CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Praise of Folly

Desiderius Erasmus · *1511 (this English, 1668)* · *John Wilson*

As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables, I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. So Erasmus writes to Thomas More, in John Wilson's 1668 English, Project Gutenberg #9371. Then Folly speaks in her own person. For grades 11–12. The letter to More is not the oration. Tact in later satire; do not turn it into a jeer only. Quote Wilson.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a school read The Praise of Folly as Wilson's 1668 English—opened by Erasmus's letter to More, then by Folly speaking in her own person—rather than as a later slangy retelling, or as a mere jeer?

"I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. But"

The letter to Thomas More

The hosted file is Erasmus's The Praise of Folly in John Wilson's 1668 English, Project Gutenberg #9371. The dedicatory letter to Thomas More opens: As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables, I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. Then the oration, of feigned matter, spoken by Folly in her own person: At what rate soever the world talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly has got, even among the most foolish), yet that I am that she, that only she, whose deity recreates both gods and men. Teach the letter first, then the oration, for grades 11–12. Name Wilson, and name More. Later satire of the church and of learning needs tact; do not turn the book into a jeer only. Quote this English, not a later slangy retelling. One map of the opening cannot teach the whole oration.

KEY CHARACTERS

Erasmus
Who, riding from Italy toward England, writes to More that he will make some sport with the praise of folly

Thomas More
To whom the letter is written, and whose surname, Erasmus says, comes near the word Moriae

Folly, speaking in her own person
Who knows her ill report, and claims to be that only she whose deity recreates gods and men

John Wilson
The translator of this 1668 English; name him

HOW TO BEGIN THIS PRAISE OF FOLLY

"I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. But"

Letter to More

"At what rate soever the world talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly has got, even among the most foolish), yet that I"

Folly's oration

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Out of Italy for England

THE LETTER TO THOMAS MORE

As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables. The book begins as a ride, and a letter, not as Folly's first sentence.

- Keep "out of Italy for England" and "on horseback."
- 11–12.
- The letter is not the oration.
- Quote Wilson.

> *"As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables, I chose"*
>
> The letter to Thomas More

02

Some Sport with the Praise of Folly

THE LETTER TO THOMAS MORE

I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. The purpose is named to More, whose surname, he says, comes near the word Moriae.

- Keep "some sport with the praise of folly."
- 11–12.
- Quote this wording.
- Name More, as the letter does.

> *"I resolved to make some sport with the praise of folly. But"*
>
> The letter to Thomas More

03

At What Rate Soever the World Talks of Me

FOLLY'S ORATION

At what rate soever the world talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly has got, even among the most foolish). Folly begins by naming her own ill report.

- Keep "at what rate soever" and "ill report Folly has got."
- 11–12.
- The oration, after the letter.
- Quote Wilson, not a later slang.

> *"At what rate soever the world talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly has got, even among the most foolish), yet that I"*
>
> Folly's oration

04

That Only She

FOLLY'S ORATION

Yet that I am that she, that only she, whose deity recreates both gods and men. She claims her office, in this English, as a recreation.

- Keep "that only she" and "recreates both gods and men."
- 11–12. Tact in later satire.
- Quote this wording.
- One map cannot teach the whole oration.

> *"yet that I am that she, that only she, whose deity recreates both gods and men, even"*
>
> Folly's oration

05

Wilson, 1668, Letter then Oration

THE EDITION

John Wilson, 1668, PG #9371. For grades 11–12. The letter to More stands first; the oration follows. Tact in later satire of the church; do not turn it into a jeer only. Quote this English, not a later slangy retelling.

- Name Wilson, 1668.
- 11–12. Tact.
- A letter, then Folly in her own person.
- Quote this wording.

> *"As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables, I chose"*
>
> The letter to Thomas More

A ride, and a letter to More | Sport with the praise of folly | An ill report, named first | Folly in her own person | Tact in later satire

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The letter to More: coming out of Italy for England, on horseback, Erasmus resolves to make some sport with the praise of folly. The letter is not the oration.
2. Folly's oration: "At what rate soever the world talks of me… yet that I am that she, that only she, whose deity recreates both gods and men."
3. John Wilson, 1668, PG #9371, for grades 11–12. Quote this English, not a later slangy retelling.
4. Later satire of the church and of learning needs tact; do not turn the book into a jeer only. One map cannot teach the whole oration.

Quotations are verbatim from the John Wilson, Project Gutenberg #9371, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/erasmus-praise-of-folly/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.