

Do We Need the 'Ism'? Some Mediterranean Perspectives*

Introduction

A scholar who agreed to write the article 'Erasmianism' for a hypothetical dictionary of historiographical terminology would face an alternative: presenting it either as a literary phenomenon or as a theoretical position (philosophical, political, religious). This initial dilemma cannot be avoided. On the choice depend both the definition and the evaluation of the phenomenon 'Erasmianism'. In Italian (as in other Romance languages), where the term 'Erasmianism' has not yet made its way into dictionaries, substantives ending in 'ism' derived from the names of historical figures belong to one of two categories.

In substantives of the first category, the suffix 'ism' indicates the tendency to imitate and reiterate the stylistic traits of a writer or an artist. Ciceronianism is 'the theory and practice of writing under the inspiration of Cicero's style'; Petrarchanism is 'the poetry that reflects stylistic traits and spiritual attitudes of Petrarch's lyrics'; Raphaelism is 'the pictorial tendency deriving from the art of Raphael'.¹ By no means all great authors and artists have given birth to an 'ism': Goethe did not generate 'Goethism', nor did Michelangelo inspire 'Michelangelism'. The production of an 'ism' constitutes not the proof of literary or artistic greatness, but only a clue to the fitness of a particular literary or figurative language for anthropological-cultural recycling. The suffix 'ism' in substantives of the second category denotes the philosophical, political, or religious position established by the thinker from whose name the 'ism' derives. Platonism is the philosophical system elaborated by Plato and adopted by his followers; Calvinism is the religious doctrine formulated by John Calvin.²

In the two categories of 'isms', the relationship between the founder and the tendency that takes his name differs significantly. There is no 'ism' in the first category that does not presuppose direct reference to the original and does not imply the qualitative superiority of that original to all its derivatives. There was no Petrarchan poet who had not read Petrarch; no Caravaggesque painter could have been ignorant of Caravaggio. By definition, not a single Petrarchan could reach Petrarch's level,

* Translated from the Italian by Anne Jacobson Schutte.

¹ *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin 1961) ad voces.

² *Ibid.*, ad voces.

and no Caravaggesque could compete with Caravaggio. In Erasmus the inevitably pejorative connotation of this category of 'ism' found one of its most caustic observers and witnesses.³

'Isms' of the second category, on the contrary, do not presuppose a direct relationship between the founder and the movement deriving from him, nor is the movement dependant on or subordinate to the founder. One can be a rigorous Calvinist without having read a word of Calvin, and many Platonists have never read Plato. The question whether the Calvinist can surpass Calvin is meaningless, for the relationship between Calvin and the Calvinist rests not on the plane of word or sign, but rather on the level of life. The Calvinist lives, and therefore validates, ideas of Calvin that have reached him through the mediation and elaboration of his church.

“El erasmismo en España”: A Vision

The uncritical, arbitrary, and ineffectual application sometimes made of the word 'Erasmianism' which has inspired my attempt at terminological clarification suggests the necessity of verifying the usefulness of both 'isms'. Of the two 'Erasmianisms' in circulation, the more prominent and ambitious is certainly the second: the one that elevates Erasmus to the role of founder of a philosophical-political-religious doctrine. This 'ism's' native land is Spain. Marcel Bataillon's historical and literary masterpiece *Erasme et l'Espagne* (1937) presents Spanish Erasmianism as an informal church or a subterranean association, fluid but distinctly profiled, that crossed all the way through Spanish society without stopping at ethnic, religious, social, or caste frontiers.⁴ Erasmianism attracted adherents among 'cristianos nuevos' and 'viejos', Catalans and Castilians, lay people and clerics; at the apex of the King-Emperor's chancellery as well as among women of modest culture. The credo or credos of this pervasive church — evangelism, conciliarism, no to Luther and a double no to the Reformation, the cult of the Greek language, humanism — travelled by mysterious, charismatic routes, independent not only of Erasmus's books but also of mediation by any kind of concrete institution. Publishers, translators, and readers obviously played a role in the network of adherents, but Erasmianism went far beyond them; it penetrated everywhere. Wherever one finds Greek, theology linked to humanism, attempts at mediation between various confessional orientations, there is Erasmianism. In this way sixteenth-century Spain erasmianized harmoniously⁵ and triumphantly:

³ D. Erasmus, *Dialogus Ciceronianus sive de optimo genere dicendi* (1528).

⁴ M. Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne*. D. Devoto - C. Amiel ed. (3 vol.; Genève 1991). The first edition (Paris 1937), translated into Spanish (Mexico D.F. 1950), was reprinted in 1966 (Mexico D.F.) and in 1995 (Madrid). See G.F. Nuttall, 'Erasmus and Spain: The Vision of Marcel Bataillon', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46 (1994) 105-113.

