudes of the times in which they lived. This comparative study seeks to offer such an explanation.

Chapter one, in addition to providing a general outline for the paper as well as a few more introductory remarks, will be devoted to finding a useful definition of "satire." Chapter two will provide brief biographies of Erasmus and Voltaire, as well as general overviews of the periods in European history in which they lived: the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The second chapter will be concerned specifically with identifying the two writers as individuals whose lives embodied many of the major values and goals of their respective time periods.

Chapters three and four will introduce and present several of Erasmus and Voltaire's most important and well-known satirical pieces. These chapters will highlight some of the most significant objects of the authors' satire, especially those which they had in common. Chapter Five will be a topical treatment of the satirical objects highlighted in Chapter Four and will be focused on fleshing out the notion that the differences in the ways Erasmus and Voltaire approached similar topics can be explained by personal and time period distinctions. The final chapter will discuss the importance of the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire for contemporary readers as well.

As indicated by the title of the paper, this study will concentrate on the *religious* satire of Erasmus and Voltaire. Not only does this concentration make a broad topic somewhat more manageable, but it also has analytical importance as well. The periods of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment constitute significant moments in the history of Christianity, moments marked by radical change in the western world's experience with and attitude toward the Christian religion. Two themes that will be touched upon in Chapters two and five is the extent to which Renaissance attitudes toward Christianity

were characterized, more or less, by reform while those of the Enlightenment were marked, more or less, by rejection and the ways in which the religious satire of Erasmus and Voltaire reflect those attitudes.

These two men are among the most prominent in European history. Whether one agrees or not with the sorts of things Erasmus and Voltaire spent their lives advocating, one cannot help but be fascinated by the lives they lived; and whether one likes or not the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire, one cannot help but be impressed by the learning, brilliance, and wit that produced it. It is in this spirit of respect and fascination that this paper is written.

Toward a Definition of Satire

Articulating a concise and comprehensive definition of satire is something of a difficult task. When Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart was asked during the infamous obscenity hearings to define “obscenity,” he replied, “I’m not sure I can tell you what it is, but I know it when I see it.” In attempting to define “satire,” this author sympathizes with Justice Stewart. While the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines satire as “a literary work in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision, or wit” or “the branch of literature constituting such works,” Edgar Johnson writes that “there wouldn’t be much exaggeration in saying that everybody recognizes satire and that nobody knows what it is.”²

Two writers, John Russell and Ashley Brown, admit that “it is perhaps best to admit that the genre [of satire] is simply too large to be contained by any definition.” Rather than defining satire, they choose to highlight its “ingredients.”³ Northrop Frye says that “[t]wo things...are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or

²Edgar Johnson, ed. *A Treasury of Satire*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945, 3.

³John Russell and Ashley Brown, eds. *Satire: An Anthology*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1967, xviii.

a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack.”⁴ These two elements serve as good starting points in developing an element of satire.

Whether it attacks an institution or an individual, a movement or an idea, satire is critical. Its aim is to expose and deride a perceived abuse, stupidity, vice, or other flaw. Frederick Kiley and J.M. Shuttleworth write that, despite its destructive character, “satire is a constructive art. It seeks not merely to destroy but to rebuild...its aim is to inspire reform.”⁵

While its critical nature is not difficult to discern, identifying satire as something always humorous is not as simple. It is hard to imagine that Pope Julius II, had he gotten the chance to read it, would have found Erasmus’ *Julius Excluded From Heaven* funny. A good way to describe the humor in satire is that it contains comedic intent, that is, the author of a satirical piece finds it funny. There are exceptions to this general rule, but for the purposes of this study, it is enough to say that satire is comical.

Russell and Brown also identify “attack and humor” as fundamental elements of satire but add to these the notion of “responsibility.” Their idea is that the reader of satire must feel that the author knows what he or she is talking about, “that the satirist possesses competence and control and measures up to such traditional aesthetic criteria as coherence, tone, and relevance.”⁶ This element of satire excludes such things as *Mad Magazine* from being called proper satire.

While Russell and Brown say that responsibility includes the concept of relevance, one might wish to discuss the idea separately; it is essential to the satirical form. The ingredients of criticism and responsibility speak to satire’s social importance. “Until we reach perfection in some faraway Nirvana, [satire] will...certainly continue to

⁴Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 223.

⁵Frederick Kiley and J.M. Shuttleworth, ed. *Satire from Aesop to Buchwald*. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1971, 1.

⁶Russell and Brown, xix.

endure.”⁷ For it to be socially important it must speak to the times in which it is written. If one were to publish next year a witty, harsh, and well-informed parody on monastic life in the Renaissance, it would not be an important appeal for reform in the twenty-first century. As a literary vehicle for social change, satire must be concerned with contemporary issues.

Satire, then, is critical, comical, responsible, and relevant. Though this definition will not be specifically referenced in Chapters Three and Four, when the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire will be presented, it will not be difficult to recognize these four elements in the works discussed. The authors were obviously critical, and after reading Chapter two, it will be equally apparent that their work was responsible and relevant. The degree to which it is comical or humorous is up to the reader to decide.

⁷Kiley and Shuttleworth, 1.

Chapter Two

Biography and History

In order to understand the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire better, a grasp of its context must be obtained. This chapter contains brief biographies of both authors that emphasizes significant moments in their intellectual development as well as their personal religious perspectives. This chapter also discusses some of the dominant intellectual and religious trends and themes of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. These sections will be presented in such a way that highlights the roles of the Erasmus and Voltaire in the movements.

As topics that refer to complex and disparate periods of intellectual history that spanned decades and centuries, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment could never be comprehensively captured in a short number of pages, if at all. The treatment, in this paper, of these epochs of Western history suffers from a lack of subtlety and nuance. The same can be said of the biographical sketches of Erasmus and Voltaire. One hopes, however, that this chapter accentuates prominent characteristics of both the lives of Erasmus and Voltaire and the eras during which they wrote so that a backdrop might emerge against which one can read and interpret the authors' satire meaningfully.

Desiderius Erasmus

Probably born in 1466 in or around the Dutch city of Rotterdam as the second illegitimate son of priest, Desiderius Erasmus' obscure, tainted early years hardly foreshadowed his future fame. His death, which he faced with the comfort of but a few

friends while in virtual exile outside Basel, Switzerland, in 1536 did not testify to his greatness either. During the intervening seventy years, remarkable in both quantity and quality, Erasmus captured the attention of literate Europe with his erudition and wit and wrote his way into the history of the Renaissance.

Unlike most Europeans of his era, Erasmus traveled widely. He lived at various times in Holland, France, England, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. The scholar's wide circle of acquaintances and those influenced by his work included many of the most notable political, religious, and intellectual figures of his day. He impressed Henry VIII and Francis I, both of whom personally invited Erasmus to their courts; and he also served as a councillor to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. "The university centers, Cambridge and Oxford, Louvain, Basel, and Vienna," sought his presence as well. Erasmus enjoyed the favor and admiration of Pope Leo X. He corresponded with Thomas More and Martin Luther. The able writer published prolifically, and any list of his works here would be too brief to be of value. Throughout his career, Erasmus' work evidenced two characteristics he acquired as a young man in the Netherlands: a deep religious devotion and a love for classical learning.¹

From ages nine to sixteen, the young man attended school in Deventer, the "intellectual center" of the Low Countries.² The school employed many teachers who were members of the Bretheren of the Common Life, a semi-monastic community formed by Gerard Groote in the late fourteenth century. Through the Bretheren, Erasmus encountered a movement known as the *Devotio Moderna*, or modern devotion. A commitment to simple piety and the teachings of the Bible and disciplined learning, with

¹Roland H. Bainton. *Erasmus of Christendom*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, 3.

²*Ibid.*, 8.

an emphasis placed on composition, characterized the *Devotio Moderna*, the principles of which Erasmus espoused throughout his life.³

Following the plague-induced deaths of his parents in 1486, Erasmus entered an Augustinian monastery around the age of sixteen. The young scholar detested the monastic lifestyle but relished the opportunity to spend time in the monastery's impressive library. He enjoyed considerable "latitude" as a young monk, not being required to participate in the order's regular fasts and vigils, and during this time, Erasmus acquired his life-long affinity for classical Latin and the works of antiquity. He steeped himself in the Latin classics and the works of the early church fathers and wrote a great deal, developing the "wonderfully elegant Latin style for which he was to become famous."⁴

Erasmus entered the University of Paris at the age of twenty-nine to pursue the degree of doctor of theology. Wholeheartedly opposed to the scholasticism he found at the university, Erasmus continued to pursue his own interests in humanist scholarship. To earn money, he tutored younger students. One such pupil, a young English nobleman, William Blount, invited to be his guest on a trip home; and in 1499, Erasmus made his first visit to England. During this visit Erasmus met several people who were to influence his life a great deal, such as Oxford scholar and later Dean of St. Paul's John Colet, the young lawyer and humanist Thomas More, and a young prince named Henry. Erasmus left England convinced, by Colet, More, and others, of the value and "necessity of mastering the Greek language."⁵ His studies in Greek led him eventually to edit and publish a Greek New Testament as well as a new Latin translation of the text.

³Johan Huizinga. *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957, 3-4.

⁴Williams, Kathleen, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Praise of Folly*. (Hereafter referred to as Williams.) Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969, 2.

⁵Bainton, 59.

From 1506 to 1509, Erasmus lived and traveled in Italy. He accepted a doctor of theology degree from the university in Turin. He witnessed Pope Julius II's triumphant march into the city of Bologna after subduing an anti-papal revolt. This event, as well as others, provided evidence for an already critical and reform-minded Erasmus of the inconsistencies between Biblical Christianity and the state of the church in the early sixteenth century.⁶ Just as the center of academic Europe convinced him of the need for educational reform along humanist lines, the religious center of Christendom convinced him of the need for church reform along the lines of the *Devotio Moderna*.

When Martin Luther made attempts for such reforms beginning in 1517, Erasmus sympathized with his fellow Augustinian; but as the conflict grew more violent and extreme, Erasmus began to withdraw. Luther, who had been encouraged by Erasmus, expected his public support, but Luther's enemies expected Erasmus to defend the church. Erasmus attempted to mediate, arguing that Luther's lot ought not break from Rome but that Luther's ideas ought not be rejected. Erasmus' considerable efforts fell on ears more attuned to the voices of violence and extreme measures. Europe erupted, and Erasmus' goals for reform within the church disintegrated with it. Erasmus eventually quarreled, rather nastily, with Luther on the topic of man's free will, but he did so reluctantly and ultimately unproductively.⁷

Erasmus biographer Roland Bainton wrote that Erasmus died "the battered liberal."⁸ Despite this fate, Erasmus' contribution to the Renaissance was unquestionably considerable and significant. In fact, there are many ways in which Erasmus' life and work typified, even exemplified, the values and goals of the Renaissance period.

⁶Ibid., 78-90.

⁷Huizinga, 139-150 and 161-169.

⁸Bainton, viii.

Erasmus and the Renaissance

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the Renaissance period, humanism ascribes to human existence a place of prominence and elevated status. Renaissance humanists saw human beings as productive, creative individuals whose works and achievements merited celebration, praise, and study. For scholars in the Renaissance, the ancient Greeks and Romans represented the height of achievement in virtually all matters of life: language, art, architecture, philosophy, government, virtue, ethics, and morality. The Renaissance was a “rebirth” of the study of the classics.⁹

The Renaissance movement began in Italy during the fourteenth century and subsequently spread throughout much of Europe. However, the Renaissance experienced by Europeans who lived North of the Alps differed significantly from its predecessor on the Italian peninsula. “Awakened Italy felt itself the heiress of Rome, and thus patriotism coloured its enthusiasm from the past. To the rest of Western Europe this source of inspiration was not open.”¹⁰ Northern Europeans, forced to find “a calmer and truer estimate of what they might hope to gain from the study of the classics,”¹¹ fashioned their own rebirth, often called the northern or transalpine Renaissance, complete with their own brand of humanism, Christian humanism.

Christian humanism represented the confluence of humanist scholarship and Christian faith, and it cannot be explained without reference to the *Devotio Moderna*, the modern devotion. Gerard Groote, a Deventer native credited with the beginning of the modern devotion, established the Bretheren of the Common Life in the late fourteenth century. The group originated in Deventer and soon spread throughout the Low Countries and into Germany as well. The Bretheren preached a Christian faith and practice that later found its most eloquent expression in Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitatio*

⁹Donald R. Kelley. *Renaissance Humanism*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991, 1-4.

¹⁰Allen, P.S. *The Age of Erasmus*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963, 252.

¹¹*Ibid.*

Christi, The Imitation of Christ. The book's title implies its message: Christians ought to live by the example of Christ - show love and compassion to one another, overcome temptation and live virtuously, and elevate the spiritual life and the cultivation of the soul above the material life and the ways of the world. This stance on the proper expression of Christian faith made the Bretheren vocal advocates of monastic and ecclesiastical reform.¹²

Groote and the Bretheren believed their simple piety could best be advanced through education and began to find employment as teachers in many of the schools in the towns and cities in which they lived. In the early fifteenth century, Bretheren member John Cele, a friend of Groote's, introduced humanist scholarship into the curriculum of the Bretheren school at Zwolle, and the school in Deventer instituted the reforms as well. The study of Latin enabled students to read ancient sources both "Christian and classical"; they read the works of the early church fathers alongside the writings of Cicero. The Bretheren's *Devotio Moderna* came to embody the essence of Christian humanism: simple piety, church reform, and classical learning.¹³

The extent to which this tradition shaped Erasmus' development is not difficult to discern. He studied at the school in Deventer. The themes of piety, reform, and humanism permeated his work; he called them the *philosophia Christi*, the philosophy of Christ. But Erasmus was not alone in being influenced by the *Devotio Moderna*; "all over Europe there were practical men eager to reform both the Church and society. Princes, noblemen, officials, clergy, lawyers, scholars only asked to be inspired and used." The significance of the topic "Erasmus and the (northern) Renaissance" lies not in how the movement shaped Erasmus' perspective but in how Erasmus shaped the movement. He became its spokesperson. The "wandering scholar" united the "scattered

¹²Albert Hyma. *The Christian Renaissance*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965, 9-40 and 158-170.

¹³Ibid, 122-135.

minority of enlightened men” and gave them “not a constitutional programme but a message, not a new machinery but a new spirit.” Erasmus was not only a Christian humanist; he was the chief exemplar of the entire movement.¹⁴

Francois Marie Arouet

The man posterity knows simply as Voltaire was born Francois Marie Arouet in Paris most likely on 21 November 1694. He took the name Voltaire upon his release from the Bastille in 1718; he stayed a year in prison for writing a disparaging, satirical poem about the young King Louis XV and the regent Philippe of Orleans. Arouet spent the next fifty years making Voltaire one of the most recognizable names in Europe. He died in the city of his birth on 30 May 1778.

Voltaire’s life closely resembled Erasmus’. He lived for significant periods of time in England, Prussia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. He knew “everybody who was anybody” in eighteenth century Europe. He served the French government as a diplomat. But first and foremost, Voltaire was a writer, perhaps “the most varied and voluminous of the world’s great writers.” Whether he put pen to paper as a dramatist and poet, an historian, or a philosopher, Voltaire’s words “touched human activity at almost every point.”¹⁵

At an early age, Voltaire wanted to become a writer of plays and poems. His career began well. His first play, *Oedipe*, a tragedy very much in the style of ancient Greek theatre that contained “strongly anti-monarchical and anti-clerical lines,” succeeded tremendously on both the popular and critical level. First performed in Paris in 1718, the same year the author took the name Voltaire at the age of twenty-four, *Oedipe* placed Voltaire at the “forefront of French literature” and propelled him into the position of an “international symbol of free thought.” Appropriately, the work drew comparisons

¹⁴H.R. Trevor-Roper. *Historical Essays*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977, 38, 39, 38.

¹⁵Theodore Besterman. *Voltaire*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1969, 13.

to Sophocles. His first poem, the *Henriade*, an epic that Voltaire hoped would be a virtual French *Aeneid*, garnered significant attention and praise as well. "The subject is technically the siege of Paris by Henri IV at the end of the sixteenth century, but in reality the *Henriade* is a philosophic panorama of fanaticism."¹⁶ Voltaire later judged his epic a failure in the genre. He also criticized his own pieces for the theatre and, throughout his life, bemoaned what he believed to be the poor state of French theatre. However, through his early works in poetry and drama, "Voltaire...achieved glory."¹⁷

Though not a trained historian, Voltaire's historical scholarship signaled the beginning of a movement that revolutionized the study of history. Widely considered a turning point in historiography, his book *Histoire de Charles XII* represented one of the first attempts in the Western tradition to approach an historical topic somewhat scientifically and free from the censure of church or state. He said that "history is a witness, not a flatterer."¹⁸

Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* excellently represents his efforts as a writer of philosophy. Voltaire was not a systematic philosopher in the same vein as, say, Locke, Hume, or Kant, and Voltaire himself acknowledged as much: "so far as systems are concerned, one must always reserve to oneself the right to laugh in the morning at the ideas one had the previous day."¹⁹ In the *Dictionnaire*, he defines "philosopher" as a "lover of wisdom, that is, of truth."²⁰ The book, which is "not a dictionary" but a "polemical tract"²¹ consisting of a compilation of terms and topics, records Voltaire's

¹⁶Ibid., 531, 531, 95.

¹⁷Gustave Lanson. *Voltaire*. Translated by Robert A. Wagoner. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960, 23

¹⁸Besterman, 157.

¹⁹Ibid., 209.

²⁰Voltaire. *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. Printed in *Candide and Other Writings*, edited by Haskell M. Block (Hereafter referred to as "Block"). New York: Random House, 1956, 429.

²¹Peter Gay. *The Party of Humanity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, 7.

thoughts about and attitudes toward such things as God, cannibals, dogmas, freedom of thought, fanaticism, and tolerance, which he defines as “the portion of humanity. We are all full of weakness and errors; let us mutually pardon our follies.”²² Critical, insightful, disparaging, and hopeful, the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* is Voltaire’s “most characteristic work.”²³

Voltaire discovered his passion for writing while attending the prestigious, Jesuit-run *Louis-le-grand* school in Paris from ages ten to seventeen. During these years, he also developed a fondness for ancient philosophy and literature, which he encountered in the humanist curriculum. While appreciative of his opportunity to study the classics, Voltaire grew weary of the regimented lifestyle and the strict, intolerant atmosphere he found among the Jesuits.²⁴ His associations with a group of older intellectuals known as the *libertins*, who “were as free in their behavior as in their ideas...a living demonstration of the fact that...the life of reason does not exclude a passion for beauty and poetry, and the love of women, good food and good wine,”²⁵ introduced Voltaire to the attitude and lifestyle he would exhibit throughout his life.

These notions of freedom of thought and reason played a significant role in the formation of Voltaire’s attitude toward religion. In contrast with Erasmus’ religious views which were very much in line with traditional Christianity, Voltaire was hostile to an established and organized church. However, he did believe in a “watchmaker” God. He abhorred the injustices apparent in Christian history, and his condemnation of the church’s past abounds throughout his writings. He rejected the doctrine of the trinity and counted belief in miracles as superstitious and unwarranted. The most appropriate generalization of Voltaire’s religious position identifies him as a deist, or perhaps, as Will

²²Voltaire. *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. In Block, 441.

²³Gay, 7.

²⁴Lanson, Chapter One

²⁵Besterman, 47.

and Ariel Durant suggest, a “theist.” He believed God to be “a conscious intelligence designing and ruling the world.” While Voltaire’s religiosity reflected his commitment to reason, it also exposed his humanity, if one of humanity’s traits be the ability to accept inconsistency. Voltaire’s creator fashioned a world in which something as disastrous as the Lisbon earthquake of 1 November 1755 destroyed over 30,000 lives in but a matter of minutes. While he recognized the incongruity, he found no explanation “to reconcile the event with his faith in a just God.” He wondered at the end of a poem he composed following the tragedy ““What must we do, O mortals? Mortals, we must suffer,/Submit, adore, hope, and die.””²⁶

Such a despondent tone contradicted much of the optimism Voltaire expressed throughout his life, an optimism characteristic of the Enlightenment period. But Voltairean contradiction of dominant Enlightenment themes was quite a rarity. The next section assesses some of the ways in which Voltaire is truly a representative figure of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

Voltaire and the Enlightenment

In many ways, the Enlightenment was a descendant of the Renaissance. The humanism that characterized the Renaissance permeated intellectual Europe in the eighteenth century. “Classical education was class education: it provided delightful objects of aesthetic contemplation, interesting subjects for scholarly study, and above all, a common language for the educated.” Enlightenment humanism differed from that of the Renaissance, however. It might be called a more developed or advanced form. It so influenced Enlightenment thinkers that Peter Gay said the Enlightenment “may be defined as ancient philosophy plus modern science.”²⁷

²⁶Will and Ariel Durant. *The Age of Voltaire*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965, 716, 721, 723.

²⁷Gay, 10, 11.

The ancient philosophy of the Enlightenment existed as a synthesis of “the ideas of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics,”²⁸ the common denominator of which is the human capacity to reason. The understanding of reason to which Enlightenment era thinkers subscribed deserves a bit of discussion. The *philosophes* were not rationalists. That is, they did not view reason as the only authority in determining knowledge. Voltaire did not change his position on the existence of a just God when 30,000 citizens of Lisbon perished in an earthquake. Rather, the *philosophes* were empiricists; they used their capacity for reason in drawing conclusions about information available to them by way of their senses. Voltaire believed in a creator God because the order manifest in the universe, detected and described by Newton, evidenced design.

The scientific advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were revolutionary. Acceptance of the Copernican model of the solar system, Bacon’s emphasis on experimentation, Newton’s mathematical formulations of the laws of physics, and numerous other discoveries and achievements all contributed to the Enlightenment view that the natural world could be understood and explained through observation and study. This new-found appreciation for the study of the environment humans inhabit came with strings attached, however. “The growth of science - of its pursuit, its methods, its findings, its successful predictions and productions, its power, and its prestige - is the positive side of that basic modern development whose negative side is the decline of supernatural belief.”²⁹

Though they did so often subtly and peripherally, Enlightenment era thinkers and writers attacked religion in general and Christianity specifically. They laughed at what they saw as superstitions, exposed the errors of Christian history, denied the divinity of Christ, and railed against the abuses of the Catholic church. Many of the *philosophes*

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Durant, 507.

embraced deistic beliefs; a few even identified themselves as agnostic or atheist. But religious criticism was not the only sort of criticism in which the *philosophes* engaged.³⁰

It might be helpful here to define the term *philosophe* and briefly assess their role in the Enlightenment. A term generally reserved for Enlightenment figures in France, *philosophe* originally referred to “those who joined in the attack on Christianity and the Catholic church.” It came to encompass a much larger sphere of writers and thinkers, however; and they were not only concerned with the church. They were for the Enlightenment what Erasmus was for Christian humanism: its voice, its force, and its soul. They advocated freedom of thought and speech, justice on all levels of society, and tolerance.

[To them] we owe the multiplication of schools, libraries, and universities; we owe a hundred humane reforms in law and government, in the treatment of crime, sickness, and insanity...[and] the immense stimulation of mind that produced the literature, science, philosophy, and statesmanship of the nineteenth century. Because of them our religions can free themselves more and more from a dulling superstition and a sadistic theology, can turn their backs upon obscurantism and persecution, and can recognize the need for mutual sympathy in the diverse tentatives of our ignorance and our hope.³¹

Assessing Voltaire’s importance to the Enlightenment movement proves as easy as assessing the role of the *philosophes*. “Intelligent, witty, belligerent, prejudiced, and tenaciously humane, [Voltaire] was the representative *philosophe*.”³² And the Durants titled their Volume IX, *A History of Civilization in Western Europe from 1715 to 1756*, in their massive collection *The Story of Civilization* after him: *The Age of Voltaire*.

In summary, the lives of Erasmus and Voltaire, with respect to the ages in which they lived, bear remarkable resemblance. They were the spokesmen of the Renaissance

³⁰Ibid., 755-786.

³¹Ibid, 497, 786.

³²Gay, 3.

and the Enlightenment, and satire was their voice. With this understanding of their lives and historical contexts, the authors' works may now be considered.

Chapter Two The Satire of...

...dedicatory epistle of *The...* ...
...every other profession ...
...a little time off for a ...
...and ... The ...
...of the most famous ...
...but just a scholar ...
...remembered for what it ...
...Far from being a satire ...
...in the previous ...
...a transition of ...
...of letters. He ...
...a humorous way of ...
...He did not write ...
...of *Folly* helped ...
...addressed ...
...gave ...
...Hazlitt wrote ...

Chapter Three

The Satire of Erasmus

In the dedicatory epistle of *The Praise of Folly*, Erasmus writes to Sir Thomas More that “every other profession is entitled to a bit of leisure - what’s so terrible if scholars take a little time off for play, especially if their foolery leads to something slightly more serious?”¹ The words that follow Erasmus’ preface to that little book remain some of the most famous and most lasting the author ever penned. It is a quirk of historical fate that a scholar as serious, dedicated, and prodigious as Erasmus would be best remembered for what is, in his words, “foolery.”

Far from being a satirist and an author of popular reading material, Erasmus was, as discussed in the previous chapter, a doctor of theology, an educator, something of a linguist, a translator of classical and canonical literature, a bit of a cosmopolite, and a prolific man of letters. He wrote satire as a form of relaxation, as an outlet for frustration, and as a humorous way of expressing his own opinions about politics, society, culture, and religion. He did not write satire as a professional pursuit, although the publication of *The Praise of Folly* helped transform his reputation as an erudite and able scholar to that of an internationally celebrated writer and thinker. His satire was, however, a personal indulgence, perhaps even preference, and in that it finds its importance. Erasmus biographer Johan Huizinga wrote that “only when humor illuminated that mind did it

¹Desiderius Erasmus. *The Praise of Folly* (Hereafter referred to as *Folly*). Printed in *Norton/Erasmus*, 4.

become truly profound”²; and though one might argue with that statement at some point, it is enough here to say that through his satirical efforts, Erasmus, as he saw it, told “the truth in a joke.”³

For the reasons just presented, Erasmus’ body of satirical work is quite small. *The Praise of Folly* is the only published piece of satirical literature whose authorship Erasmus acknowledged. He never claimed to have written *Julius Excluded From Heaven*. He also never denied it, and “modern scholarship, basing itself on internal evidence, some cautious phrases in the later correspondence, and the lack of a credible alternative author, has had little hesitation in assigning the piece to Erasmus.”⁴ The present study will proceed on the assumption that “modern scholarship” is correct, and both of these works will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

Although *Folly* and *Julius* are the only two pieces of Erasman literature that fall directly into the category of satire, Erasmus often found that a point was best made through irony or wit. These bits of satirical expression, or satirical moments, abound Erasmus’ work. In his famous *Colloquies* and in his well-known pacifist apologetic *The Complaint of Peace*, Erasmus often employs satirical language and techniques.

The Colloquies

The Colloquies were a series of dialogues and stories that Erasmus wrote as a way to teach proper Latin grammar as well as “various Latin phrases appropriate to a particular social situation.”⁵ He began writing them as a tutor while studying at the University of Paris, and throughout his life continually revised and expanded the collection until it contained over fifty individual works. As he developed his technique in writing these short pieces, Erasmus began to include bits of social and religious criticism,

²Huizinga, 78.

³Desiderius Erasmus. “Letter to Martin Dorp.” Printed in *Norton/Erasmus*, 231.

⁴*Norton/Erasmus*, 142.

⁵*Ibid.*, 174.

often in satirical form. In 1526, only eight years after publication of the first edition of *The Colloquies*, the faculty at the University of Paris voted to condemn the book; and in 1559, twenty-three years after Erasmus's death, Rome placed the collection on the Index of Prohibited Books.⁶

Shipwreck is a story that first made it into a printed edition of *The Colloquies* in 1523. In it, two men, Antony and Adolph, engage in a dialogue wherein Adolph tells his companion of a disaster that befell him and several fellow travelers at sea. Superstitious veneration of saints receives the bulk of Erasmus' satirical condemnation in this piece, but ignorant and self-absorbed priests also receive a bit of abuse.

On a clear night, Adolph recalls, a storm blew up apparently out of nowhere. The waves that rose made warts out of the Alps. After throwing all of their luggage and valuable personal items overboard at the request of the ship's captain and to the dismay of a wealthy, cursing Italian, the passengers and crew alike began a spirited and chaotic series of chants and prayers as the crew tore down the sails and sawed off the mast. The sailors began singing "*Salve Regina*, praying to the Virgin Mother, calling her Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation, flattering her with many other titles the Sacred Scriptures nowhere assign to her."⁷ Adolph responds to Antony's query as to what Mary, who "never went voyaging," had to do with the sea by saying that she took Venus's place when "the mother who was not a virgin" (241) stopped protecting them.

Some of the sailors even went so far as to worship the "deaf" sea. "Absurd Superstition!" Antony observes. An Englishman "promised heaps of gold to the Virgin of Walsingham" if he survived. Others promised gifts to "the wood of the Cross at such

⁶Ibid.

⁷Desiderius Erasmus. *Shipwreck*. Printed in *The Erasmus Reader*, ed. by Erika Rummel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, 241. All quotations for *Shipwreck* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

and such a place; others, again, to that in some other place.” Still others beseeched the Virgin Mary, “who reigns in many places; and they think the vow worthless unless you specify the place.” Antony remarks on the “ridiculous” idea that saints reside anywhere but in Heaven. Some promised to become monks. One man will make a pilgrimage to see “St. James at Compostella barefoot, bareheaded, clad only in a coat of mail, begging his bread besides.” Another man promised, “in a loud voice (for fear he wouldn’t be heard),” to give to Christopher a “wax taper as big as himself.” When reminded to watch himself because such a donation would be too expensive, the man replied in a low voice so as to not be heard by the saint, ““Shut up, you fool. Do you suppose I am serious? If I once touch land, I won’t give him a tallow candle.”” (242)

Most of these people perished as, first the ship, then the lifeboat, sank to the bottom of the sea. A rather large Dominican priest who pleaded with Thomas Aquinas and Catherine of Siena made it to land despite refusing to remove his heavy cowl, which impeded his chances of survival, because Catherine might not have recognized him without it. Obviously, Adolph survived. He didn’t make “deals with saints.” He had calmly “recited the Our Father” (243) rather than enlisting the help of some saint because he might have drowned while Peter, who stands at the gate and would have been the first to hear him, notified the proper authorities. Adolph then went about helping as many of the others as he could. There was a woman with a young child who reached land as well. She prayed silently and was given a small board which she used as a paddle in her right hand while clutching her baby with her left.

Also in the form of a dialogue between two men, Philecous and Lalus, *The Alchemy Scam* is the story of a wise man with a weakness. In this piece, Erasmus ridicules the practice of alchemy, the art of transmutating various elements, especially metals, into gold. He also sets his satirical sights on degenerate, unscrupulous clerics and, again, superstitious faith in the power of saints.

Lalus tells of an episode in the life of Balbinus, an “oldish fellow, quite respectable, and rather learned.”⁸ His weakness was that he was “cracked on the art they call alchemy.” A “certain priest,” (175) knowing of the wise man’s hobby, proposes that the two of them go into business together. With Balbinus’s expertise and finances and the priest’s willingness to do the work, the two would most certainly make a fine partnership. Balbinus thought as much and agreed to the contract. The two men would be rich within a year.

The venture got off to a rocky start as the alchemist/priest spent the money Balbinus had fronted for supplies on “whores, dice, and drink.” Philoceus remarks that such activities were “one way of changing the properties of things.” The two eventually gathered the necessary materials, but they had bought the wrong type of wood for the furnace, a key ingredient in the process. “There went another 100 ducats, and they skipped cheerily away over the dice table.” (177) After a bit more trouble, the priest suggested that Balbinus offer a few gold pieces to the Virgin Mary; that would certainly guarantee success. Being a pious individual, Balbinus agreed and gave the donation to the priest to deliver. He delivered it to a local brothel and reported back to Balbinus that “the Virgin would certainly give her blessing to their endeavors.”(178)

After several months passed and no results were evident, Balbinus became impatient. Something had gone terribly wrong. The priest admitted he had recently forgotten to attend mass a time or two, “and the other day after a late dinner I forgot to pay my respects to the Virgin.” (178) Balbinus surmised that must indeed be the reason for their troubles. The priest promised to make up for his errors.

Soon after that episode, the priest ran out of money again. He convinced Balbinus that the authorities were after him and that the only way he could save his neck was by

⁸Desiderius Erasmus. *The Alchemy Scam*. Printed in *Norton/Critical*, 175. All quotations for *The Alchemy Scam* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

bribing the pursuing officers. Balbinus handed over “thirty gold coins, the price of silence,” and a whole new round of supplications were made to the Virgin Mary. Lalus tells his friend that the “only danger [the priest] ever ran was of not having enough money for his whore.” (179)

Later on the priest got into some more trouble for nearly being caught in the bedroom of a courtier’s wife. The Virgin’s assistance was all that saved him from sure imprisonment. The priest candidly confessed his sins to Balbinus and telling of the wonderful help from Mary; and Balbinus, assured now that the Virgin was on their side, offered even more money to her, which the priest delivered faithfully. More of this sort of thing went on for some time, and the priest “squeezed out of [Balbinus] a very healthy sum of money.” (180) Upon realizing that he had been scammed, an old acquaintance of the priest had informed Balbinus of his partner’s reputation, Balbinus made one last payment to the con-man/priest, rather than having him arrested, so that the humiliating story would never get out.

The Complaint of Peace

It is evident that Erasmus utilizes satirical expressions in his more scholarly works. Another piece of writing in which Erasmus employed satire is *The Complaint of Peace*. Published in 1517, the same year Luther nailed his *Theses* to the door of the castle church in Wittenburg and before the furious sixteenth century “struggles known collectively as the ‘wars of religion,’” this little book resembles in form *The Praise of Folly*, although it lacks the structural complexity of *Folly*, something that will be discussed later in this chapter. Erasmus ardently opposed war. *The Complaint of Peace* systematically states his pacifist beliefs.