⁵ A small indication of the spirit of harmony that pervades Bataillon's picture: "L'Inquisition ne le [le luthéranisme comme évangélisme] prit pas au tragique. *Le nombre d'accusés relaxés par elle au bras séculier semble avoir été infime: Juan López, Garçon et Castillo sont les seuls, à notre connaissance, qui aient péri sur le bûcher*": Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne* 1, 473 (emphasis mine).

there was an Erasmianism before Erasmus,⁶ an Erasmianism without Erasmus,⁷ and even an Erasmianism against Erasmus.⁸

That sixteenth-century Spain was the stage of Erasmianism is an unassailably current historiographical paradigm without anomalies. Sixty years have passed since the publication of Marcel Bataillon's book without a serious challenge to the dogma, except by Bataillon himself.⁹ I can think of no other historical work on the early modern period which has marked in such a profound and lasting way the self-consciousness of a linguistic and cultural collective, not just a nation but also its international outposts (Mexico, South America). In the mirror created by Bataillon, the Spanish intelligentsia of 1937, 1950, and 1995 gazed and gazes at itself, recognized and recognizes itself with an enthusiasm that shows no signs of abating.¹⁰ If there is no organic current of research on Erasmus in Spain, could the reason be that the picture delineated in 1937 must not be altered or touched up? Whether sixteenth-century Spain was really Erasmian, and to what degree it was, is a discussion that no one wants to reopen. Educated Spaniards of the late twentieth century are Erasmian through will and their forebears' choice. Was the Erasmian will in 1937 and 1950 the historiographical metaphor of a repressed and frustrated Europeanist vocation? Is Marcel Bataillon's 'Erasmus of Spain' perhaps destined to become a fascinating and imperishable chapter in the history of the cultural origins of European unification in the twentieth century?

Erasmianism in Italy? An Inventory

The title of this conference proposes a dichotomy between 'idea and reality'. On the Spanish stage where we have been moving thus far, Erasmianism reigns as an idea. The change of scene that follows is at the same time a change of register. Passing from Spain to Italy, we pass from the immateriality of the 'ecclesia Erasmiana' to the material reality of the book — the book as a container of ideas, but also as a manufactured item, an object of use, the reference point of a concrete action: reading (Figure 1).

Figure 1 graphically represents my inventory of Italian editions of Erasmus in the sixteenth century.¹¹ Having selected as a unit of measure not the text but the book, I have compiled an inventory of one hundred eighty-six editions. (Since some books contain more than one text, an inventory based on the text as a unit of measure would yield a higher total, between two hundred fifty and two hundred sixty titles.) The one

⁶ A. Huerga, 'Erasmismo y alumbradismo', M. Revuelta Sanudo - C. Morón Arroyo ed., *El erasmismo en España* (Santander 1986) 339-356, especially 345.

⁷ M. Bataillon, 'Prólogo' to D. Erasmus, *El Enquiridión del Caballero cristiano*. D. Alonso ed. (Madrid 1932) 84. But see also Huerga, 'Erasmismo'.

⁸ Bataillon, *Erasmus et l'Espagne* 1, 229-231 (Ignatius Loyola).

⁹ See, for example, M. Bataillon, 'Vers une définition de l'erasmisme', *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensis, Tours 1969* 1 (Paris 1972) 21-34; reproduced in *Erasmus et l'Espagne* 3, 141-154.

¹⁰ As noted earlier, 1950 is the date of publication of the Spanish translation, 1995 of its most recent reprinting.

¹¹ The diagram is drawn from S. Seidel Menchi, *Bibliotheca erasmiana italica* (Genève, forthcoming).