Erasmus’ basic line of argument is that war represents a wholesale rejection of Christ’s message to his followers, namely, that they “love one another.”⁹ For Erasmus,

⁹Desiderius Erasmus. *The Complaint of Peace* (Hereafter referred to as *Peace*). Printed

war among Christian nations was unacceptable and unjustifiable. He cites numerous scriptural admonitions to peace, but Erasmus also argues that war is an affront to basic human dignity. Appealing to reason and decency, Erasmus uses examples in nature as well as the words of classical authors to support his argument, frequently using satire to make these arguments.

Unlike Folly, who is a woman and airs her thoughts to an active and attentive crowd, Peace is genderless and is not giving an oration. Perhaps Peace should not be considered a figure at all but rather an ideal to which Erasmus ascribed a voice and a personality. Peace begins by saying that if humans had something to gain by rejecting her (one cannot help injecting a personal pronoun here if only to make reference smoother while retaining the personal tone of the piece, though it is understood that Erasmus did not identify Peace as a female), she might only be saddened or frustrated by their behavior, but because she is “the source of all human happiness” (89) and man’s misfortune is greater even than her grief, she cannot but lament and offer her complaint.

Peace defines herself as the opposite of war, but she also shows herself to be the enemy of discord of all kinds. Peace exists throughout nature, for even “the savagery of lions is not directed against other lions” (90); but among humans Peace never finds a place. Human nature inclines everyone toward “mutual benevolence,” “agreement,” and “harmonious relations.” (91) Yet not only do men continually engage in warfare, they cannot even get along with each other in non-military interactions. Adversarial lawsuits besiege law courts and churches. The courts of princes overflow with hypocrisy, greed, fraud, and conspiracy and are the very places where wars begin. People who “will do battle over the tenth part of a hair” (93) fill the academy. The church is filled with just as much abuse and corruption as the courts of princes, and the monasteries offer Peace no

in Norton/Erasmus, 97. All quotations for *The Complaint of Peace* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

dwelling place either. Households and marriages allow no entrance to Peace. Peace does not even reside “within the breast of a single individual” who is “often at odds with himself” (91) as reason battles emotion and piety battles greed.

In all of these cases, Peace has dealt with people who call themselves Christians - disciples of the “prince of peace.” (91) Throughout scripture, God calls his people to peace, and peace makes up the core of the message brought to humanity by Christ. He came not only to make peace between the creatures and their creator but to call all who would follow him to live as one. Christians do not have to agree with one another always, but they are always to be identified by the way in which they treat each other. “‘This is my only precept,’ [Christ] says, ‘that ye love one another.’” (97)

However, Peace says, Christians ought to “be ashamed of the way they actually live.” (99) Christian princes declare war on other Christian princes. Christian soldiers fight with and kill their Christian brothers. Priests and monks support and encourage these atrocities. Christ called his followers to be a city on a hill. What kind of example is set for the outside world when Christian nations goes to battle against another Christian nation?

Peace waxes satirical as she spotlights the inconsistency inherent in Christian warfare. Princes “show themselves ready every day to shed blood over a bit of money not paid on time, perhaps never even owed.” (98) That is certainly not the charitable, forgiving attitude Christ would desire in his followers. “This prince either finds or forges a moldy old document giving him title to a bit of new territory - as if, in heaven’s name, it mattered the slightest bit which prince rules a bit of land” (101) as long as the people who live in that territory are well off. “That prince takes offense because he was left out of a petty treaty between his neighbors. (101)

Christ’s ministers, the most pious and faithful of his followers, endorse and celebrate the wars these trifling rulers begin. “Priests, who profess to be our absolute guides through life, the professors of an infallible church, the very cardinals of the church

and vicars of Christ,” (102-103) are not at all ashamed to incite and even lead their people to war. “What has the shepherd’s crook to do with the sword?” Peace asks. “Can the same mouth preach Christ the bringer of peace and then cry for war, can one celebrate God and Satan at the same time?” Peace wonders whether those who do this are “afraid that the phrase used about Christ, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who announce peace, good tidings, and salvation,’” might be inverted to address them: “How foul are the tongues of priests who incite to war and evil-doing, who provoke men to their perdition.” (103)

“Evangelical tub-thumpers, that is, Franciscan as well as Dominican friars,” excite “battle-frenzy” followers who are “only too eager to listen to them.” They rouse “British against French, French against British,” (103) and send Christians, who bear a cross on their standard, off to fight their brothers who march under the same banner. “Over both camps and both lines of battle the same cross is displayed, on both sides the same prayers for victory are recited. What unnatural procedure is this? Cross fighting with cross, Christ at war with Christ?” (104)

Of those who fight, Peace has this to say:

Let me ask, what does the soldier say when he recites his prayers? *Our Father* - bonehead, do you dare to petition our father when you’re trying to cut your brother’s throat? *Hallowed be thy name* - how can the name of God be more disgraced than by your constant murderous violence? *Thy kingdom come* - is that what you pray for while you wade through blood to set up a tyranny here on earth? *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* - what he wills is peace, what you study is war. *Give us this day our daily bread* - so you plead to the father of all, and promptly ravage your brother’s fields, preferring to go hungry yourself rather than that he should prosper. What sort of face do you put on when you repeat *And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*, at the very moment when you’re on your way to commit fratricide? *Lead us not into temptation* you pray, and then put yourself in the way of the very worst temptations in order to entice your brother there too.

Deliver us from evil you ask, at the very moment you are devising the greatest possible evil for your fellow man. (104-105)

This soldier “carries a cross as he goes to war, and the symbol that should prohibit war becomes a means of inciting it.” He takes the sacrament “in camp (at one of the field-altars temporarily installed there),” observes the “supreme rites of Christianity,” races into battle, drives “cold steel in [his] brother’s guts,” and makes “Christ a spectator - if indeed he deigns to be present at all - at the most horrible of all crimes.” (104) Through baptism the Christian becomes a part of the family of God, bound to all Christians everywhere by a sacred act; and “are those whom Christ joined together any less brothers than if they were united by blood?” The soldier’s fate is a wretched one. The winner has murdered his brother. The loser is dead “but is no less guilty of fratricide because he attempted it.” (105) Not only does war soil the soul of a Christian, it makes a mockery of the sacraments.

Peace finishes the oration by offering suggestions for Christian behavior. A Christian ruler is one who ought to always be concerned with the welfare of his people, and war is not something that contributes to public welfare. Clerics ought to be examples of how Christian brotherhood extends beyond national boundary lines. Disagreements ought always to be resolved through negotiation and compromise. Most people honestly desire peace. “Nothing has been accomplished so far by treaties, alliances, force, or acts of retribution; now let us make the great experiment, how much can be done by mutual kindness and good deeds.” (115-116)

Julius Excluded from Heaven

If *The Complaint of Peace* is a serious, thoughtful literary achievement sprinkled with glimpses of Erasmus’s satirical talents, *Julius Excluded from Heaven* is a *jeu d’esprit* touched by moments of piety and wisdom. Written less than a year after the death of the Pope Julius II on February 21, 1513, the work first found its way into print in 1518. Though the literal object of the satire is obviously the “warrior pope,” the book

ascribes to Julius a much larger array of sins and shortcomings than he actually exhibited. One is, perhaps, better served by thinking of the fictional Julius as “a conflation of the Renaissance popes.”¹⁰ During the Renaissance period, crisis continually plagued the papacy. Individuals more concerned with worldly matters - power, wealth, pleasure - continually ascended to the church’s highest office. The trend disgusted Erasmus, and *Julius Excluded* is about the “contrast between the spiritual and the worldly life.”¹¹

The piece takes the form of a dialogue between St. Peter, Julius, and a Genius or Spirit. This last character might best be described as a figure who sits on Julius’s shoulder or hovers above him guiding, guarding, or even making fun of Julius. The dialogue occurs in front of the gate to Heaven. Julius appears with an army behind him demanding admittance, enraged and disgusted that the doors are not open.

His key does not fit, and he has only brought the one, the key of power, not of wisdom. He knows not of another one. The doorman is either asleep or drunk. The Genius remarks that Julius judges everyone according to himself!

Peter appears, thankful that this “stormer of cities”¹² has not kicked in the doors, to inquire about the new arrival. Immediately, the differences between Peter and Julius emerge. Peter is uninterested in Julius’s family heritage. He vaguely recognizes the key in Julius’s possession “though there’s only one of them, and it’s very different from those that were given to me long ago by the one true shepherd of the church, that is, Christ.” (143) He has no clue as to the importance of Julius’s crown or the expensive, jeweled attire worn by Julius. He expects the letters P.M. stand for “Pestiferous Maximus” rather than “Pontifex Maximus.” (144)¹³

¹⁰Bainton, 109.

¹¹Norton/Erasmus, 142.

¹²Desiderius Erasmus. *Julius Excluded from Heaven* (Hereafter referred to as *Julius*). Printed in Norton/Erasmus, 143. All quotations for *Julius* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

¹³The letters “P.M.” appeared on all things papal in much the same way the letters

Julius must show evidence that he is holy. Well, he has “six thousand bulls” describing him as “Lord most holy” and addressing him as “your holiness.” “Then you’d better ask those flatterers of yours to let you into heaven,” Peter replies. “They provided the holiness, now let them provide the bliss.” (144) Peter sees only signs of impiety in Julius, none of holiness. He reeks of “brothels, booze shops, and gunpowder;” wears “the robes of a priest of God” over “the bloody armor of a warrior;” and is marked from head-to-toe with “traces of outrageous and abominable lust.” (144-145) Peter suspects the body, “broken down and shrivelled up by drunken excesses,” before him is none other than “that most pestilent pagan of all, Julius the Roman, returned from hell.” (145)

Julius curses Peter, threatens him with “my thunderbolt of excommunication,” and prepares to storm the gate, but Peter says that is impossible. Such things “count for nothing here. Here we deal only in the truth. This is a fortress to be captured with good deeds, not ugly words.” (145) Peter asks Julius to present his merits.

“What merits?” is Julius’s reply? Peter lists the sorts of gifts, talents, and accomplishments an outstanding pope is supposed to possess: theological distinction, evangelical fervor, miraculous deeds, a life of “earnest and constant prayer,” subjugation of “the lusts of the flesh with fasts and long vigils.” (145) Such pursuits were outdated according to Julius. He recounts for Peter how he rose to the papacy - nepotism, wealth gained by simony and usury, political bargaining, and ambition. Peter wonders whether that is the common practice. Julius admits that it is, and the remainder of the dialogue consists of Julius telling the story of his life as the pope to a bewildered, shocked, appalled, and outraged Peter.

Pope Julius waged war all across Italy - conquering Bologna and crushing Venice so that he could collect taxes from these wealthy cities. He manipulated the politics of

“E.R.,” which stand for Elizabeth Regina or Queen Elizabeth, appear on clothing, seals, flags, and various other official items associated with the Queen of England. Pontifex Maximus, which means high (or chief) priest (or pontiff), is the pope’s Latin title.

France, Spain, Germany, and England by making treaties that he broke and playing one country's ruler off against another's. He created new ecclesiastical offices so that he could sell them. He raised even more money through the selling of dispensations. "Over and above all this, I raised several different armies, celebrated many grandiose triumphs, put on splendid shows, built numerous impressive structures, and then at my death left at least five million ducats...Now do you hesitate to open the gates for a pontiff who has deserved so well of Christ and the church?" (148-149) Summing up his conquests and political exploits, Julius says that "now you see everywhere statues of me; my titles are inscribed everywhere, my trophies are admired; nothing to be seen but stone and bronze images of Julius." Peter's reply to him is this: "So when you were the monarch, as I understand it, that condition had come about for which Christ ordered us to pray: 'Thy kingdom come.'" (152)

During the course of the conversation, Julius makes reference to his daughter. "What's this I hear? Do Popes have wives and children nowadays?" Peter wonders. "Proper wives they don't have; but what's so strange about their having children, since they're men and not eunuchs?" (153)

Before being elected pope, Julius promised to call a general council within two years of his election, "but," he says, "when it suited my convenience to do so, I absolved myself of my own oath." (153-154) A pope had the power to do that sort of thing; "what isn't legal if the pope with his full authority approves it?" (157) A group of people, "discontented with the Roman church," (153) decided to call the council themselves. This group was led by "cardinal d'Amboise of Rouen, who out of some quirk of conscience was always trying to reform the church." When cardinal d'Amboise died, the Spaniard cardinal Santa Croce, "a man of blameless life took his place." (157) These men were against "shameful money-grubbing, of monstrous and abominable lusts, of poisonings, sacrilege, murders, public sales of simoniacal positions, [and] pollution of every description" (153) and invited Julius to oversee their council.

He did not accept but instead called a council of his own. He decreed that his council was the only true council. He limited the number of eligible attendants, set a date that made it nearly impossible for most of the eligibles to come, and “then, when I had excluded practically everybody,” (157) held his council in Rome. At this council masses were said and “other solemn ceremonies handed down from antiquity and generally acceptable, though they had nothing to do with the matter at hand,” were performed. Julius “turned the worst threats of my thunderbolt” (159) against those who attended the other council and against all of France as well.

As for the “schismatic assembly,” (160) those who attended decided “that the church should be stripped of all her wealth and all her splendor, returned to her primitive squalor and wretched frugality. That cardinals, who now outdo princes in the pomp of their equipage, should be reduced to poverty.” (158-159) The schismatics further decided that “nobody should be created pope or bishop or priest as a result of money changing hands...but only because of the purity of his life,” and that “a Roman pope convicted of flagrant crimes might be deposed.” (159) The council made other proposals as well, most of them along the lines of what Erasmus would have seen as positive reforms.

Peter responds to these accounts by observing that the decrees of the schismatic council “seem to me a good deal more holy than those of your sacrosanct council. I don’t see that you produced anything but tyrannical threats, curses, and cruelty combined with cunning. If Satan inspired that other assembly, he seems closer to Christ than the spirit, for whom I don’t even have a name, who presided over your council.” (159)

Peter is also disturbed upon hearing that there is no reason for which nor method whereby a pope can be removed. “Not for homicide?” he queries. “Not for parricide,” replies Julius. “Not for fornication?” Peter asks further. “Ridiculous! not even for incest,” says Julius. After a series of such exchanges involving several more sins, Julius tells Peter to “add if you like the names of six hundred other vices, each one worse than any of these, and still the pope cannot be removed from his throne for any such reason.”

“This is a new doctrine about the dignity of the pope that I’ve picked up here,” Peter responds. “He alone, it seems, is entitled to be the worst of men.” The church is now forced to endure in her pope a character “that nobody would endure in a stable-boy.” (155)

Peter’s reactions to Julius’s story are best summed up in this statement near the end of the dialogue: “And still I hear nothing from you but worldly concerns.” He calls Julius the worst tyrant in the world, “the enemy of Christ, and the church’s bane.” (168) Julius is a “braggart soldier” who has “driven to their deaths entire populations!” (169) “You are utterly alien to Christ,” Peter tells Julius, “you abuse the titles of Christ to serve your own pride. Hiding behind him who despised the rule of the world, you act the tyrant.” (171) Peter continues this verbal assault by deriding Julius for failing to represent “the real gifts of Christ, that is, a holy life, a sacred teaching, ardent charity, prophetic wisdom, and genuine virtue.” Julius’s reaction to Peter’s condemnations is this: “Such things as this I have never heard before.” (172)

The dialogue ends with Peter’s final refusal to admit into Heaven Julius and his army. He tells Julius that he has a “gang of musclemen; you have a pile of money; you’re a good builder. Go make yourself a new private paradise; but make it good and strong to keep the demons of hell from dragging you out of it.” (173)

The crises of the Renaissance papacy eventually led to the downfall of its political power in Europe. For decades leading up to 1527, popes signed treaties with other rulers and broke them when it was convenient, meddled in and manipulated the domestic politics of European countries, and engaged in war in Italy and throughout Europe. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V’s troops sacked Rome in 1527 and held Pope Clement VII prisoner for months. The papacy never regained its political prominence after the humiliating defeat.

The Praise of Folly

Encomium Moriae, Latinized versions of Greek words meaning *The Praise of Folly*, is the name Erasmus gave to what became his most enduring piece of literature. The title is a pun on the name of Erasmus's dear friend Thomas More; "*encomium moriae*" might also be read as "the praise of More." He wrote the piece in a very short amount of time as a guest at More's house in early 1509, having just arrived in England from his three year stay in Italy. Erasmus published *Folly* in Paris in the spring of 1511; forty subsequent editions made it into print during Erasmus' lifetime.