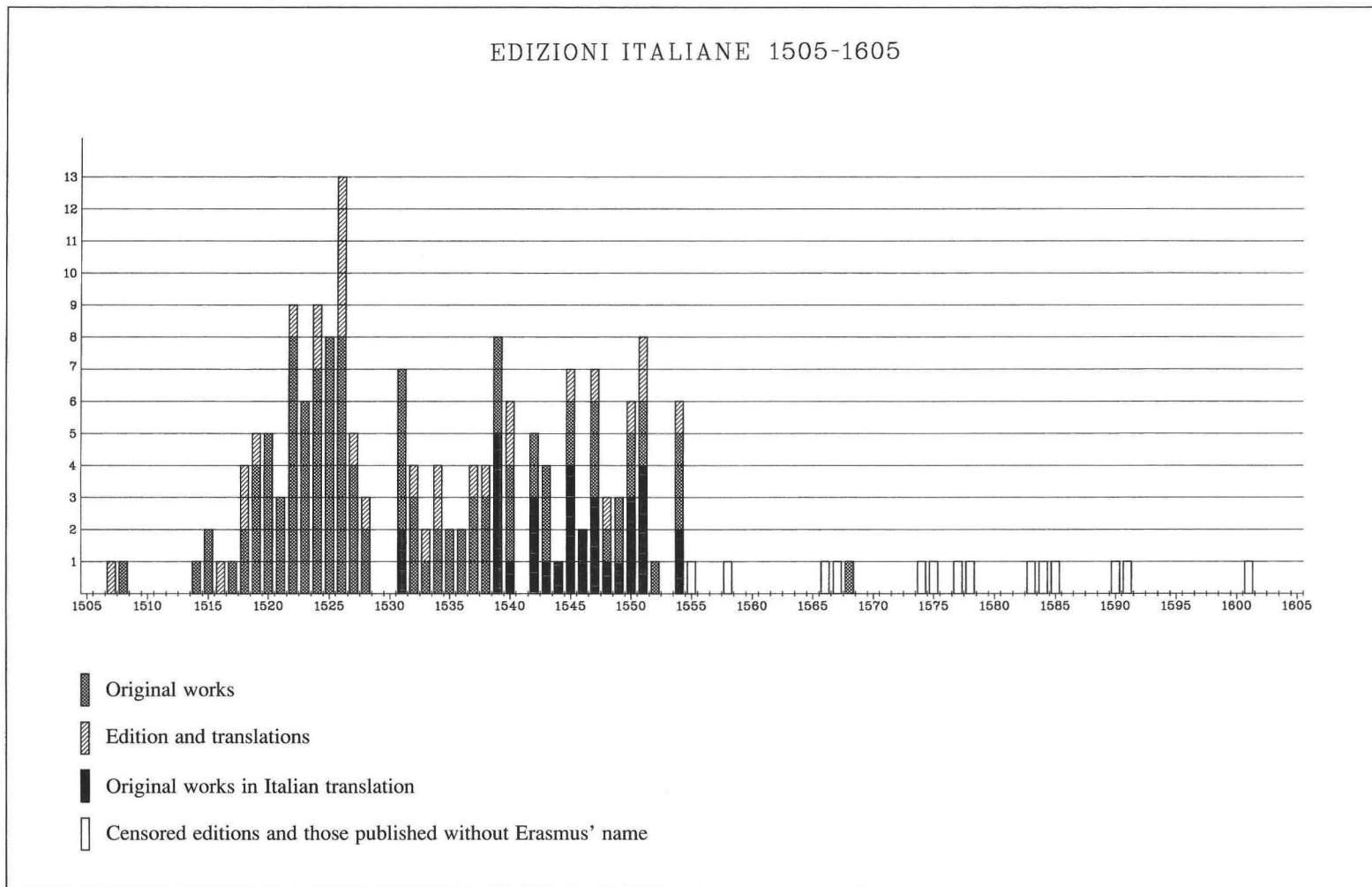


Fig. 1. Diagram of Italian editions of Erasmus in the sixteenth century.

hundred eighty-six books on which this graph is based include both original works and editions and/or translations central to Erasmus's intellectual biography (the *Novum Testamentum*, editions of the Church Fathers, the *Disticha Catonis*). I have excluded 'ancillary' texts (that is, the product of Erasmus's work as an editorial consultant: dedications, commendatory prefaces, technical-philological contributions to editions of the classics), as well as 'fragments' (namely sections of his works which appear in subordinate positions in the works of others, or in composite publications assembled in various ways). Editions neither dated nor datable by conjecture are also excluded from the graph.

Italian production of publications by Erasmus occurred in three phases, the first running from 1514 to 1528, the second from 1531 to 1555, the third from 1556 to 1600. The two dividing points correspond to key events in the history of Italian culture: the sack of Rome (1527) and the beginning of work on the compilation of the first index of prohibited books issued in Rome (1555).

The first phase (1514-1528)

The editorial success of Erasmus touched its apex in this period: seventy-one volumes in fourteen years. Production between 1521 and 1527, in which the Italian market was literally inundated by Erasmus editions published in Venice, appears particularly dense and homogeneous: in 1521 we have only three, a number that rises to nine in 1522, five in 1523, nine in 1524, eight in 1525, and thirteen in 1526. Through strategies lowering the price of books, Venetian printers successfully met the challenge of more qualified transalpine competition: they economized on the quality of paper, used worn-out type, reduced the folios of Basel to quartos and the quartos to small octavos, eliminated the costs of editing and reduced those of proofreading, constricted the printed page to the limit of legibility. Theirs was not merchandise destined for deluxe libraries. Aldo Manuzio's complete withdrawal from this sector of the market, this prestigious publisher's divorce from 'his' author, signals the definitive decline of Erasmus publications from first- to second-class goods.

With these second-class goods, moreover, very good deals could be done. Cheap, handy little pocket books designed for rapid consumption, careless treatment, and reading on the road were rapidly absorbed by the market. The more they related to the current political-religious situation, the faster they sold. In fact, it was not Erasmus's short treatises on grammar and rhetoric, manuals of letter-writing, and anthologies of works by classical authors — his humanistic production, in Kristeller's sense of the word — that swelled the curve of publications between 1521 and 1527. Instead, Erasmus's place on the best-seller list was achieved by the publication and reissue of works intimately linked with the religious conflict in progress, among them his proclamation of the rebirth of the Gospel and his vibrant appeals for the renewal of the Christian world.

Let me illustrate this claim concretely, using the example of the publisher-printer team Lorenzo Lorio and Gregorio de Gregori, who (sometimes in association with other publishers and printers) issued thirty works of Erasmus between 1521 and 1527. Lorio and de Gregori focused almost exclusively on Erasmus's theological and

religious production, particularly the most current titles. In reconstructing the list of Erasmian titles published by Lorio, I was astonished to discover, in addition to such classics of Erasmian spirituality as the *Enchiridion*, the *Ratio verae theologiae*, the *Paraclesis*, the *Novum Testamentum*, and various evangelical *Paraphrases* not only the *De libero arbitrio*, *Modus orandi*, *Exomologesis*, and *Lingua*, but also the *Detectio praestigiarum cuiusdam libelli* and two editions of the *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni*.¹²

You may wonder what possible interest Italian readers of 1526 or 1527 would have had in these last titles: polemical writings, often marked by personal rancor; forays into minor controversies, replete with unpleasant and ridiculous details, like the *Sponge for Mopping Up Hutten's Filth*. On the whole, however, the thirty Erasmian imprints issued between 1521 and 1527 by Lorenzo Lorio, Gregorio de Gregori, and their associates document with precision Erasmus's laborious construction of a specific religious identity, distinct on the one hand from Lutheranism and Zwinglianism and on the other hand from Catholic traditionalism. In other words, they document fully the Erasmianism of Erasmus, the image of his religious and political religious identity he chose to convey.