Before considering the text itself, there is a brief word to be said about the influences that contributed to Erasmus' writing of the book. An *encomium* was a formal eulogy with rules stipulated by Aristotle; it often served as a means of paying tribute to or praising an important or prestigious individual. One began an encomium by noting the subject's ancestry, presenting it in such a way as to have one's background speak well of him or her. One discusses the subject's homeland and describes the circumstances surrounding that person's upbringing and education. The orator then proceeds to an account of the subject's achievements and public honors and mentions the important people with whom the subject associated. *Folly's* encomium of folly adheres quite well to these guidelines.¹⁴

Often called a mock encomium, the book hardly passes for a serious eulogy. *Folly* tells her audience that "Busiris and Phalaris...quartan agues, flies, baldness, and other misfortunes" all received encomia.¹⁵ Lucian wrote the mock encomium of Phalaris. Erasmus, however, added another element to the tradition of the mock encomium: irony. *Folly* was "both the author and the subject of her encomium," which means that

¹⁴Hoyt H. Hudson. *The Folly of Erasmus*. Printed in Williams.

¹⁵*Folly*, 8.

Erasmus's title "doubles back on itself, it tends to cancel itself out in the fashion of a double negative." Thus, "Folly's Praise of Folly"¹⁶ is really not praise at all.

The book draws from two other well-established traditions: "fool literature" and "learned parody." Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools*, published in 1494 was a favorite among Renaissance comedies. Readers in 1511 would have recognized many of Folly's kind as belonging in Brandt's ship. The learned parody was a technique used by Lucian, Aristophanes, and Plato and known during the Renaissance. In the learned parody, one generates a joke "out of the very modes and techniques of scholarship."¹⁷ One must be privy to a certain kind of knowledge in order to appreciate the joke. It is with this great tradition behind her that Folly mounts the rostrum.

Once she has taken her place and begun her oration, the reader senses a bit of confusion. "Our Folly is a very disconcerting dame. She is like mankind, whom Erasmus...describes as actors on the stage of life wearing as in the ancient drama now one mask and now another." But Folly effects these changes by "sleight of hand" so that the reader is not always aware of which mask she is wearing. She is a "sot" and then a "sage."¹⁸ Mary Geraldine describes Folly's shifting personality as an expression of her femininity: "now confidential, now aloof, sometimes amused, often furious, ready to break her ironic vein to coax and plead, or to pursue some tangential thought; she grows in folly or in wisdom as we listen to her diatribes and rhapsodies."¹⁹

It seems that there is a systematic method of understanding the changing faces of Folly. First, Folly is ultimate foolishness. Hans Holbein's image of her as a jester is an appropriate costume for this mask as she describes simpletons and morons as the happiest of all men. Second, Folly is the wisdom of the world. She ridicules scholars who waste

¹⁶Walter Kaiser. *Praisers of Folly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, 36.

¹⁷Ibid, 24, 26, 26.

¹⁸Bainton, 91.

¹⁹Geraldine, Sister Mary. *Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox*. Printed in Williams, 99.

away their youth with study and anxiety; this Folly is the source of all human happiness. Third, Folly is wisdom. She has recognized that “human life as a whole is nothing but a kind of fool’s game.”²⁰ Fourth, Folly is Erasmus himself. There are times when the author rather forgets that Folly is speaking and begins to hurl his familiar attacks.

The daughter of Plutus, god of riches, and Youth, Folly alone is able to bring “joy to both gods and men.” (6) With the help of Philautia (Self-Love) and Kolakia (Flattery), she is able to maintain human society and supply everything that is good about it. What man could stand himself were it not for Philautia? What friend could bear another without Kolakia? Why would two people endure matrimony or why would a woman want to have children without the resources provided by Folly? Human life would be unbearable without her, Folly says.

Heroes and greatness would never be realized without Folly. War is the source of all the mightiest heroes, and what is war but a type of Folly? Great things are never achieved by cautious, thoughtful, and wise men never achieve great things. Such a fate awaits open only to those willing to take a risk in search of praise and glory. “Wisdom interferes with performance,” but Folly is also “the champion of prudence” since “prudence rises from experience of things.” (27)

Foolishness is preferable to wisdom, Folly says. Being a fool simply expresses one’s willingness to play an assigned part in the cosmic comedy humanity performs for the gods. The wise man would have everyone remove their masks and expose the situation for what it actually is, but that would be the equivalent to “demanding that the play should no longer be a play,” (29) a ridiculous and impossible notion. It is “miserable *not* to be deceived.” (46) The truly wise man, or rather, the fool, simply “cast[s]his lot in with the rest of the human race and blunder[s] along in good company.” (29)

²⁰*Folly*, 27. All quotations for *Folly* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

Folly spends much of her time talking about the many types of fools among the human race. Grammarians are “the most wretched of men...being penned up, grubby and half-starved in their classroom.” Philosophers (or “foolosophers,” [9]) “know nothing specific, [though] they claim to know everything in general.” (56) “Shyster” lawyers, “asses though they are,” (34) make huge fortunes for doing useless work. Princes “think they’re performing all the duties of a prince if they ride regularly to hounds, keep a stable full of fine horses, sell government offices for their own profit, and think every day of a new way to squeeze money out of the citizens and funnel it into the royal treasury.” (67) Courtiers are the “most meeching, slavish, stupid, abject creatures conceivable,” yet “they fancy themselves the most distinguished of men.” (68) Scientists, businessmen, soldiers, gamblers, rhetoricians, alchemists are all fools as well, absolutely indebted to Folly.

But Folly saves some of her harshest rebukes for religious figures. Theologians “are a class of men so arrogant and irritable that they’re likely to attack me by squadrons with their six hundred conclusions and force me into a recantation.” “They cocker up their own self-esteem, as if raising themselves to a seventh heaven, and from that vantage look down on the rest of the human race as so many dumb beasts crawling the ground.” They ask questions like “Is it thinkable that God the Father hated Christ? Could God assume the shape of a woman, of the devil, of an ass, of a pumpkin, or a piece of flint? Suppose him transformed to a pumpkin, how could he have preached, performed miracles, been crucified?”²¹ (57) Folly juxtaposes the perspectives of these theologians with those of the apostles who preached grace without distinguishing actual grace from sanctifying grace. The apostles “exhort us to good works, but without discriminating between the work as such, the work of the worker, and the work worked.” Folly commends the doctors of theology for not “condemning out of hand what the apostles

²¹Here Folly criticizes scholastic theology which was susceptible to virtually endless, and at times rather silly, logical puzzles.

wrote in their untutored, unacademic dialect; no, they simply interpret it into the form and sense they prefer...Of course it would be unfair to expect academic correctness of the apostles, because they never heard so much as a word on the matter from their master.” (59) Theologians “are particularly in their element when describing hell down to the last detail,” observes Folly, “as if they had spent many years in that part of the world.” (61)

Monks are men who “avoid religion as much as they can.” They “make an excellent living out of beggars’ rags, bellowing for bread from door to door, and shoving into inns, carriages, and boats to the great prejudice of other beggars.” They “pass themselves off to us as apostles - by virtue of their filth, stupidity, grossness, and impudence.” (62) “They are far less interested in resembling Christ than in differing among themselves”; they have come up with so many distinguishing names for themselves it is “as if it was their last concern to be known as Christians.” Folly imagines Christ saying to these men, upon hearing of how they boast about their presumed piety, “Where did this new race of Jews come from? I recognize no law but my own, and about it I hear nothing whatever.” (63)

Folly says that “Popes, Cardinals, and Bishops” so eagerly imitate the courtly manner of princes that some of them “have even surpassed their originals.” (68) Bishops “never even think of the meaning of their title...which means ‘overseer,’ and implies work, caring, taking pains. Yet when it comes to raking in the revenues, they’re sharp-sighted enough; no ‘careless oversight’ there.” If Cardinals actually reflected upon what their jobs are supposed to be, “they are the successors of the Apostles,” “they wouldn’t be so ambitious for the post, might even resign it - or at least live lives as strenuous and devoted as those of the original Apostles.” (69) A Pope would behave in much the same way were he to try to “imitate [Christ’s] life - his toil, his teaching, his suffering on the cross.” Away would go “all those riches, honors, powers, triumphs, appointments, dispensations, special levies and indulgences.” There would instead be “wakeful nights, long fasts, tears, prayers, sermons, hours of study, sighs, and a thousand

other griefs of that sort.” “As things stand now, whatever work may be called for in the church is passed along to Peter and Paul, who have ample free time.” (70) There are no “enemies of the church more pernicious than impious popes,” Folly says, “who by their silence allow Christ to be forgotten, lock him up behind their money-making laws, contaminate his teachings with their interpretations, and murder him with their atrocious manner of life.” (71)

A pilgrim who travels to “Jerusalem, Rome, or Compostela, where he has no business being - meanwhile leaving a wife and children to shift for themselves” (50) - is just another part of the foolish play that human beings put on for the gods. Storytellers are “men who definitely belong to my sect,” Folly claims. “Tall tales about miracles and other prodigious lies...serve not only to pass the time but also to coin money, especially when recited by pardoners and preachers.” The “near neighbors” of these storytellers are those “who nourish the comfortable if stupid illusion that if they have looked on some wooden image or painting of Polyphemus-Christopher²², their lives will be safe that day; or that a man who has recited a prayer to Saint Barbara²³ in set form will return unscathed from battle,” or, if on a certain day, one says a prayer to Saint Erasmus²⁴, lights special candles, and uses a precise formula and believes “riches cannot fail to follow immediately.” (41)

Folly goes on to ridicule

those who happily delude themselves with forged pardons
for real sins, measuring out time to be spent in purgatory as
if on a chronometer, calculating the centuries, years, months,

²²Polyphemus is the name of Homer’s *Kyklops*. Christopher, a Christian “giant” (Norton/Erasmus, footnotes, 42), was the patron saint of travelers. Here Erasmus equates obsession with saints to mythology.

²³Saint Barbara was the patroness who provided protection against lightning and gunpowder explosions.

²⁴Saint Erasmus, or Saint Elmo, was the patron of sailors. Folly may also be making a joke on her author’s financial misfortunes.

days, and hours as if on a mathematical table, so as not to make the slightest error...[There are also] those who promise themselves, as a result of certain magic formulas and prayers (dreamed up by a sanctimonious impostor and imparted out of mischief or for money), nothing less than everything - wealth, honor, pleasure, abundance, unbroken good health, long life, a green old age, and then a seat in Heaven itself right next to Christ's - but that they don't want to soon. (42)

Folly says that "the whole life of Christians everywhere is infected with idiocies of this sort; yet priests tolerate them without misgivings, and even encourage them, being well aware how much money can be coined out of them." (43-44)

Folly ends her oration by quoting scripture that affirms her value to humanity and reflecting on the notion that "the entire Christian religion seems to bear a certain natural affinity to folly." (82) By that she means that true Christianity, in an almost Platonic fashion, which Folly acknowledges, elevates the spiritual life above the material. For Folly, this is a sort of madness, if madness be the tendency to "shun life, seek death, and seem completely numb to all human feeling as if their souls existed somewhere else, not in their bodies" (83), but a madness to which Christ called his followers. "In the Eucharist is represented the death of Christ, which men should reenact by mastering, destroying, and (as it were) laying in the grave the passions of the body, so they may rise again to a new life, made with him and with each other. This is what the pious man does, these are his thoughts." (85)

Evident throughout Erasmus' satire is his desire to see wrongs righted, to see behavior corrected, to see Christians answer their savior's true call. In short, he wanted to see reform in the church. His "foolery," as discussed at the beginning of the chapter, led to "something more serious." Voltaire wrote in a similar, yet fundamentally different, vein. Their similarities and differences will be discussed in Chapter Five, but before making such comparisons, the satire of Voltaire must be examined.

Chapter Four

The Satire of Voltaire

In Chapter Eleven of *Candide*, the old woman reveals that she is “in fact the daughter of Pope Urban the Tenth.”¹ Papal progeny are not unfamiliar satirical subjects; Erasmus comments on the issue of reproductive fecundity among the vicars of Christ in *Julius Excluded*. By simply mentioning the offspring of a supposedly celibate spiritual leader, Dr. Ralph, the pseudonym under which Voltaire published *Candide*, pokes fun at the institution of the papacy. The target was an easy one. Dr. Ralph is not wanting for examples of sexually errant but productive popes, but Pope Urban X never existed. Concerning Dr. Ralph’s fictional character, Voltaire had this to say: “Note the extreme discretion of the author; hitherto there has never been a pope named Urban X; he avoided attributing a bastard to a known pope. What circumspection! what an exquisite conscience!”² Leave it to a satirical genius to satirize his own satire.

Centuries of scholarly and popular attention to and appreciation of Voltaire’s satire testify to his skill in the genre; but, like Erasmus, Voltaire did not only write satire. Though not a trained scholar, he was an able philosopher, the most famous, in fact, of the eighteenth century *philosophes*. He succeeded as a dramatist. Voltaire traveled a great deal and enjoyed the favor of political leaders throughout Europe.

¹Voltaire. *Candide*. Printed in *Voltaire: Candide* (Hereafter referred to as Norton/Voltaire), ed. by Robert M. Adams. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966, 19.

²Norton/Voltaire, Footnote, 19.

In fact, evidence suggests that Voltaire cared little for his satire. Voltaire was rarely unwilling to discuss his literary work; but with only a few exceptions, he remained virtually silent on the topic of his satirical stories. Theodore Besterman believes, however, that such evidence indicates the opposite, that Voltaire's satirical stories were intensely personal and important to the author. Besterman argues convincingly that the central characters in Voltaire's stories represent a "kind of interior autobiography." Figures such as Babouc, Micromegas, and Candide are all Voltaire, "weeping over mankind and his own failure to mould the world to his ideals." Voltaire never discussed his stories and "did his best to pretend that they did not exist" out of fear that he would betray something of himself.³

Activism, art, and amusement also motivated Voltaire's satirical pursuits. He saw his work as criticism offered with the desire for change. Through his satire, Voltaire expressed his opinion about, among other things, philosophical systems, social and cultural customs, and religious practices and beliefs. The artistic aspect of Voltaire's satire is his use of the genre known as the *conte philosophique*, the philosophical tale.

Dorothy Madeleine McGhee says that prior to the period of 1740-1760 "the 'conte' was essentially a tale or fiction based upon unreality...the unique aim of which was to amuse; its merit consisted in the piquant or naive manner of recounting facts which had no foundation in reality." The *conte philosophique* is a "conte" in which "moral and social considerations" are added to the "piquancy of expression and a basis of unreality." Voltaire's correspondence bears witness to his belief that the "fundamental quality" of the *conte philosophique* was "social criticism," and anyone familiar with Voltaire's satire would be able to recognize this foundation.⁴ The "piquancy of expression and a basis of unreality" often took the form of a "travelogue combined with a

³Besterman, 418, 419, 419.

⁴Dorothy Madeleine McGhee. *Voltairian Narrative Devices as Considered in the Authors' Contes Philosophiques*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1973, 11, 11, 12, 13.

biography”⁵; the “moral and social considerations” were satirical. Three of the stories to be discussed in this chapter, *The World is Like That*, *Micromegas*, and *Candide*, are examples of Voltaire’s efforts in this genre.

Voltaire’s satirical pursuits were not limited to the *contes*. Voltaire frequently amused himself and his friends with short works that often took the form of a dialogue. The *Conversation of Lucian, Erasmus, and Rabelais* is an example of this type of Voltaire’s writing.

Conversation of Lucian, Erasmus, and Rabelais

The *Conversation of Lucian, Erasmus, and Rabelais* is a short dialogue in which the three satirists meet each other in the Elysian Fields and discuss their common interest, that is, satire. Religious fanaticism, monasticism, and corrupt clergy bear the brunt of Voltaire’s satirical attack in this piece. It begins with Lucian, a Greek who despises “everything coming from the frontiers of Germany,” making the acquaintance of Erasmus and deeming “this Batavian a deceased of such good company”⁶ that he feels compelled to speak with him.

Lucian, who believes he hails from “the most civilized” country, asks if Erasmus “made fun of everything” in his “barbarous” country. Erasmus says that he would have liked to but was not able to take the same sort of liberties as his predecessor because there was “a vast difference between the ridiculous men” of Lucian’s time and his own. He was “surrounded by fanatics” and had “to take great care not to be burned by some or murdered by others,” whereas Lucian had only to deal with gods in a theatre and “philosophers who were believed even less than the gods.” (465) Erasmus explains that, in his time, people were “profoundly occupied with empty ideas that made men

⁵Lanson, 127.