In a general way, we can identify these readers. Their ranks included schoolmasters and their pupils, unaligned ecclesiastics, officials in republican and princely chanceries, literary men connected with printers' shops, university students of Padua and Bologna, physicians, and diplomats. Unlike their Spanish contemporaries, who had easy access to Erasmus in their mother tongue (an editorial phenomenon certainly encouraged and perhaps promoted at the highest level), these Italians read Erasmus in Latin. As far as I have been able to determine, the seventy-one Latin imprints issued in Italy in this period were not supplemented by a single vernacular edition. The only known translation with Erasmus's name on the title page, dated 1526, is a fraud: a collection of two works by Luther and one of his followers.¹³

Italian readers, however, were not only deaf to Erasmus's main message; they badly misinterpreted it. For them, cut off from the flood of pamphlets that accompanied the Protestant Reformation in its expansive phase, his controversial and in some cases pedantic polemical writings provided not a credo but something quite different: a detailed report on the religious theological debate being conducted across the Alps. In effect, they threw a bridge across the first major gulf between north and south of the early modern era, the one blasted out by the bull *Exsurge Domine*. For curious, restless learned Italians, then, the great scholar of Basel served as special correspondent from the battlefield of the Reformation. The heaviness, prolixity, and complete absence of humor that make some of these works so difficult for us to digest are exactly the qualities that recommended them to the readers of the 1520s.

I am convinced that with this group of writings Erasmus became for *many* Italians in the cultivated classes a primary source of information on transalpine heresy, and for *some* of them the teacher who initiated them into it. Numerous documents, primarily literary in nature, referring to the reception and interpretation of this flood of

¹² *Ibid.*, section I, nos. 58, 40, 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Appendix II, Nr. 1.

imprints make it quite clear that readers of Erasmus most likely formed the pool from which Italian philo-Protestants of succeeding generations were recruited.¹⁴ In other words, Italian 'Erasmianism' of the 1520s carried within it the live seeds of its own destruction and annihilation. Even before it was born, it had already become something else.

At this point there remains the possibility of abandoning the more ambitious alternative and falling back on the more modest one. If the sources do not support the construction of an 'ism' as an autonomous theological religious position, can we posit an 'ism' as a literary phenomenon? In fact, testimonies to Erasmus's literary success reach their maximum density in this phase. Educated Italians read, cited, imitated, and summarized Erasmus in many forms and contexts: manuals of law and historical works, satirical poems and political treatises, writings designed to entertain and to instruct. Thanks to new research, the ranks of Italian reader/imitators of Erasmus, already numerous, are steadily increasing. A recently discovered new recruit, the historian and memorialist Francesco Guicciardini, links Erasmus's name to the most brilliant Italian prose of the sixteenth century.¹⁵

Although this list is impressive and lengthening, I do not believe that it supports the hypothesis of Erasmianism as a literary movement. In reality, the panorama of literary reception in the 1520s and early 1530s is as discontinuous and heterogeneous as it is rich: no common stylistic features, no predominant themes permit us to connect these diverse pieces of evidence, or even to identify a group. An occasional erudite borrowing, the insertion of a particularly elegant stylistic feature, a two line echo of the *Encomium Moriae*, the occurrence of a two word adage: if such literary borrowings justify applying the label 'Erasmianism', then all of learned Europe professed 'Erasmianism'. Applying Ockham's razor, would it not be more accurate to conclude that all of learned Europe read Erasmus?

The second phase (1531-1555)

Translations into the vernacular mark the second phase in Italian production of Erasmus's books. From the quantitative point of view, to be sure, Latin continued to prevail: of the ninety-seven imprints in these twenty-five years, only thirty-three (about one third) are in the vernacular. The minority, however, surpasses the majority in specific weight and consistency. While the sixty-four Latin imprints document the continuing Italian interest in Erasmus's humanistic production (*De octo orationis partium constructione*, for instance), the thirty-three Italian publications transmit the heritage of Erasmian spiritualism and evangelicism. This urgent message now spoke in the vernacular. Five editions of the *Enchiridion*, three of the treatise *De immensa misericordia Domini* by three different translators, at least six of the *Exhortation to the Reading of the Gospel* prefacing the New Testament and probably a separate edition

¹⁴ S. Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus als Ketzer. Reformation und Inquisition im Italien des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden 1993) 73-103.

¹⁵ A. Asor Rosa, 'Ricordi di Francesco Guicciardini', A. Asor Rosa, ed., *Letteratura italiana: Le opere 2* (Turin 1993) 3-94, especially 67-76. For another recently discovered case of reception, see L. D'Ascia, 'Galeazzo Flavio Capello traduttore di Erasmo', *Lettere italiane* 24 (1990) 66-88.

(now lost) made a lasting impression on Italian readers. Their impact was enhanced by the work of Antonio Brucioli, who in his prefaces to the New Testament reproduced extensively (that is to say, copied) Erasmus's evangelical manifestos.¹⁶

Compared to his predecessor, the reader of Erasmus in Latin, the Italian who now read Erasmus in the vernacular is much better known to us. We know not only *what* he read and *how many* books he bought. From the records of Inquisition trials, our main source for this period, we know *how* he read.

Italian readers of Erasmus as they appear in Inquisition trials around 1550 display an independent spirit and a complete lack of concern about his orthodoxy. That is, this audience pays no attention to that image of himself as 'homo pro se' or 'homo supra partes' that he had constructed in the 1520s and attempted to disseminate throughout Europe as the 'real' Erasmus. Readers around 1550 deconstructed Erasmian texts, pulled out certain elements, and put them back together in an independent form that the Erasmus of the 1520s and 1530s probably would not have recognized as his. From among the dozens of examples that Inquisition trials offer, let me select one, a Protestant reconstruction.