⁶Voltaire. *Conversation of Lucian, Erasmus, and Rabelais* (Hereafter referred to as *Conversation*). Printed in Block, 465. All quotations for *Conversation* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

quarrelsome. A man who believed that a body could be in two places at once was ready to massacre another who explained the same thing in a different way.” (466)

The Greek agrees that such were terrible times indeed and asks what profession Erasmus practiced. When Erasmus replies that he was a monk, Lucian asks “What profession is that?” “That of having none, of contracting by an inviolable oath to be useless to mankind, to be absurd and slavish, and to live at the expense of others,” answers Erasmus. He goes on to tell Lucian that he was one of “six or seven hundred thousand” of this “wretched” sort. “Good heavens!” exclaims Lucian. “The world has surely become quite stupid and barbaric since I have left it.” He then asks Erasmus what “the principal follies” (466) of his time were. Erasmus has with him “a long list” and invites Lucian to read it. Lucian does and “bursts out laughing.” (467)

Rabelais joins the pair and answers Lucian’s question as to whether he, like Erasmus, took “an oath to live at the expense of others” by saying that he did “doubly so,” being both a priest and a doctor. He tells Lucian about a book he wrote, one “of scurvy tales, full of filth, in which I turned to ridicule all the superstitions, all the ceremonies, all that was worshipped in my country, even occupation, from that of king and pope to that of doctor of theology, the lowest of all.” He tells Lucian that he dedicated this work to a cardinal and made “even those who despised me laugh.” (467)

Lucian then asks “What is a cardinal, Erasmus?” He learns that a cardinal “is a priest garbed in red, who is paid an income of a hundred thousand crowns for doing nothing.” Lucian remarks that they at least must have been reasonable men, that “not all of your fellow citizens must have been as crazy as you say they were.” Erasmus explains that the cardinals “had another sort of madness: that of dominating; and as it is easier to subjugate fools than intelligent men, they wished to crush reason, which was beginning to stir a little.” (467)

Everything he hears convinces Lucian that “it was better to live in my century than in yours.” He wonders whether the cardinals were “masters of the whole world, since

they commanded madmen.” “No,” says Rabelais, “there was an old fool over them.” He goes on to say that this man, the *papegaut*, “held himself to be infallible and thought himself to be the master of kings; and he had this said and repeated so often, and exclaimed so frequently by monks, that finally almost all Europe believed him.” Lucian can hardly believe that “you allowed this *papegaut* all the stupidities imaginable, and your nation tolerated it!” Rabelais says that his nation was “an amalgamation of ignorance, superstition, stupidity, cruelty and nonsense. They began by hanging and roasting all those who spoke seriously against cardinals and *papegauts*.” When they were finished, he continues, “the whole country began to dance, to sing, to make love, to drink and to laugh. I took them at their weak point; I talked about drinking, I told filthy tales, and in this way I got away with everything.” (468) After Lucian reads a chapter of Rabelais’s book, the story ends with “Doctor Swift” joining the group, and “all four went off to dine together.” (469)

Micromegas

First published in London in 1752, *Micromegas* is the story of a Sirian space-traveler who, accompanied by an acquaintance from Saturn, visits Planet Earth. This story essentially satirizes what Voltaire sees as human vanity, the tendency to believe that human life is significant with respect to the entire universe. Several philosophical systems receive satirical attention in this story, the most critical (and comical) of which is trained on the work of Aquinas. Intolerance, injustice, war, and superstition receive satirical slight as well. Though *Micromegas* is not replete with specifically religious satirical targets, the piece does have a place in this study; and comments pertaining to the quantity of Voltaire’s satirical treatment of religion will be made in the next chapter. Also, *Micromegas* eloquently embodies a theme that runs throughout Voltaire’s work, namely, that human beings possess the potential to be, at once, virtuous and vicious, intelligent and ignorant, practical and profligate.

The story begins with a lengthy description of Micromegas's size. "He had a stature of eight leagues [or 120,000 feet]."⁷ His waist is recorded at being "about fifty thousand feet round," and his nose is said to be "six thousand three hundred and thirty-three statute feet in length." Voltaire reckons that "some mathematicians, a class of persons who are always useful to the public," (3) will no doubt conclude, based on the traveler's proportions relative to that of the average human, that the world from which Micromegas, whose name means "little great one,"⁸ comes would have to have a "circumference precisely twenty-one millions six hundred thousand times greater than our little earth." (3)

Not only are Micromegas's physical characteristics staggering from a human vantage point; his longevity astonishes as well. Readers are told that Micromegas was 450 years old "and already passing out of childhood" when he offended the leader of Sirius, a country "much given to hair-splitting and very ignorant." Micromegas, a scientist who, while studying at school, solved "more than fifty propositions of Euclid, that is, eighteen more than Blaine Pascal, who solved thirty-two for his own amusement [and] afterwards became a pretty fair geometer, and a very poor metaphysician," (4) wrote a book about the fleas of Sirius. The leader believed the book to be "suspicious, offensive, rash, heretical or savoring of heresy, and he prosecuted him for it with the bitterest animosity. The question in dispute was whether the substantial form of which the fleas of Sirius consisted was of the same nature as that of the snails." (4-5) The trial lasted 250 years. Micromegas was convicted by a panel of judges who never read the book under examination and exiled from court for eight hundred years. "He was only

⁷Voltaire. *Micromegas*. Printed in *Best of All Possible Worlds: Romances and Tales by Francois Voltaire* (Hereafter referred to as *Tales*). Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972, 3. All quotations for *Micromegas* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

⁸*Tales*, footnote, 443.

moderately afflicted at being banished from a court which was full of nothing but trickery and meanness.” (5)

Micromegas decides to embark on a journey in order to improve “his mind and soul.” (5) He travels from planet to planet by way of sunbeams and comets and eventually arrived on the planet of Saturn. There he “formed an intimate friendship with the secretary of the Academy of Saturn, a man of great intelligence, who had not indeed invented anything himself, but was a capital hand at describing the inventions of others.” (6) The Saturnian is much smaller in stature than Micromegas, standing only about six thousand feet tall.

The two learn a great deal from one another about life on their respective planets. For instance, Saturnians possessed only seventy-two senses, “and we are always complaining that they are so few. Our imagination goes beyond our needs; we find that with our seventy-two senses...our range is too restricted, and, in spite of all our curiosity and the tolerably large number of passions which spring out of our seventy-two senses, we have plenty of time to feel bored.” (7) Micromegas understands his companion’s sentiments. Although Sirians “have nearly a thousand senses, there lingers even in us a certain vague desire, an unaccountable restlessness, which warns us unceasingly that we are of little account in the universe.” (8)

The two also discuss their comparative life-spans. On Saturn, beings lived for about fifteen thousand years. “[Y]ou see how it is our fate to die almost as soon as we are born: our existence is a point, our duration an instant, our globe an atom. Scarcely have we begun to acquire a little information when death arrives before we can put it to use...I am ashamed...of the absurd figure I make in this universe.” (8) Micromegas informs the Saturnian that on his planet “we are always complaining of the shortness of life. This must be a universal law of nature.” While Sirians lived seven hundred times as long as Saturnians, “when the time comes to give back one’s body to the elements and to reanimate nature under another form, which process is called death... it is precisely the

same thing whether we have lived an eternity or only a day. I have been in countries where life is a thousand times longer than with us, and yet have heard murmurs at its brevity even there.” (9)

The two continue this conversation for some time, always lamenting that their various experiences were minimal with respect to the possibilities. Desiring to learn more about the universe and about his place in it, the Saturnian secretary decides to accompany Micromegas on the remainder of his journey, much to the chagrin of his disconsolate, deserted wife. After a stop on Jupiter which lasted only a year, the two “alighted on the earth by the northern shore of the Baltic Sea, July the 5th, 1737.” (13)

After resting for a while, “they consumed for their breakfast a couple of mountains” and set out to inspect their surroundings. The pair circumnavigate the globe in thirty-six hours, with Micromegas taking the lead and his companion following heartily behind as if he were “a tiny little toy spaniel pursuing a captain of the King of Prussia’s grenadiers.” “[T]he sun, indeed, or rather the earth, makes the same journey in a day, but it must be borne in mind that it is a much easier way of getting on, to turn on one’s axis, than to walk on one’s feet.” (13) While they search diligently, they find no signs of life on the planet,

their eyes and their hands being out of all proportion to the tiny beings who crawl up and down here[.] They felt not the slightest sensation which could lead them to suspect that we and our fellow-creatures, the other inhabitants of this globe, have the honor to exist. (14)

The Saturnian believes strongly that no life was to be found on the earth and, in fact, cannot not suppose “any people of sense would wish to occupy such a dwelling.” Micromegas replied that “perhaps the people who inhabit it are not people of sense.” (15) Finally, the Saturnian, employing a make-shift microscope constructed by Micromegas, discerns a whale swimming in the Baltic Sea. “He caught it very cleverly with his little finger, and, placing it on his thumbnail,” shows it to Micromegas who “burst out

laughing” at its size and immediately set about looking for any other signs of earthly inhabitants. He finds a ship full of philosophers who were returning from a trip to the polar circle. The story’s narrator here notes that newspaper reports about this expedition said that the ship ran aground in the gulf of Bothnia, but “we never know in this world the real truth about anything. I am going to relate honestly what took place, without adding anything of my own invention, a task which demands no small effort on the part of an historian.” (16)

Micromegas plucks the ship full of philosophers right out of the water and sits it on his finger. The passengers and crew of the ship believe they had been seized by a sudden and violent tempest. The sailors throw casks of wine overboard and into Micromegas’s hand and follow the beverages out. One of these men drives a spear a foot deep into the giant’s skin; “he felt something tickling him.” (16) This behavior amuses Micromegas and his companion. The Saturnian believes he sees some of the tiny creatures “engaged in the work of propagation.” He “was deceived by appearances,” however, the narrator tells the readers, “an accident to which we are only too liable, whether we make use of microscopes or not.” (19)

Through his observation, Micromegas “perceived clearly that the atoms were speaking to each other,” but the Saturnian, “ashamed as he was of having made a mistake on the subject of generation, was indisposed to believe that such creatures as they could have any means of communicating ideas.” Both of the travelers possess the “gift of tongues,” but they cannot hear the sounds the humans are making. Besides, reasoned the Saturnian, if these beings could speak, they must be able to think as well, “or at least make some approach to thought.” Such a conclusion would mean that “they must have something equivalent to a soul; now to attribute the equivalent of a soul to these little animals appeared to him absurd.” (19)

Micromegas eventually came to not only hear the creatures in his hand, but to understand the French language as well. Taking precautions not to appear too

frightening, Micromegas addresses the gathering in his hand saying “Invisible insects, whom the hand of the Creator has been pleased to produce in the abyss of the infinitely little...” “If ever anyone was astonished, it was the people who heard these words...The ship’s chaplain repeated the prayers used in exorcism, the sailors swore, and the philosophers constructed theories.” The Saturnian then takes his turn at speaking to the humans since he “had a softer voice.” He asks them if they have always been so small, “a pitiful condition, little better than annihilation.” He asks “what they found to do on a globe that appeared to belong to whales, if they were happy, if they increased and multiplied, whether they had souls, and a hundred other questions of that nature.” (21)

“A philosopher of the party, bolder than the rest of them, and shocked that the existence of his soul should be called in question,” makes a couple of measurements and asks the Saturnian “Do you suppose, sir, because a thousand fathoms extend between your head and your feet, that you are -” at which point the Saturnian interrupts exclaiming “[G]ood heavens! How is it that he knows my height?” (21) The philosopher proceeds to tell the two travelers Micromegas’s exact height as well. Astounded, Micromegas exclaims, “O intelligent atoms, in whom the eternal Being has been pleased to make manifest His skill and power, you must doubtless taste joys of perfect purity on this, your globe; for being encumbered with so little matter, and seeming to be all spirit, you must pass your lives in love and meditation,, which is the true life of spiritual beings.” (23)

None of the philosophers agreed with Micromegas’ and one among them “candidly confessed that, with the exception of a small number held in little esteem among them, all the rest of mankind were a multitude of fools, knaves, and miserable wretches.” “We have more matter than we need,” said he, “the cause of much evil, if evil proceeds from matter; and we have too much mind, if evil proceeds from the mind.” (23) The philosopher then tells Micromegas and his friend that “at this very moment while I am speaking to you, there are a hundred thousand fools of our species who wear hats,

slaying a hundred thousand fellow-creatures who wear turbans, or who are being massacred by them.” (23-24) Micromegas wonders “what could be the cause of such horrible quarrels between those miserable little creatures.” The philosopher responds that the “dispute is all about a lump of clay no bigger than your heel. Not that a single one of those millions of men who get their throats cut has the slightest interest in this clod of earth. The only point in question is whether it shall belong to a certain man who is called Sultan, or to another who, I know not why, is called Czar.” (24)

Stunned and indignant at “such frantic ferocity,” Micromegas asks whether he should “stamp upon the whole swarm of these ridiculous assassins.” The philosopher advised the giant not to waste his time; “[T]hey are working hard enough to destroy themselves...Even if they had never drawn the sword, famine, fatigue, or intemperance will sweep them almost all away. Besides, it is not they who deserve punishment, but rather those armchair barbarians, who...command the massacre of a million men, and afterwards ordain a solemn thanksgiving to God.” (24) Micromegas, “moved with compassion for the tiny human race, among whom he found such astonishing contrasts,” (24-25) inquires as to the sorts of activities in which the men with whom he was speaking engaged. “‘We dissect flies,’ said the same philosopher, ‘we measure distances, we calculate numbers, we are agreed upon two or three points which we understand, and we dispute about two or three thousand as to which we know nothing.’” (25)

Being themselves interested in many of the same things, Micromegas and the Saturnian ask several questions pertaining to the physical nature of life on the planet. Delighted with the answers and impressed with the knowledge displayed by the philosophers. Micromegas then says, “‘Since you know so well what is outside of yourselves, doubtless you know still better what is with in you. Tell me what is the nature of your soul, and how you form ideas.’” (25) Hardly any of the philosophers agree on an answer, and they nearly fall over each other outlining their various views. They

produce answers representing the philosophies of Aristotle, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibnitz, and Locke.

Micromegas and the Saturnian listen to their views and are not tremendously impressed. Micromegas smiles, however, after hearing the Lockean, not the “least sagacious of the company,” speak. In fact, “the dwarf of Saturn would have clasped Locke’s disciple in his arms if their extreme disproportion had not made that impossible.” (28) But the apologists are not finished.

[U]nluckily a little animalcule was there in a square cap, who silenced all the other philosophical mites, saying that he knew the whole secret, that it was all to be found in the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas; he scanned the pair of celestial visitors from top to toe, and maintained that they and all their kind, their suns and stars, were made solely for man’s benefit. At this speech our two travelers tumbled over each other, choking with that inextinguishable laughter which, according to Homer is the special privilege of the gods. Their shoulders shook, and their bodies heaved up and down, till, in those merry convulsions, the ship which the Sirian held in his nail fell into the Saturnian’s breeches pocket. (28)

The two travelers eventually recover and carefully, safely remove the humans from the Saturnian’s pocket. The story ends with the philosophers delivering a book to the Academy of Sciences in Paris which was given to them by Micromegas, who was filled with kindness toward the “little mites” even though “he was a little disgusted in the bottom of his heart at seeing such infinitely insignificant atoms puffed up with a pride of such infinite magnitude.” The book, Micromegas tells the philosophers, contains “all that can be known of the ultimate essence of things.” When the secretary of the Academy of Sciences opened the book, “he saw nothing but blank leaves.” (28)

The World is Like That

First published in 1748, *The World is Like That* satirized, among other things, war, politics, marital infidelity, and academic life. With respect to religious satirical targets, Voltaire fired volleys at sexually indiscreet and pedantic religious leaders, their

uninterested but faithful followers, monks, the relationship between religious and money-making activities, and the practice of burying the dead inside places of worship. The tale actually seems to be something of a parallel to the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh; Voltaire makes reference to the Biblical account at the end of the piece.

In this story, Ithuriel, one of the “genii [angels or spirits] who preside over the empires of the world and rule Upper Asia,” enlists a man named Babouc to travel into the Persian city of Persepolis and determine whether it “should be punished or utterly destroyed.”⁹ The Persians have fallen into disfavor among the genii; and Babouc, whom “Heaven has given ...discernment,” is to be an “impartial” investigator, to “look, listen, [and] observe.” (233) Babouc mounts his camel and sets out for Persia.

He first comes into contact with the Persian army on its way to fight with India. He asks one of the troops why the war was declared. “I know nothing about it,” the soldier replies. “[I]t is no business of mine, my trade is to kill and be killed to get a living.” Babouc moves on to the man’s captain, who says to the inquisitor, “How should I know [what caused the war]?...I hear it said that war has been declared; I immediately forsake my family, and go, according to our custom, to make my fortune or to die, since I have nothing else to do.” Babouc eventually learns, from the generals of the Persian army, that the war “which has laid Asia waste for the last twenty years” grew out of a squabble concerning a tiny sum of money “between a eunuch belonging to one of the wives of the great King of Persia...and a customhouse clerk” (234) who served for the King of India.

The Indian and Persian prime ministers worthily supported their masters’ rights. The quarrel grew hot. They sent into the field on both sides an army of a million troops. This

⁹Voltaire. *The World is Like That* (Hereafter referred to as *World*). Printed in *Tales*, 233. All quotations for *World* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

army has to be recruited every year with more than 400,000 men. Massacres, conflagrations, ruin, and devastation multiply, the whole world suffers, and their fury still continues. Our own as well as the Indian prime minister often protests that they are acting solely for the happiness of the human race, and at each protestation some towns are always destroyed and some province ravaged. (235)

Babouc stayed with the Persian army for another day on which the “Persian and Indian generals hastened to give battle” because of a report “that peace was about to be concluded.” Babouc sees all the battle’s “mistakes and all its abominations.” He sees “officers slain by their own troops...[and] soldiers dispatching their dying comrades in order to strip them of a few blood-stained rags, torn and covered with mud.” Babouc visits a battlefield hospital where the wounded die “through the inhuman negligence of those very men whom the King of Persia paid handsomely to relieve them.” Babouc wonders if these “creatures” are men or “wild beasts.” He sees “plainly that Persepolis will be destroyed”; and after visiting the Indian camp and witnessing horrors similar to what he saw among the Persians, Babouc believes that “if the angel Ithuriel resolves to exterminate the Persians, then the angel of India must destroy the Indians as well.” (235)

However, Ithuriel later hears of “acts of generosity, magnanimity, and humanity” in both camps. “‘Unintelligible mortals!’ he exclaims, ‘how is it that ye can combine so much meanness with so much greatness, such virtues with such crimes?’” After receiving news that peace had been declared and “extolled in public proclamations, which announced nothing less than the return of virtue and happiness to earth,” (236) Babouc sets off for Persepolis now believing that the genii will have no reason to destroy the Persians.

Upon reaching the city, Babouc immediately follows “a crowd of people composed of the dirtiest and ugliest of both sexes, who with a dull and sullen air were pouring into a vast and dreary building.” (236-237) Babouc believes, “from the constant hum of voices...[and] the money that some were giving to others for the privilege of

sitting down,” that he is in a “market where straw-bottomed chairs were on sale.” (237) After observing “several women drop upon their knees, pretending to look fixedly before them, but giving sidelong glances at the men,” Babouc realizes that he is in a temple. The music being made is “harsh, disagreeable, and out of tune,” reminding Babouc of “the braying of wild asses.” Babouc then notices a group of “workmen entering the temple with crowbars and spades.” The men remove a large stone in the floor of the temple, and “a most offensive smell” (237) issues from the hole. Another group of people lay a dead body in the opening. This gathering is a funeral, and Babouc is disgusted:

[T]hese folk bury their dead in the same places where they worship the Deity, and their temples are paved with corpses! I am no longer surprised at those pestilential diseases which often consume Persepolis. The air, tainted with the corruption of the dead and by so many of the living gathered and crammed together in the same place, is enough to poison the whole earth. (237)

Babouc reckons that “the angels intend to destroy [Persepolis] in order to raise up a fairer [city] on its site, and to fill it with cleaner inhabitants, and such as can sing better.” (237)

Babouc takes his leave of the temple; and on his way to dine with a lady whose husband he had met while visiting with the army and who lived on the other side of the town, Babouc travels through the city of Persepolis and marvels at its beautiful architecture and landscaping. The sights he sees lead Babouc to believe that Persepolis is not such a wretched city after all. He cannot imagine Ithuriel would really want to destroy such a “delightful” (238) place.

The dinner party Babouc attends turns out to be an orgy. His married host, “who had begun [the evening] by making tender inquiries after her husband, was, towards the end of the repast, speaking more tenderly still” to a young man at the party. A certain magistrate, seated next to his wife, “was bestowing the liveliest caresses upon a widow.” The widow, in turn, drapes one arm around the magistrate’s neck while stretching out her other arm to a “handsome young citizen whose modesty seemed equal to his good looks.”

The magistrate's wife leaves the table to "entertain in an adjoining chamber her spiritual director," who has arrived too late to dine with the rest of the group. The spiritual director, "a man of ready eloquence, addressed her in that chamber with such vigor and unction, that the lady, when she came back, had her eyes moist and her cheeks flushed, an unsteady step, and a stammering utterance." After being told that "in all the houses at Persepolis he would find the same sort of behavior," (239) Babouc once again concludes that Persepolis is doomed.

Much later in the story, Babouc meets his host again. While Babouc visits with a government official who despises the cabalistic politics of Persepolis, the woman storms into the minister's office home and argues emotionally and eloquently that her husband had been denied a position that was rightfully his by dint of his ancestry. Her pleas "made her husband's fortune." Babouc asks the woman why she went to all the trouble for a man she does not love. She responds by saying that her husband "is the best friend I have in the world; there is nothing that I would not sacrifice for him, except my lover, and he would do anything for me, except give up his mistress." The lady invites Babouc to dine at her house once again, this time with her lover, her husband, and her husband's "charming" (253) mistress! "Unity, cheerfulness, wit, and elegance were the soul of the repast." (254)

Babouc next encounters a twenty-five year old magistrate who asks an old and wise man of the law for advice on a case he is to decide. Babouc reasons the young magistrate had made a clever move in seeking such worthy counsel but wonders why the erudite and experienced elder is not a judge himself. Babouc learns that the young magistrate's family purchased the position for him and that such a situation is quite common. "[T]he right of administering justice is bought and sold here like a farm." Babouc responds to this revelation by lamenting that "Doubtless those who have purchased the right of dispensing justice sell their judgments. I see nothing here but unfathomable depths of iniquity." (240) Upon being told that top military positions are

achieved in much the same manner and that tax collecting is an equally arbitrary and corrupt endeavor, Babouc becomes even more certain that Persepolis's destruction is imminent.

Babouc then visits another temple, "one of the grandest temples in the city." He sits "in the midst of a crowd of men and women who had come there to pass away the time." A "magician" rises to the pulpit and speaks "for a long time about virtue and vice." The magician "divided under several heads what had no need of division, he proved methodically what was perfectly clear, and taught what everybody knew already. He coolly worked himself into a passion, and went away perspiring and out of breath." When the magician finished, "all the congregation awoke, and thought that they had been listening to an edifying discourse." (242) Babouc believes that, even though the event was absolutely useless, the intention was good. He decides that there is nothing in the display that warrants the destruction of Persepolis.

Not yet certain of his opinion of Persepolis, Babouc pays a visit to a "college of the magi" hoping that those who devoted their lives to religion "would obtain pardon for the rest of the people." He meets the leader of the college, who admits that he has "an income of a hundred thousand crowns for having taken a vow of poverty, and that he exercised a very extensive dominion in virtue of his profession of humility." During his visit to the college, a rumor circulates that Babouc is someone who has come to reform the houses of religion. He receives pleas from every faction urging him to "'Preserve us, and destroy all the others.'" (245)

If one were to judge these societies by their own attempts at self-defense, Babouc observes, one would believe that they were each "absolutely necessary; if their mutual accusations were to be believed, they all alike deserved extinction." (245) Dismayed, "Babouc shuddered at...the intrigues of those who had renounced the world; the ambition, greed, and pride of those who taught humility and unselfishness; and he came to the conclusion that Ithuriel had very good reason for destroying the whole brood." (246)

Babouc learns even more about the people of Persepolis. He encounters worthy, enlightened scholars who, unfortunately, spend much of their time bickering with each other. He attends an enjoyable dramatic production. He hears moving orations made by leaders who are more interested in their own comfort than the good of the common people. He meets and is inspired by a noble lady named Theona. Babouc leaves Persepolis feeling “fond of a city whose inhabitants were polite, good-humored and kind, however frivolous they might be, greedy of scandal, and full of vanity.” (254)

To make his report to Ithuriel, Babouc commissions a founder “to cast a small image composed of all kinds of metals, earth, and stones, alike the most precious and the most worthless.” Presenting the figure to Ithuriel, Babouc says, “Wilt thou break this pretty little image because it is not all gold and diamonds?” (255) Ithuriel decides not to punish Persepolis but rather to

let the world go on its own way. So Persepolis was allowed to remain unharmed, and Babouc was very far from uttering any complaint like Jonah, who was angry because Nineveh was not destroyed. But when a man has been three days in a whale’s belly, he is not so good-tempered after a visit to the opera or to the play, or after having supped in good company. (255)

Candide

Perhaps the most famous and enduring of all Voltaire’s writings, *Candide* was first published in 1759. Like *The Praise of Folly*, *Candide* leaves virtually no aspect of eighteenth century European life unscathed. It records Candide’s journey across continents and oceans, from boyhood to maturity, from naive faith, by way of despondency, to restrained hope. Robert M. Adams suggests that it might well have been

titled “Civilization and Its Discontents.” The book expresses Voltaire’s “passionate addiction to, and scepticism of, the reasonable life.”¹⁰

Written in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake that occurred on All Saints’ Day, 1 November 1755, and killed between 30,000 and 50,000 people, *Candide* is Voltaire’s attempt to grapple with the problem of evil. For Voltaire, the earthquake represented natural evil in its most terrible form. Despite “the [Enlightenment] feeling that man was capable of conquering the forces around him,”¹¹ Voltaire saw in the earthquake evidence that humans did not have the capacity to control a flawed, even capricious, natural world, also known as the problem of natural evil.

Candide does not only comment on the problem of natural evil; it also deals with the problem of moral evil: the human tendency to be unkind, unjust, and even cruel - in a word, inhumane. The themes of natural and moral evil appear throughout the book. They serve as arguments against the philosophical notion of progress, that human nature and the human condition have improved throughout history and will continue to do so. Voltaire’s response to this optimism, which he satirizes as Martin’s “all is for the best” philosophy, is that the human experience is necessarily a tragic one.

In addition to satirizing the philosophy of optimism, Voltaire fires satirical shots at several familiar targets: war, intolerance, superstition, monks, and the clergy. That list is only a beginning. The story is about a young man named Candide who, along with a colorful group of fellow travelers, encounters almost innumerable calamities and misfortunes as he chases his dream of a happy life with Miss Cunegonde.

Candide grew up in the castle of “one of the most mighty lords of Westphalia,”¹² and his early years were more than a bit sheltered. A philosopher named Pangloss

¹⁰Norton/Voltaire, viii.

¹¹I.O. Wade. *Voltaire and Candide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, 3.

¹²*Candide*, 1. All quotations for *Candide* will come from this edition. Page numbers will be cited in parenthetical notes.

instructed Candide in “metaphysico-theologico-cosmoloogology.” (1) Candide learns from Pangloss that “there cannot possibly be an effect without a cause” and that the world in which human beings live is the “best of all possible worlds.” (1-2) “It is clear, said [Pangloss], that things cannot be otherwise than they are, for since everything is made to serve an end, everything necessarily serves the best end.” (2)

“Candide listened attentively [to Master Pangloss] and believed implicitly; for he found Miss Cunegonde exceedingly pretty, though he never had the courage to tell her so.” (2) Cunegonde, the Baron’s daughter, is quite fond of Candide as well. One evening after dinner the two find themselves alone together. Candide “kissed her hand quite innocently with remarkable vivacity and emotion; their lips met, their eyes lit up, their knees trembled, their hands wandered.” (2-3) The Baron witnesses the rendezvous and, “taking note of this cause and effect, drove Candide out of the castle by kicking him vigorously on the backside...[E]verything was confusion in the most beautiful and agreeable of all possible castles.” (3)

Alone, penniless, and without anywhere to go or anything to do, Candide joins the army of the King of the Bulgars. He learns to “right face, left face, present arms, order arms, aim, fire, [and] doubletime.” He catches on quickly, after only sixty “strokes of the rod” in three days, and his comrades regard him as a prodigy. Military discipline hardly agrees with the young man, however. “One fine spring morning he took it into his head to go for a walk, stepping straight out as if it were a privilege of the human race, as of animals in general, to use his legs.” Jailed, court-martialed, and sentenced “to be flogged thirty-six times by the entire regiment,” which consisted of two thousand men, Candide runs the gauntlet twice before begging for someone to smash his head. Just as this “special favor” (4) is about to be granted, the King of the Bulgars, having learned of Candide’s court-martial defense, that human beings have free will, pardons the young metaphysician, who is “extremely ignorant of the ways of the world.” (5)

When the King of the Bulgars goes to war with the King of the Abares, Candide, “who was trembling like a philosopher, hid himself as best he could while this heroic butchery was going on.” He listens as “the trumpets, the fifes, the oboes, the drums, and the cannons produced such a harmony as was never heard in hell.” He watches as “the cannons battered down about six thousand men on each side; then volleys of musket fire removed from the best of worlds about nine or ten thousand rascals who were cluttering up its surface.” After the battle, Candide “undertook to do his reasoning of cause and effect somewhere else” and escapes as the “two kings in their respective camps celebrated the victory by having “*Te Deums*” (5) sung.

On his way to Holland, Candide passes through two villages that had been destroyed during the battle. The first is an Abare village, “which the Bulgars had burned, in strict accord with the laws of war.” Men and women lay beaten and dying. “[D]isemboweled girls, who had first satisfied the natural needs of various heroes, breathed their last...Scattered brains and severed limbs littered the ground.” The second village, one controlled by the Bulgars, had been equally ravished by “the heroes of the Abare cause.” (5)

Candide’s supplies run out when he reaches Holland. He begs assistance from a man whom he witnessed preach a sermon on charity. The man asks whether Candide believes the “Pope is antichrist.” He admits that he has not considered the matter, “but whether he is or not, I am in need of bread.” The charitable man says he did not deserve any, and the man’s wife dumps a bowl of urine on the hungry traveler’s head. An Anabaptist named Jacques “saw this cruel and heartless treatment being inflicted on one of his fellow creatures, a featherless biped possessing a soul,” (6) and takes Candide in, giving him food, money, and a job. Jacques’s kindness renews Candide’s faith that “everything is for the best in this world.” (6-7)

The next day Candide comes across a beggar “who was covered with pustules, his eyes were sunken, the end of his nose rotted off, his mouth twisted, his teeth black, he had

a croaking voice and a hacking cough, and spat a tooth every time he tried to speak.” Touched by compassion, Candide “gave this ghastly beggar the two florins that he himself had received from his honest Anabaptist friend Jacques.” (7) The beggar bursts into tears and gives Candide a hug; the beggar is Pangloss. Candide’s old teacher tells him that the Baron, the Baroness, their son, and their daughter, the lovely Cunegonde, all died violent deaths when the Bulgar soldiers attacked the castle. As for Pangloss himself, his maladies were the result of a disease he contracted while tasting “the delights of paradise” (8) in the arms of the Baroness’s maidservant who had contracted it from a monk.

Pangloss recovers from his illness under the care of Jacques’s doctor; he “lost only an eye and an ear” during the process. He “still maintained that everything was for the best.” (9) Two months after becoming Jacques’s bookkeeper, Pangloss accompanies Jacques and Candide on a business trip to Lisbon.

As they near the Lisbon harbor, a storm blew up, wrecking the ship. As the ship sunk, Jacques rescues a sailor from drowning, only to be thrown into the water himself. The thankless sailor does not return the favor; and as Candide helplessly watches the good Anabaptist drown, Pangloss proves to him that “the bay of Lisbon had been formed expressly for this Anabaptist to drown in.” (10) The ship sinks, and only Pangloss, Candide, and the ungrateful sailor survive. The three come ashore and set out for Lisbon.

As they arrive in the city, “still bewailing the loss of their benefactor...they felt the earth quake underfoot.” The earthquake decimates Lisbon; “thirty thousand inhabitants of every age and either sex were crushed in the ruins.” Whistling through his teeth, the sailor comments that “there’ll be something to pick up here.” Pangloss and Candide look on as the sailor rushes into the city, “found some money, laid violent hands on it, got drunk, and, having slept off his wine, bought the favors of the first street walker he could find amid the ruins of smashed houses, amid corpses and suffering victims on every hand.” Pangloss tells the sailor that his behavior is “not good form at all; your behavior

falls short of that required by the universal reason; it's untimely, to say the least." The sailor tells him to "get out of here with your universal reason." (10)

As Pangloss and Candide work to bring relief to those who survived the catastrophe, Pangloss illustrates why "things could not possibly be otherwise." (11) While the recovery efforts continue, the learned men of Lisbon decide that the only way to avert total destruction is to perform an "auto-da-fe," an act of faith. "[T]he University of Coimbra had established that the spectacle of several persons being roasted over a slow fire with full ceremonial rites is an infallible specific against earthquakes." Lisbon authorities arrest Pangloss and Candide, "one for talking and the other for listening with an air of approval." Many believe Pangloss's "all is for the best" philosophy denies the doctrines of original sin and eternal punishment. After dressing them in "*san-benitos* and paper mitres," the apparel of persons pleading before the Inquisition, officials escort Pangloss and Candide in a procession to hear a "very touching sermon, followed by a beautiful concert of plainsong. Candide was flogged in cadence to the music." The gathering burns three men at the stake. They hang Pangloss. Though the efforts of the Lisbon faithful aimed to prevent more destruction and devastation, "on the same day there was another earthquake, causing frightful damage." (12)

"Candide, stunned, stupefied, despairing, bleeding, trembling, said to himself : -If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?" (12) He is then "led away, barely able to stand, lectured, lashed, absolved, and blessed." (12-13) Shortly thereafter, an old woman approaches him, tells him to "be of good cheer," (13) and takes him to a shack where she gives him a jar of ointment, some food and drink, and leaves him with a bed and a change of clothes. She returns every day for three days, bringing Candide food and taking care of his wounds. At the end of the third day, she takes him to an isolated house in the country. There Candide becomes reacquainted with the lovely Miss Cunegonde.