Ippolito Chizzola, a Canon Regular of the Lateran Congregation, was tried in Brescia in 1549 for his sermons on confession. Although he had not dissuaded the faithful from confessing, he had tentatively insinuated that confession was mandated by human, not divine law. His source for the sermons, he told the inquisitor, was Erasmus's *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi*. In this treatise (1524) Erasmus had left open the question whether confession was 'de iure divino' or 'de iure positivo', limiting himself to the observation that he could not adduce any scriptural evidence for its institution by Christ. While Chizzola followed Erasmus's historical theological exposition point by point, he took a philo-Protestant position on the fundamental issue, the origin of confession. Declaring the sacrament to be a product of historical evolution in the Church amounted to liberalizing it.¹⁷

The incorporation of Erasmus into the patrimony of Protestantism is particularly evident in the metamorphoses undergone by his evangelical manifestos. The splendid pages in which he exhorted the ordinary Christian to take possession of the Gospel accompanied the translations of the New Testament, which were the preferred reading and the distinguishing mark of Italians sympathetic to the Reformation. Most references, literary and inquisitorial, to group reading and discussion of Erasmian texts regard these evangelical appeals. Now read in Italian, not Latin, they spread beyond the learned class to artisans, shopkeepers, and women. In the 1540s, 1550s, and 1560s we find these works in the hands of druggists and weavers, shoemakers and barbers, all of them philo-Protestants.¹⁸

At this point a major hermeneutical problem arises. Should the philo-Protestant interpretations of Erasmus, the predominant manifestations of his posthumous influence in Italy, be considered legitimate or spurious? I suppose that Bataillon and other scholars of his generation would have considered these interpretations spurious.

¹⁶ Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus als Ketzer*, 94-96.

¹⁷ Brescia, Biblioteca Civica Queriniana, Ms. Q.I.II.11.M.1.

¹⁸ Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus als Ketzer*, 94-96.

Bataillon would probably have criticized me for losing sight of Erasmus and his real intentions. In response to criticism of this sort, I maintain that although in the classic history of ideas the author's intention was a primary interpretative criterion, it no longer holds that privileged position. Historical anthropology has taught us to consider what the miller Menocchio did with the parable of the three rings he came across in the *Decameron* to be as original as, and historically more fruitful than, Boccaccio's novella. The miller's 'betrayal' of Boccaccio's text provides access to a dimension of popular culture that is just as relevant as and intellectually more stimulating than the high culture that generated the original source. Indeed, Menocchio's transformation of his source attests to the vitality and semiotic multivalence of Boccaccio's work.¹⁹ The same is the case with those writings of Erasmus that Italian religious dissidents around 1550 tailored to fit their own priorities.

The third phase (1556-1600 and beyond)

In 1555 the inquisitor general Gian Pietro Carafa rose to the pontificate, taking the name Paul IV. One of the new pope's first moves was the appointment of a commission charged with preparing an official catalogue of prohibited books. These events had an immediate effect on editorial programs. Although the commission of cardinals entrusted with producing the index completed its work only in 1557, and the condemnation of Erasmus came into force in 1559, the publishing world reacted to the change in climate before the new rules became official. Here the graph speaks eloquently. The flatness and quantitative insignificance of Erasmus publications during this long period, which lasted until the eighteenth century, contrast sharply with the lively editorial activity during the first half of the sixteenth century.

Only one printer defied the ban placed by the Roman index upon Erasmus. In 1568 Vincenzo Busdrago of Lucca printed a clandestine edition of the *Disticha Catonis*, which was immediately intercepted, denounced, and prosecuted by the inquisitor of Pisa.²⁰ This Lucchese *Cato*, though issued without the name of the city or the publisher, bore the author's name on the title page. Other sporadic signs of Erasmus's survival, appearing under the name Paolo Manuzio, were severely mutilated. White quantities in the chart reveal the conscious intellectual appropriation and systematic disfigurement inflicted upon Erasmus. Had some plagiarist got hold of Erasmus's notes for the preparation of the *Adagia* and the *Apophthegmata* and issued them under his own name, the result could not have been more foreign to the original author than the four editions of the *Adagia* and the three of the *Apophthegmata* that represented his exiguous editorial presence during the last thirty years of the sixteenth century and beyond.

Along with this silencing by means of expropriation and deformation went the destruction of Erasmus's books published during the first half of the century. That Erasmus was the principal target of this campaign the numbers — calculations performed

¹⁹ C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Harmondsworth 1982) 29, 50, 152 n. 50.

²⁰ Seidel Menchi, *Bibliotheca erasmiana italica*, section I, Nr. 147.

on lists of books sequestered and destined for destruction — leave no room for doubt.²¹ While we cannot and probably never will attain certainty about the total number of books destroyed, there are some very significant indications.

Let us take another look at the group of Italian Erasmus editions issued during the seven-year period 1521-1527. We notice a very low survival quotient: among the fifty-two books published between 1521 and 1527, sixteen have survived in a single copy and three not at all. These figures lead to a probabilistic conjecture: it may well be that a relatively high number of other editions which left no documentary trace whatever were totally destroyed as well.

Surviving books by Erasmus in Italian libraries reflect conscientious and pervasive censorship activity. When a work by Erasmus formed part of a collective publication, it was often cut out and eliminated. (Only close analysis of the remaining parts permits us to reconstruct the original whole.) Works entirely by Erasmus suffered more or less serious mutilations (Figures 2-6). In some instances the ritual character of censorship efforts did not damage the body of the text (Figures 7-8).

Thus the Italian cultural scene in the second half of the sixteenth century was a theatre of anti-Erasmianism homogeneous and systematic in a way that Italian 'Erasmianism' had never been. Of 'Erasmianism' in Italy, therefore, one can speak only in the negative, as a crusade against Erasmus. At the same time as (and perhaps on account of) this crusade, Italian reception and interpretation of Erasmus became radicalized.