He learns that when the Bulgars attacked the Baron's castle Cunegonde had been raped, but she had not been disemboweled as Pangloss told him, only stabbed in the thigh. She was then saved by a Bulgar captain who sold her to a Jew named Don Issachar. Don Issachar brought her to Lisbon and allowed her to live in the house in which they are in now. The Grand Inquisitor took notice of her at mass and threatened Don Issachar with an auto-da-fe if he did not turn Cunegonde over to him. The two struck a bargain in which they would share the services of Cunegonde. "That has been the arrangement for six months now." (15) Having seen Candide and Pangloss at the "auto-da-fe" put on by her Grand Inquisitor, Cunegonde had directed her maidservant to take care of Candide.

While the two continue to share the stories of their experiences since their forbidden kiss, Don Issachar arrives at the house. Candide kills him after a short struggle; and as Cunegonde, the old woman, and a distraught Candide decide what to do next, the Grand Inquisitor pays a visit as well. "Without giving the inquisitor time to recover from his surprise, [Candide] ran him through, and laid him beside the jew." (17) The old woman decides that the only thing for the three to do is to gather what valuables they can and escape to Cadiz.

Having been robbed by a Franciscan friar on their way to Cadiz, the trio arrive in the city with no money. They hear of a fleet being gathered to sail to Paraguay and subdue a group of Jesuits "who were accused of fomenting among their flock a revolt against the kings of Spain and Portugal." (18) Presenting himself as one trained in the Bulgar army and displaying for a general the Bulgar manual of arms at which he was so adept, Candide is given command of a company of infantry. The newly commissioned captain, Miss Cunegonde, and the old woman set sail for the new world.

As they cross the ocean, Candide reflects on the philosophy of his dead teacher. "We are destined, in the end, for another universe, said Candide; no doubt that is the one where everything is well. For in this one, it must be admitted, there is some reason to

grieve over our physical and moral state.” (18-19) Cunegonde agrees, saying that “my soul is still harrowed by thoughts of what I have seen and suffered.” Candide reckons that “surely it is the New World which is the best of all possible worlds.” Cunegonde is less optimistic. “My heart is almost dead to hope.” (19) Amused by Cundgonde’s laments, the old woman says that her fate has been much worse.

The old woman, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, was born the daughter of Pope Urban X, the Princess of Palestrina. In her youth, she had been one of the wealthiest, most beautiful girls in Italy. A handsome, charming, brilliant, and powerful prince had asked her to be his wife. Not long before she was to be wed, a ship on which she was traveling was attacked by pirates. The pirates took her, her mother, and her maidservants prisoner, and the captain of the ship took the beautiful young princess for himself. The pirates then set sail for Morocco, intending to sell their captives as slaves.

War was raging in Morocco when they landed. Almost immediately the pirates came under attack by Moorish soldiers intent on kidnapping the Italian ladies. During the skirmish, everyone involved was slaughtered except for the unlucky, young princess. “I remained half dead on a mountain of corpses. Similar scenes were occurring, as is well known for more than three hundred leagues around, without anyone skimping on the five prayers a day decreed by Mohammed.” (21)

A eunuch who had been the court musician to her mother several years before, rescued her; this dear old friend promptly sold her to a group of Islamic warriors in Algiers. At that time, this group were being attacked by an invading Russian army. The Russians laid siege to the fortress at which the princess was being held. During the siege, the warriors ran out of food and decided that they should eat the women among them, the newly-purchased princess included. A reasonable imam persuaded the hungry army that it would be a sin to eat the women entirely; cutting off a single rumpsteak from each of them would suffice for a nice meal. The operation was performed, and the princess lost

one of her buttocks. Before another could be taken, the Russians captured the fortress, and the princess was given to a wealthy boyar who, after two years, was killed for plotting against Peter the Great. Over the course of several years, the woman made her way across Russia and back into Europe where she eventually came into the service of Don Issachar, where she met Miss Cunegonde. Concluding her story, the old woman said that “a hundred times I wanted to kill myself, but always I loved life more. This ridiculous weakness is perhaps one of our worst instincts; is anything more stupid than choosing to carry a burden that really one wants to cast on the ground? to hold existence in horror, and yet to cling to it?” (24) Cunegonde agrees that the old woman’s story was, indeed, worse than hers.

When their ship arrives in Buenos Aires, Candide has to flee, along with his valet, Cacambo, because the Portuguese police wanted him for the murder of the Grand Inquisitor and would be arriving in the city soon. He leaves Miss Cunegonde and the old woman with the Paraguayan governor, who has taken quite a liking to the younger lady. Cacambo, a native of the area, leads Candide to Los Padres, the capital city occupied by the Jesuits Candide had been sent to the new world to fight. There he meets with the commanding Colonel, who turns out to be Cunegonde’s brother, the Baron of Thunder-Ten-Tronckh’s son.

The Jesuit Colonel tells Candide that he had been taken for dead after the Bulgars attacked his father’s castle and transported along with several other corpses to be buried near a Jesuit chapel. A Jesuit realized he was still alive, rescued him, and nursed him back to health in three weeks. “You know, my dear Candide, that I was a very pretty boy; I became even more so; the reverend father Croust, superior of the abbey, conceived a most tender friendship for me; he accepted me as a novice, and shortly after, I was sent to Rome.” (29) Since he was German, he had been sent to fight with his fellow Jesuits against the Spanish in Paraguay.

Candide tells the Jesuit Colonel his story, that he had rescued Miss Cunegonde, and that he intended to marry her as soon as possible. Outraged at hearing this news, he strikes Candide in the face with the flat of his sword, and Candide, defending himself, thrusts his own sword into the Jesuit's belly. Tremendously upset but fearing for his safety, Candide, along with Cacambo, escapes from the Jesuit camp.

Not sure of where to go next, the pair wander through Paraguay and eventually happen on the hidden paradise of Eldorado, a utopian country filled with amiable people and ample wealth. Cacambo speaks the language of Eldorado, and the two lost travelers get on beautifully throughout the country.

Candide enjoys the opportunity to learn all he can about Eldorado. Through Cacambo, he asks one of their hosts whether the Eldoradans practiced any kind of religion. The host replies, "Can you have any doubt of it? Do you suppose we are altogether thankless scoundrels?" Candide wants to know what religion they practiced. "Can there be two religions? [the man] asked. I suppose our religion is the same as everyone's, we worship God from morning to evening." (37) Still curious, Candide inquires about how Eldoradans pray to God. "We don't pray to him at all, said the good and respectable sage; we have nothing to ask him for, since everything we need has already been granted; we thank God continually." (37-38) When Candide asks about priests, the old man says that "we are all priests; the king and all the heads of household sing formal psalms of thanksgiving every morning, and five or six thousand voices accompany them." (38) The old Eldoradan goes on to say that they have no monks either.

-What! you have no monks to teach, argue, govern, intrigue, and burn at the stake everyone who disagrees with them?

-We should have to be mad, said the old man; here we are all of the same mind, and we don't understand what you're up to with your monks. (38)

Candide and Cacambo stay in the hidden paradise for a month. They marvel at the sights of Eldorado. The system of government amazes them; Eldoradans have no parliament and no lawsuits. The scientific and mathematical skills of the Eldoradans amaze the pair as well. But Candide, impatient to be reunited with Cunegonde, decides they should take their leave of Eldorado; “the two happy men resolved to be so no longer.” As they leave the Eldoradans give Candide and Cacambo one hundred sheep laden with provisions for their journey and treasures amounting to more wealth “than all the kings put together.” (39)

On their way to the colonial Dutch city of Surinam, from which they will set sail for Buenos Aires, they lose all save two of their precious sheep, but the size of their treasure is still tremendous. Along the road going into Surinam, Candide and Cacambo make the acquaintance of a one-handed, one-legged slave. The slave tells the two travelers the cruel story of how he became a slave and lost one of his hands and one of his legs. “The Dutch witch doctors who converted me tell me every Sunday that we are all sons of Adam, black and white alike. I am no genealogist; but if these preachers are right, we must all be remote cousins; and you must admit no one could treat his own flesh and blood in a more horrible fashion.” (41)

Appalled by the story, Candide cries, “Oh Pangloss!...you had no notion of these abominations! I’m through, I must give up your optimism after all.” Cacambo asks “What’s optimism?” (41) Candide explains that “it is a mania for saying things are well when one is in hell.” (41-42)

The two soon learn that no one will take them to Buenos Aires, owing to the fact that Cunegonde had become the governor’s favorite mistress. Candide decides that he will instead sail for Venice. Cacambo, who knew the territory well, would make his way to Buenos Aires, rescue Cunegonde and the old lady, and meet Candide in Italy. After Cacambo leaves, Candide works to secure passage to Venice. After making all the arrangements, Candide watches the captain of the ship he chartered set sail without him,

taking with it his last two treasure-laden Eldoradan sheep. Tremendously upset but still possessing several diamonds and jewels, Candide purchases a ticket on a ship bound for France.

Desiring some good company for the voyage, Candide holds a city-wide contest in order to find the “most truly miserable and rightly discontented” man in Surinam. The winner will be invited to travel with him. He selects a “poor scholar” and former bookseller named Martin. Though Candide deems him a good man, Martin “had been robbed by his wife, beaten by his son, and deserted by his daughter...He had just been fired from the little job on which he existed; and the preachers of Surinam were persecuting him because they took him for a Socinian.¹³” (44)

During the voyage, Candide and Martin discuss Candide’s favorite topic: metaphysics. With enough wealth to sustain him for the rest of his life and the promise of reuniting with Cunegonde, “he still inclined to the system of Pangloss.” (44) Martin says that he is a Manichee¹⁴, and Candide says that he “must be possessed of the devil.” The devil is “mixed up with so many things of this world, said Martin, that he may be in me as well as else where; but I assure you, as I survey this globe, or globule, I think that God has abandoned it to some evil spirit.” (45) He goes on to recount many of the evil things he has seen in his lifetime.

The sound of cannons firing interrupts their conversation. They look across the water and witness two ships fighting; then “one of the vessels caught the other with a broadside so low and so square as to send it to the bottom.” Candide and Martin watch a hundred men perish. “Well, said Martin, that is how men treat one another.” (45) As

¹³A Socinian was a follower of the sixteenth century Polish theologian Laelius Socinus who advanced his own brand of “rational” Christianity that minimized mysteries such as the Trinity.

¹⁴A Manichee was a follower of the Persian philosopher Mani, who taught the world was the battleground for two equally powerful spiritual forces, that is, good and evil. St. Augustine dabbled in Manichean philosophy.

Martin and Candide's ship nears the site of the wreck, Candide sees one of his stolen sheep in the water. He recovers it quickly.

Candide and Martin resume their earlier discussion as their ship nears the coast of France. Candide asks Martin if he believes that humans "have always been liars, traitors, ingrates, thieves, weaklings, sneaks, cowards, backbiters, gluttons, drunkards, misers, climbers, killers, calumniators, sensualists, fanatics, hypocrites, and fools?" (47) Martin says that he does.

Candide decides that, rather than heading straight to Venice, the two of them ought to visit Paris. As they make their way into the city, Candide "came down with a mild illness caused by exhaustion...[A]s a result of medicines and bleedings, Candide's illness became serious." A local resident brings the ailing traveler a ticket to be filled out and delivered to the porter of the other world. "Candide wanted nothing to do with it." They assure him it is the latest fashion, and a "cleric swore that without the ticket they wouldn't bury Candide." (48) Fortunately missing the opportunity to find out whether the ticket is necessary, Candide recovers, and he and Martin continue their journey.

Candide finds Paris to be quite a disagreeable city. After being swindled and later arrested, he bribes the guard at the jail, makes his way to Normandy, and eventually sails to Venice. On arriving in Venice, Candide disappointedly learns that Cacambo, Cunegonde, and the old woman had not yet arrived.

After several months, Cacambo finally reaches Venice and informs Candide that Cunegonde is in Constantinople. Candide, Martin, and Cacambo, who works as a servant to the throne-less Sultan Ahmet the Third, set sail for Constantinople. Cacambo told Candide that he had paid a heavy price for Cunegonde's freedom and that they were then robbed by a pirate, who abducted Cunegonde and the old lady and sold them to an exiled Transylvanian king who lived in Constantinople. Cacambo informs Candide that Cunegonde had become quite ugly. Candide does not care; he wants to find her.

When the group reaches the Black Sea Canal, they purchase the services of a slave-powered galley to take them to Cunegonde. Candide recognizes two of the men rowing the galley as Pangloss and the Jesuit Colonel, Cunegonde's brother. The Jesuit Colonel says that he had not died from the wound inflicted by Candide. After he recovered, the Jesuits sent him to serve a French ambassador in Constantinople. He took a swim with "a very handsome" young man and was arrested because it was a capital crime for a "Christian to be found naked with a young Moslem." (71)

Pangloss had not died on the gallows. The rope had been wet and became stretched out as Pangloss hung on it. His body was given to a surgeon to dissect, but he groaned when the surgeon made his first incision. The kind surgeon found Pangloss a job on a ship which eventually brought him to Constantinople. While visiting a mosque, he had the misfortune of meeting a young, attractive, bare-breasted Moslem girl. An imam recognized Pangloss as a Christian and had him arrested, after which he was sentenced to serve as a galley slave on the same ship and on the same bench as his former pupil, the Baron of Thunder-Ten-Tronckh's son. Candide ransoms them both, and the whole group sets off to rescue Cunegonde.

Cunegonde has, indeed, become quite ugly, so ugly that Candide no longer wished to marry her. He ransoms her anyway, along with the old woman, who tells Candide of a farm nearby that is for sale. He makes the purchase, and at the insistent urging of Cunegonde, informs the Jesuit Colonel that he intends to marry Miss Cunegonde. The Jesuit Colonel will not stand for it, claiming that she will marry no one but "a baron of the empire." "You absolute idiot, Candide told him, I rescued you from the galleys, I paid your ransom, I paid your sister's; she was washing dishes, she is ugly, I am good enough to make her my wife, and you still presume to oppose it! If I followed my impulses, I would kill you all over again." (73) Still, the Jesuit Colonel refuses. Candide seeks advice from his friends and sends the Jesuit Colonel back to the galley.

Candide, Cunegonde, Cacambo, Martin, Pangloss, and the old woman are not happy on their little farm, however. Jews cheat Candide out of all the money he has left. Cunegonde grows even uglier and becomes “sour-tempered and insupportable; the old woman was ailing and even more ill-humored than Cunegonde.” Cacambo curses his fate as a farm hand. Pangloss wishes he could teach at a German University, and Martin “was firmly persuaded that things are just as bad wherever you are.” (74)

Candide, Martin, and Pangloss argue frequently about metaphysics. Martin “concluded that man was bound to live either in convulsions of misery or in the lethargy of boredom.” Pangloss holds to his same old line but “didn’t believe a word of it.” (75) Candide agrees with neither but has no opinion of his own. They visit a Turkish philosopher and ask him “why such a strange animal as man was created.” He answers them with a question of his own: “Is it any of your business?” Candide comments that there was “a horrible lot of evil on the face of the earth.” The Turkish philosopher asks what it matters “whether there’s good or evil? When his highness sends a ship to Egypt, does he worry whether the mice on board are comfortable or not?” Pangloss then asks what they are to. “Hold your tongue,” (75) he told them.

On their way home from visiting the philosopher, the group meets a farmer who, along with his family, does nothing but tend his farm. He leads a good life by minding his own business and selling his products in town. His routine keeps him and his family from the “three great evils, boredom, vice, and poverty.” (76) The farmer’s perspective on life inspires the group. “Let’s work without speculating, said Martin; it’s the only way of rendering life bearable.” (77)

So, they all go to work. They cultivate their garden. “[E]ach one began to exercise his talents. The little plot yielded fine crops.” Cunegonde is ugly, but she becomes a great cook. “Everyone...did something useful.” Pangloss sometimes enjoys recounting Candide’s life for him. This happened because that happened; had he not endured this horrible thing, that tolerable thing would not have happened. “All events are

linked together in the best of possible worlds; for, after all, if you had not been driven from a fine castle by being kicked in the backside for love of Miss Cunegonde...you wouldn't be sitting here eating candied citron and pistachios." Candide replies by saying, "that is very well put...but we must cultivate our garden." (77)

Voltaire wrote in one of his many letters that "I have read a great deal...and I have discovered nothing but doubts, lies and fanaticism; I am just about as wise, in what really concerns our existence, as I was in the cradle. What I like best is to plant, sow, build, and above all to be free."¹⁵ He liked to cultivate his garden. Such sentiments might well serve as evidence for Besterman's assertion that Voltaire's *contes philosophiques* represent a kind of autobiography. His stories certainly reveal his intellectual and religious attitudes; and having examined samples of the satire of both Erasmus and Voltaire, Chapter five will compare the ways in which the authors' intellectual and religious perspectives shaped their satire.

¹⁵Andre Morize. "The Moment of Candide". Printed in Norton/Voltaire, 111.

Chapter Five Making Comparisons

In a comparative study of Erasmus and Voltaire, possibilities abound. One might wish to focus such a study on topics touched in Chapter two of this paper: the ways in which the lives of Erasmus and Voltaire exemplified the periods of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The lives and work of both men captured the European *zeitgeist* they experienced. The present study, however, seeks to make connections between specific aspects of their satirical writings, namely, the ways in which Erasmus and Voltaire acted as social critics, particularly in the area of religion.