The most substantial case of reading and imitation of Erasmus that I have found in this period illustrates vividly such a process of radicalization in a philo-Protestant direction. In 1579-80 Agostino Vanzo, a physician from Schio, was tried for heresy by the bishop of Belluno. A long poem in free verse which the physician claimed to have composed in 1575 constituted the principal charge against him. In his *Dialogo di papa Leone e di Santo Pietro*, Saint Peter refuses to let Pope Leo X into heaven just as he had denied entry to Julius II in Erasmus's *Julius exclusus*. Having read the dialogue, Vanzo adopted it as a rhetorical model but radicalized its message: he suggests that the pope is the Antichrist. His combining the *Julius exclusus* and Luther's *Passional Cristi et Antichristi*, I believe, accounts for the anticurial violence of Vanzo's poem. The irrepressible conflict documented by this literary composition shaped the trial, one of the most dramatic I have ever examined. It is marked by the cold, impersonal correctness of the judge bishop, the lucidity of the accused ("I know that Your Most Reverend Lordship will put me to death"), and the shadow of capital punishment that looms over every page of the trial record.²²

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me reiterate in explicit form the three arguments underlying this paper.

First, I have no intention of denying historiographical legitimacy to the term 'Erasmianism'. Rather, I consider it a construction by Erasmus — not 'in ordine verborum'

²¹ Ibid., Introduction, part II.

²² Belluno, Archivio Vescovile, Atti vescovili e curiali, b. 11, trial of Agostino Vanzo di Vicenza, 1579-1580.

but 'in ordine rerum'. Erasmus's 'Erasmianism' was a lucid, conscious creation, datable with precision, that corresponded to a practical objective: safeguarding his own autonomy. Luther did not construct Lutheranism — a spontaneous emanation from him, an involuntary aura projected by his actions and words. Erasmus's 'Erasmianism', on the other hand, was an ingenious protective strategy. The conflict that overwhelmed his generation necessitated a choosing of sides, from which someone of his stature and personality could hardly abstain. Erasmus reacted by inventing a center. I doubt whether in the preceding history of Europe the centrist ideology had ever been theorized so brilliantly, dressed and furnished with all those traits that made it so durably fascinating: a position of equilibrium between two opposing poles; a point of encounter, mediation, and dialogue; a citadel of measure, reasonableness, and irenicism in the fiery maelstrom of opposing fanaticisms; a perfect, rhetorically insuperable style. Like all self-images cultivated over a considerable period of time, this one took over its creator. During the last twelve or thirteen years of his life, Erasmus was the prisoner of 'Erasmianism', his own construction.

Second, the category 'Erasmianism' does not adequately convey the richness of creative energies that Erasmus unleashed and the multiplicity of intellectual and moral experiences that found nourishment in his work. The application of this category, therefore would produce considerable hermeneutic inflexibility, for the largest group of Erasmus's disciples and interlocutors would have to be cut out of his legacy.²³ In my view, the concept of 'reader response' elaborated in literary theory during the last few decades — that is, the principle "that a book's meaning is not fixed on its pages; it is construed by its readers"²⁴ is better suited to interpreting the Erasmus phenomenon. In practical terms, this means that Erasmus's influence cannot be accounted for by blanket application of the prefabricated label 'Erasmianism', but requires analysis and specific interpretation case by case.

Third, the most obvious limitation of 'Erasmianism' as an interpretive category is that it does not embrace all of Erasmus. Such texts as the *Encomium Moriae*, the adage 'Dulce bellum inexpertis', the *Paraclesis*, and the letter to Paul Volz (1518) hardly fit into a mode of tempered, accommodating reformism, subservient to the constituted authorities. Of this difficulty Erasmus was aware, as we can see in the tactics of self-censorship he employed during the last period of his life. Among these, his repudiation of the dialogue *Julius exclusus* constitutes merely the most striking example.

²³ C. Augustijn, *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (München 1986) chapter 15.

²⁴ R. Darnton, 'History of Reading', P. Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Padstow 1995) 157.