Chapter two highlighted the central concerns and aims of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and the ways in which those concerns and aims were manifest in the lives of Erasmus and Voltaire. Chapters three and four introduced the satire of the two men, focusing on the attention paid to religious matters. Chapter five will show that while the religious satire of Erasmus and Voltaire criticized many of the same things and supported many of the same ideas, it was marked by distinctions of purpose and motivation that were consistent with the religious perspectives of the authors and the religious attitudes of the times in which they lived. This conclusion will be illustrated in a topical treatment of the works. The comments of Erasmus and Voltaire on war, superstition, monks, the papacy, and the doctrine of the trinity provide clear evidence that while dealing with similar subjects, the two authors' criticisms are marked by significant distinctions.

Before beginning this topical assessment, one general comparative observation is in order. With respect to the vehicles used by Erasmus and Voltaire to advance their

satirical comments, call it their satirical *modus operandi*, the authors differed considerably. Voltaire's satire is strictly fictional. As was mentioned in Chapter Four, Voltaire utilized the form of the *conte philosophique* to voice his satirical criticisms. Erasmus' satire is a bit more difficult to classify. While the *Colloquies* are obviously fictional stories, they were not written as exercises in short fiction. Although Peace and Folly are obviously fictional characters, the works they represent do not contain what would normally be recognized as the elements of fiction. These pieces are best characterized as non-fiction, recognizing, of course, that such a description is not a nuanced one. *Julius Excluded From Heaven* is Erasmus's only satire that is purely fictional.

The various satirical forms used by Erasmus and Voltaire can be explained with respect to their professional interests. The dramatist Voltaire would have found fiction a logical way in which to present his satire. The scholar Erasmus did not have such tools available and was forced to resort to other methods. Whereas Voltaire's satirical *modus operandi* was unvaried and rather simple, Erasmus utilized a range of forms that were brilliant in design. And whereas Erasmus' choices of vehicles enabled him to make satirical statements rather easily, Voltaire's fictional satires required him to be quite inventive and creative.

This short comparative note serves as an example of the way in which the rest of the comparisons will be made. Erasmus and Voltaire both wrote satire and did so brilliantly, but they did such work differently. Those differences can be explained with reference to both personal and temporal distinctions.

One of the most apparent instances of similarity and divergence in the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire is found in their comments concerning war. Both expressed intense hatred for the atrocities and horrible consequences of war in their satire. Erasmus directly attacked the practice in *The Complaint of Peace* and also dealt with the topic in *Julius Excluded From Heaven* and *The Praise of Folly*. Folly identified war as a practice

sanctioned by herself, and Peter chastised Julius for the slaughters he caused. Erasmus said that “war always brings about the wreck of everything, and the tide of war overflows with everything that is worst.” While that statement does not come from his satire, it accurately reflects the sentiments of his satirical works. Graphic descriptions marked his satirical tirades; phrases such as “drive the cold steel into your brother’s guts” and “trying to cut your brother’s throat”¹ along with images of blood-stained rivers, mangled bodies, and ravaged countrysides signal Erasmus’s aversion to war.

In *Micromegas*, *The World is Like That*, and *Candide*, Voltaire ridiculed the practice of war and exposed its evil, destructive tendencies. Referring to the picture of the giant Micromegas holding a human sailing vessel on his fingertip, Voltaire’s narrator asks readers to “consider then, I pray you, what [observers would] think of those battles which give the conqueror possession of some village, to be lost again soon afterwards.” Babouc saw that soldiers viewed war as just another job and that war was fought for rather trivial reasons. Babouc and *Candide* both witnessed the devastation of war, and like those of Erasmus, Voltaire’s descriptions of war are violent and grotesque. Burned villages, beaten men, “butchered women, who still clutched their infants to their bleeding breasts...disemboweled girls...Scattered brains and severed limbs” along with thousands of military casualties haunt Voltaire’s depictions of the “heroic butchery”² of war.

In addition to expressing their opposition to war and describing its incredible cruelty, the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire pointed to the inconsistency of religious warfare. The kings of the Abares and Bulgars had “*Te Deums*” sung at their victory celebrations. The Muslim warriors in northern Africa engaged regularly in bloody fighting without ever “skipping on the five prayers a day decreed by Mohammed.”³

¹Desiderius Erasmus. *The Education of a Christian Prince*. Printed in *The Erasmus Reader*, ed. by Erika Rummel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, 280. *Peace*, 104.

²*Micromegas*, 18. *Candide*, 5.

³*Ibid.*, 5, 21.

Peace went to great lengths to criticize Christian warfare, and Peter told Julius that Christ was opposed to his barbaric activities.

The divergence lies in this aspect of the authors' treatment of war. Erasmus criticized Christian warfare because it was contrary to Christ's central message. He then went on to urge Christians to make peace with one another, to be committed to the unifying call of the Savior. Voltaire never took that second step. He suggested the inconsistency of religious belief and war-like practice, but he did not suggest reform. Whereas Erasmus seemed to say "from a religious perspective, war is ridiculous, and here is what we ought to do," Voltaire simply said "from a religious perspective, war is ridiculous." Note that Voltaire's criticism included Islam as well.

This reaction is typical of the difference between Renaissance and Enlightenment attitudes. Christian humanists wanted to reform the church from within; deists worked outside the church framework to correct assumptions and behavior. Erasmus, working very much within the church, spoke out against Christian warfare and called for a return to Christ's teachings about peace and unity. While it might be argued that Voltaire's criticism implied corrective adjustments, he never offered such suggestions; and he certainly did not do so by quoting scripture. He merely criticized religious (not just Christian) warfare as being inconsistent with the professed beliefs of those who engaged in it.

The issue of criticism followed by either reform or rejection touches on a central difference between the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Both were times of significant change in European society. Both were marked by criticisms of religious trends. During the Renaissance, reformers criticized practices and worked for change within a decidedly Christian context. During the Enlightenment, intellectuals criticized central Christian tenets and spoke out for change outside of and against the Christian framework. The remaining comparisons between the religious satire of Erasmus and

Voltaire will follow this pattern. Erasmus criticized with reform in mind. Voltaire criticized with rejection in mind.

Erasmus and Voltaire both satirized superstitious faith. The superstitious veneration of saints was one of Erasmus' favorite targets. In *Shipwreck* and *The Praise of Folly*, Erasmus equates faith in the power of saints to faith in Greek and Roman deities. The sailors in *Shipwreck* prayed to the "Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation" - the Virgin Mary. Since Mary "never went voyaging," she took Venus' place when "the mother who was not a virgin" stopped protecting the sailors. Folly ridicules those "who nourish the comfortable if stupid illusion" of safety if they look at a statue or painting of "Polyphemus-Christopher."⁴

Erasmus did not only satirize superstition by comparing it to ancient mythology. Antony calls the voyagers' pleas to the Virgin Mary, "who reigns in many places," "ridiculous"; and he says that those who worshipped the "deaf" sea were engaging in "Absurd Superstition!"⁵ In *Folly*, Erasmus mocks those who pray to saints for safety in battle and wealth. Erasmus was not a man of great means, and Folly laughs at a poor soul who uses a precise formula in praying to Saint Erasmus for riches.

Voltaire ridiculed superstition in *Micromegas* and *Candide*. When Micromegas picks up the ship traveling from the polar circle back to Europe and speaks to those on board, "The ship's chaplain repeated the prayers used in exorcism." The religious leaders of Lisbon made Candide a part of their "auto-da-fe" in order to prevent any further destruction and devastation. On the same day the act of faith took place, another earthquake that caused "frightful damage" shook the region.⁶

Voltaire's satire of superstition identifies it as a reaction to something incomprehensible and uncontrollable. The chaplain on the ship did not know what was

⁴*Shipwreck*, 241. *Folly*, 41.

⁵*Shipwreck*, 242.

⁶*Micromegas*, 21. *Candide*, 12.

happening, so he behaved superstitiously. The people of Lisbon were powerless over the earthquake, so they performed a useless act of superstitious faith. Like an earthquake, a storm on the sea is a natural phenomenon. Whereas Voltaire demonstrated human kind's utter futility in avoiding the effects of a natural disaster, Erasmus, while pointing out the ineffectiveness of superstitious faith in saints, presented another way in which humans can find deliverance from a seemingly uncontrollable force. Adolph prayed directly to God and found land safely. The woman who remained calm and prayed silently survived the tempest as well.

Here is another instance of the reform/rejection distinction between Erasmus and Voltaire and the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Erasmus satirized superstition and presented a more appropriate response to a dire situation. Voltaire satirized superstition but did not suggest a more appropriate reaction. Erasmus wanted to change, reform, the way Christians dealt with extreme circumstances; Voltaire simply wanted to do away with the way Christians dealt with them.

The same distinction exists in the authors' harsh treatment of monks, even though their criticisms are incredibly similar. Both authors commented on the inconsistency between professed monastic principles and actual monastic behavior. "[W]herever you go you can't help running into these men who've 'withdrawn' from the world," wrote Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly*. He continued by saying that a monk "will number up his myriads of fasts, and account for his bursting belly by the fact that he eats only one meal at midday." "Babouc shuddered at...the intrigues of those who had renounced the world; the ambition, greed, and pride of those who taught humility and unselfishness," wrote Voltaire in *The World is Like That*. Erasmus and Voltaire both commented on the factional rivalries, jealousies, and in-fighting that existed among monastic orders. Babouc remarked "if [the members of the religious houses] mutual accusations were to be believed, they all alike deserved extinction." Folly said that monks "all try as hard as

possible not to agree with each other in their way of life; they are far less interested in resembling Christ than in differing among themselves.”⁷

One interesting aspect of Erasmus and Voltaire’s satirical comments on monasticism is that Voltaire used Erasmus to satirize the practice. Monasticism, said Voltaire’s Erasmus, was the profession “of contracting by an inviolable oath to be useless to mankind, to be absurd and slavish, and to live at the expense of others.” Were that quotation not identified as Voltaire’s, it is not implausible to think that Erasmus himself might actually have said it; he did say that monks “avoid religion as much as they can... make an excellent living out of beggars’ rags...[and] pass themselves off to us as apostles - by virtue of their filth, stupidity, grosness, and impudence.”⁸

Note that one of Erasmus’ indictments of monasticism is that monks are “less interested in resembling Christ than in differing among themselves.” He said that Christ would not recognize monks as his followers and that the savior promised “my father’s would be granted, not to cowls, prayers, or fasts, but to works of faith and charity.” Erasmus’ criticism of monasticism points to the proper way in which true “men of religion” ought to act; he had reform in mind. Voltaire never made comments of this nature. His attitude toward monasticism was probably summed up by the Eldoradan with whom Candide and Cacambo spoke. After being asked whether whether they had “no monks to teach, argue, govern, intrigue, and burn at the stake everyone who disagrees with them,” the patient old man replied that “We should have to be mad...and we don’t understand what you’re up to with your monks.”⁹ Rejection can be read in those words.

As was the case with their treatment of monks, when Erasmus and Voltaire trained their satirical sights on the papacy they sounded quite similar. Both of them ascribed children to supposedly celibate popes; Erasmus did so in *Julius Excluded From*

⁷*Folly*, 62, 63. *World*, 246, 245. *Folly*, 63.

⁸*Conversation*, 466. *Folly*, 62.

⁹*Ibid.* *Candide*, 38.

Heaven, Voltaire in *Candide*. Voltaire's Lucian observed that "you allowed this papegaut all the stupidities imaginable." Erasmus' Peter similarly noted that the pope "alone, it seems, is entitled to be the worst of men."¹⁰

While Erasmus' words in *Julius Excluded* and *The Praise of Folly*, covered at length in Chapter three, clearly illustrate Erasmus' concern with reforming the papacy, Voltaire's comments on the topic never alluded to a model of behavior for popes. He seems to have been content to laugh at the spectacle Erasmus saw as the "enemy"¹¹ of Christ. While Voltaire's silence does not constitute outright rejection of the papacy, it is indicative of his anti-Catholic position.

The fifth, and perhaps most revealing, point of comparison centers on the authors' satirical comments dealing with discussion of the doctrine of the trinity. In *The World Is Like That*, Babouc witnesses a "magician" give a sermon during which he "divided under several heads what had no need of division."¹² While there other interpretations of this statement are possible, reading it as a Voltairean comment on the nature of God would be consistent with Voltaire's deistic perspective.

Erasmus, on the other hand, said in *The Praise of Folly* that Christians ought to "adore" the "deepest mysteries of religion" rather than try to "explain" them. He later satirized a monk's sermon on the "Holy Trinity." Interpreting these two passages as an Erasmian comment on attempts to explain the inexplicable "mystery" of the trinity would be consistent with Thomas a Kempis' declaration in the *Imitatio Christi* that the "Trinity is better pleased by adoration than by speculation." He asked what use it was "to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and displease the Trinity."¹³

¹⁰*Conversation*, 468. *Julius*, 155.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 168.

¹²*World*, 242.

¹³*Folly*, 60, 64. Bainton, 9. Thomas a Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. Translated by Leo Sherley-Price. New York: Penguin Books, 1952, 27.

Both Erasmus and Voltaire, then, satirized theological discussion of the doctrine of the trinity. Erasmus seemed to say that one ought not try to explain that which has no need of explanation. Voltaire seemed to say that one ought not divide that which has no need of division. This divergence can easily be attributed to Renaissance Erasmus' orthodox view of the triune God and Voltaire's deistic view of the disinterested, creator God.

Folly in the Garden

From these five examples, it is evident that while the religious satire of Erasmus and Voltaire dealt with many of the same topics, the authors approached those topics in different ways that were consistent with their own religious sentiments and the dominant religious attitudes of the historical movements of which they were a part. This conclusion alone, however, hardly means that the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire ought to be read by students in the twenty-first century. The value and significance of the satire of Erasmus and Voltaire lies not in their comments about specific elements of life in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries but in something more timeless: their concepts of what it means to be in the human condition. One final comparison must be made. Their most famous works, *The Praise of Folly* and *Candide*, reveal what Erasmus and Voltaire saw as the defining characteristics of being human.

"Human life as a whole is nothing but a kind of fool's game," Folly states early in her oration. For Erasmus, the central fact of being human is being "in the clutches of folly." Our foolishness can take many forms, show itself in multiple ways, but there has never been and never will be a human endeavor not tainted with foolishness. "All men are fools."¹⁴

Erasmus' conception of the human condition has religious significance. "Christ himself, though he was the wisdom of the Father, took on the foolishness of humanity in

¹⁴*Folly*, 27, 32, 32.

order to relieve the folly of mortals, just as he became sin in order to redeem sinners.”¹⁵ By equating folly with sin, Erasmus tried to say that, in our folly, we are separated from God. Christ, acting as Plato’s wise man who descended into the cave to rescue the miserable souls chained up inside, entered the realm of human folly and pointed the only way out. Our responsibility is to follow him, the *philosophia Christi*.

Voltaire’s conception of the human condition as expressed in *Candide* is that human enterprise is beset and besieged on all sides by evil. There is no escaping it. There is no eradicating it. Evil exists in the world humans inhabit, and its effects are devastating, brutal, and unpredictable.

Voltaire’s assessment of the human situation has religious significance as well. Far from asserting the philosophical formulation of the problem as an argument against the existence of God, *Candide* seems rather neutral on the topic of God’s existence. Erasmus was no stranger to the question of evil. He and Luther danced all around the topic as they argued about free will. “Luther said, ‘Let God be God’”, by which one supposes he meant that God is in absolute control of all things. “Erasmus said, ‘Let God be good.’”¹⁶ One suspects Voltaire, in true deistic fashion, might have entered their dialogue here with something like “Let God alone, that is certainly what he’s done with us.”

Despite their disjuncture concerning God’s role in the human situation, Erasmus and Voltaire’s ideas about the basic fact of human existence share important similarities. Both suggest that we go about our business with humility rather than hubris, and both suggest temperance over temerity. Folly necessarily accompanies all that we do, say, and believe. Evil stands ever ready to spoil our most honorable and glorious activities. Both suggest that our jobs are to do something to make the situation better while recognizing

¹⁵Ibid., 81.

¹⁶Bainton, 190.

that ultimate correction is beyond our capacity. Erasmus says to Thomas More “defend your folly faithfully,” and *Candide* urges his companions to “cultivate our garden.”¹⁷ This is where Erasmus and Voltaire capture contemporary attention, when they tell us about the folly in the garden.

There is no doubt that in the first years of this century we stand at a very important crossroad in human history. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 brought violence and hatred to an unprecedented level in an economic, political, and cultural clash that was already complex and unfortunate. As the United States continues to calculate and carry out its response, it is easy to see in this situation what Erasmus and Voltaire saw in theirs: folly and evil. Hundreds of years separate our lives from theirs, yet their words speak as if they were right here struggling along with us.

“Clap your hands, live well, and drink deep, most illustrious disciples of Folly.”¹⁸

¹⁷*Folly*, 5. *Candide*, 77.

¹⁸*Folly*, 87.

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