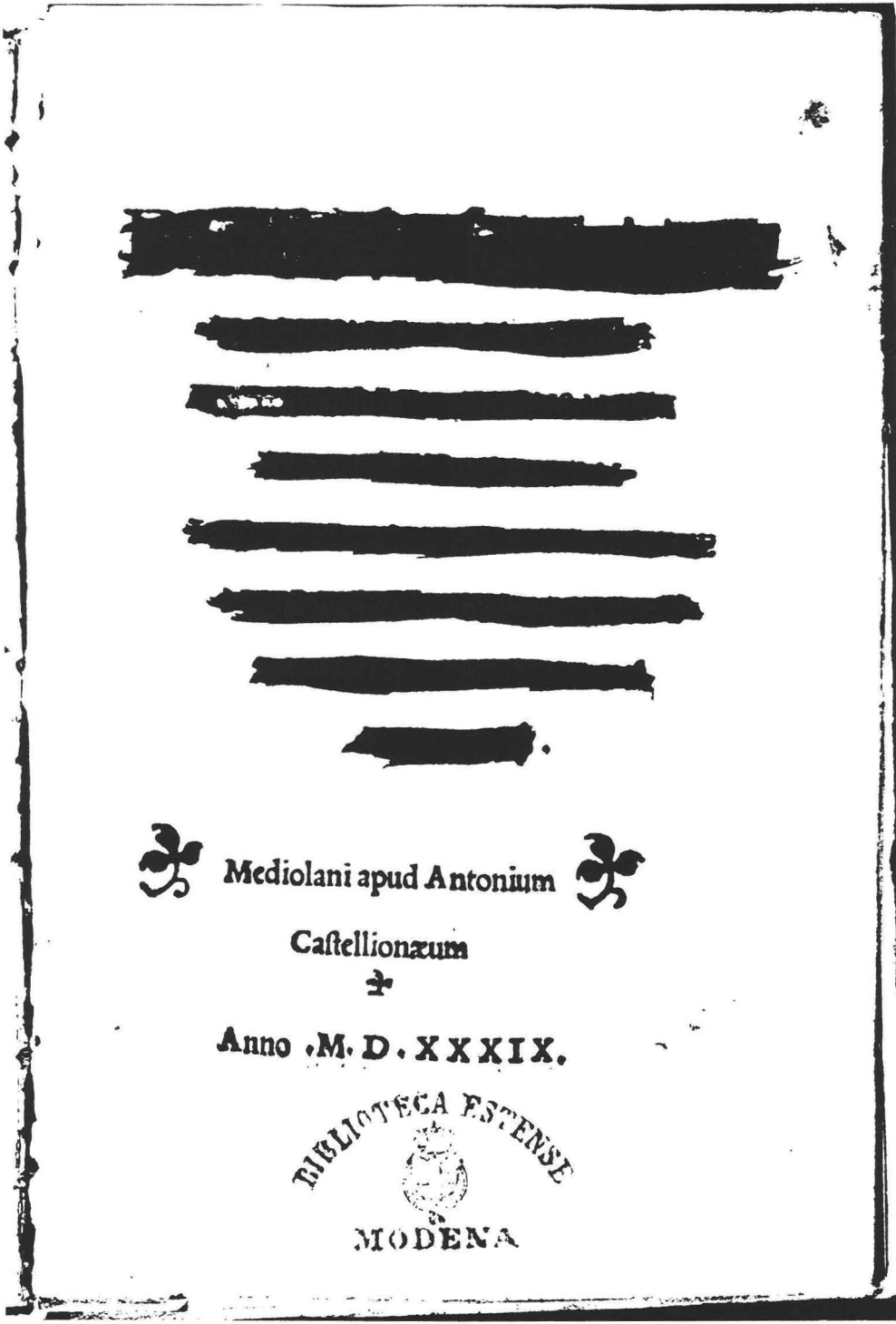


Fig. 2. Modena, Biblioteca Estense, A X B 36: Title page of the censored edition of *De civitate morum puerilium*, Milan, 1539.

A. D. C. H. R. I. S. T. I. L. O. N. G. O.

hactenus acquievi. Beasses me de ista bibliotheca Alexan-
drina emula: nisi semis fracto animo essem ob hanc flagitio-
sam valetudinem, quæ multas æquat ærumnas. Nam de ho-
spitio beatus mihi uidere: pro quod uadimonium deseri uel
ad tribunal Cassiani iudicis possit, ut fuit in proverbio. E-
Mariano nostro, Cineraliū die. Sed Rex longissime hinc
abest, et literæ ad legatū Venetorū mittendæ, quare metue-
bam ne inter caderent. Salutabis mihi Egnatiū, quæ miror
literis meis non rescripsisse, quas ei redditas esse ex thesau-
rario Insubriæ Grolerio cognoui, hoīe Egnatiū amicissim-
o, omniūq; doctissimorū. Vale. *Ἐγνατίου τῷ φίλῳ τῷ
ἐκ τῶν Ἰσθμίων ἑστώτων.* ἐ. Marliano nostro. v. Calē, Mar.
CHRISTO LONGO. IACOBO LVCÆ
DECANO AVRELIANENSI S. D.

NVnquam nobis sanè non deerit scribendi argumen-
tum, nisi (ut te olim monui) mutuis id interrogatio-
nibus excitemus: quo nomine scripsi ad te haud ita pridem
mibi adeò gratum fore, si plenius ex te intelligerem, cur
princeps uelster ~~_____~~ Budæo prætulerit, Germanū Gal-
lo, exterū ciui, ignouū familiari. Nam quod ad eruditionē
pertinet, nō uideo qua in re Budæus ~~_____~~ cedat: siue hu-
maniores, siue Christiano dignas hominē literas cōsumare
libeat. Quod uero ad dicendi facultatem pertinet, parem
meā sententiā, in tam diuerso dicendi genere laudē merentur.
Beatissima in ambobus et rerū et uerborū copias: sed
ita ut alter latius ex patietur, alter angustiore quidē aluo,
uerū altiore ingenie aquarū uim trahat: sicut ille plenior,
hic fertur rapidior. In Budæo uideo mihi agnoscere plus
neruorū, sanguinis, spiritus: in ~~_____~~ plus carnis, cutis, co-
laris: in illo plus diligētiæ: in hoc plus facilitatis: creber ille

E. P. I. S. T. L. I. B. V. 161

le sententijs, hic facit: ille omnia utilitati, hic plurimū de
le ctationi tribuit. Pugnāt Budæus cura, ingenio, grauitate
dignitate: ~~_____~~ arte, subtilitate, lenitate, iucunditate ad
uictoriā contendit. Hūc amare possit, illū admirari: Huic
fauere, parere illi. Profecto ille me uiolenter cogit, hic sua
uiter allicit. Ducit alter blandiū, alter uiribus trahit, uer-
borū delectu religiosus, proprietate perspicuus. Si res tra-
lationē expostulat, in metaphoris felix, sententijs grauis, si-
guris uarijs, summa orationis specie honestus, sublimis, se-
uerus, grā diloquus. Cōtra ~~_____~~ uenustus, modestus,
popularis, floridus, uerborū supellectile diues, compositio
ne simul expeditus, simul nitidus, frequens exēplis, densus
argumentis, gratus salibus. Ille in oratione sua totus quidē
semper est, sed tum potissimū tonat, tum fulminat, quū ma-
ceria temporū nostrorū oburgationē admittit: hic et quū
moribus conuictū facit, magis instituto suo seruire atq; do-
lere uidetur, malagmatis, collyrijs, cerotis, et cæteris id ge-
nus leniorū medicamentorū remedijs sanitati consulens: ut
ille amarulētis quidem illis, sed hactenepstate necessarijs
portionibus, sectiōnibus, cauterijs alte grassantem uim mor-
bi insectatur. Breuiter, si historiam scripturi sint, Budæus
Thucydide, magis quā Sallustii: ~~_____~~ Liniū, quā
Herodotum retulerit. Si pœma pangendum, hic tragicum
et Heroicū quiddā uerborū sententiarūq; pondere altius
intonabit: ille Comædiam urbanius, Lyricos suauis, elegi-
ciā mollius inspirabit. Assurgit tñ et hic quoq; alieno in-
genio, suo uero tam difficulter, quā ille nunquā, etiam si
uelit, sese demittere queat: alioqui superiores illæ uirtutes
ut neutri desunt, sic in altero magis patens, in altero magis
latens: effectus pares, habitu dissimiles: ut haud prorsus aber

Fig. 4. Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Stamp. Chig. V 1391: Erasmus's name censored in the letter collection of Christophe Longueil (*Christophori Longolii orationes duae*, Venice, s.n.t. 1539).

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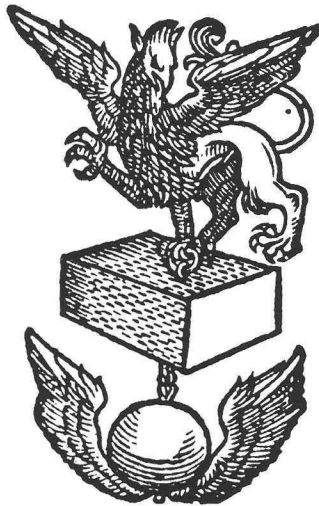


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1540. P·x

Fig. 5. Naples, Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Gerolamini, c 25 l 37: deformation of Erasmus's name by the cancellation and alteration of some of the letters on the title page of an edition of his treatise *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*. In more recent times the altered letters have been restored.

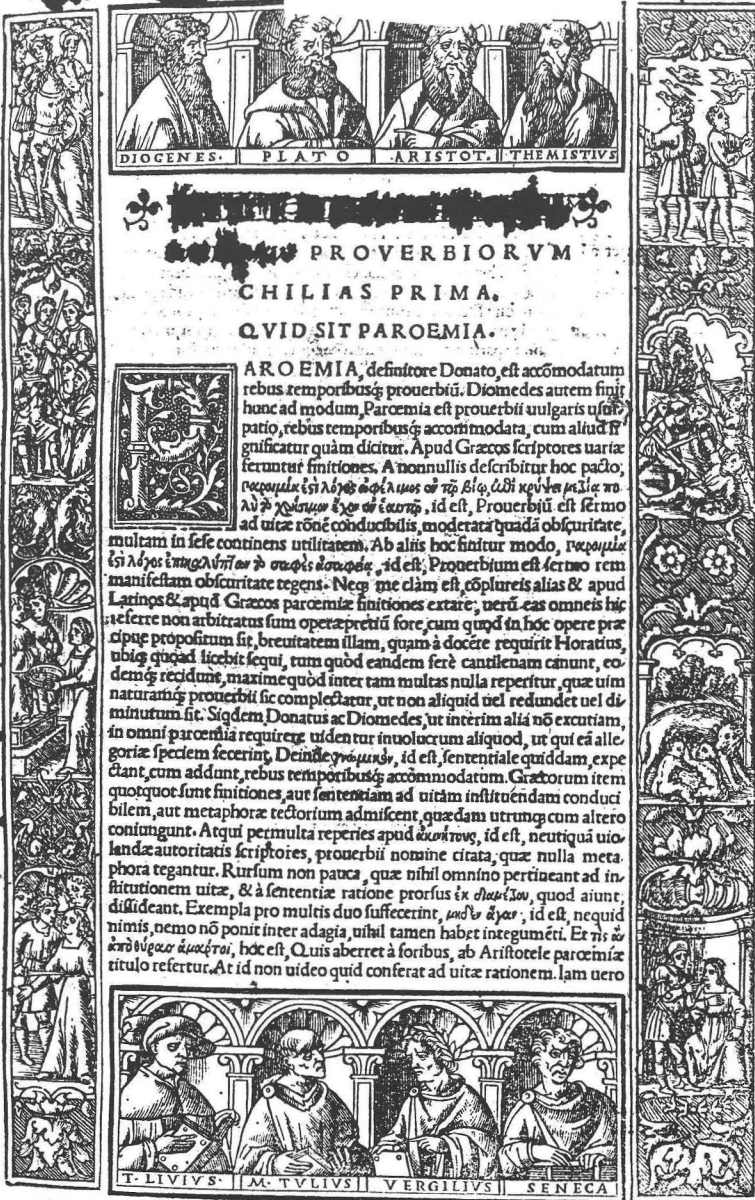


Fig. 6. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. 16 113: Censored first page of the *Adagia* (Venice, Victor a Rabanis et socii, 1537).

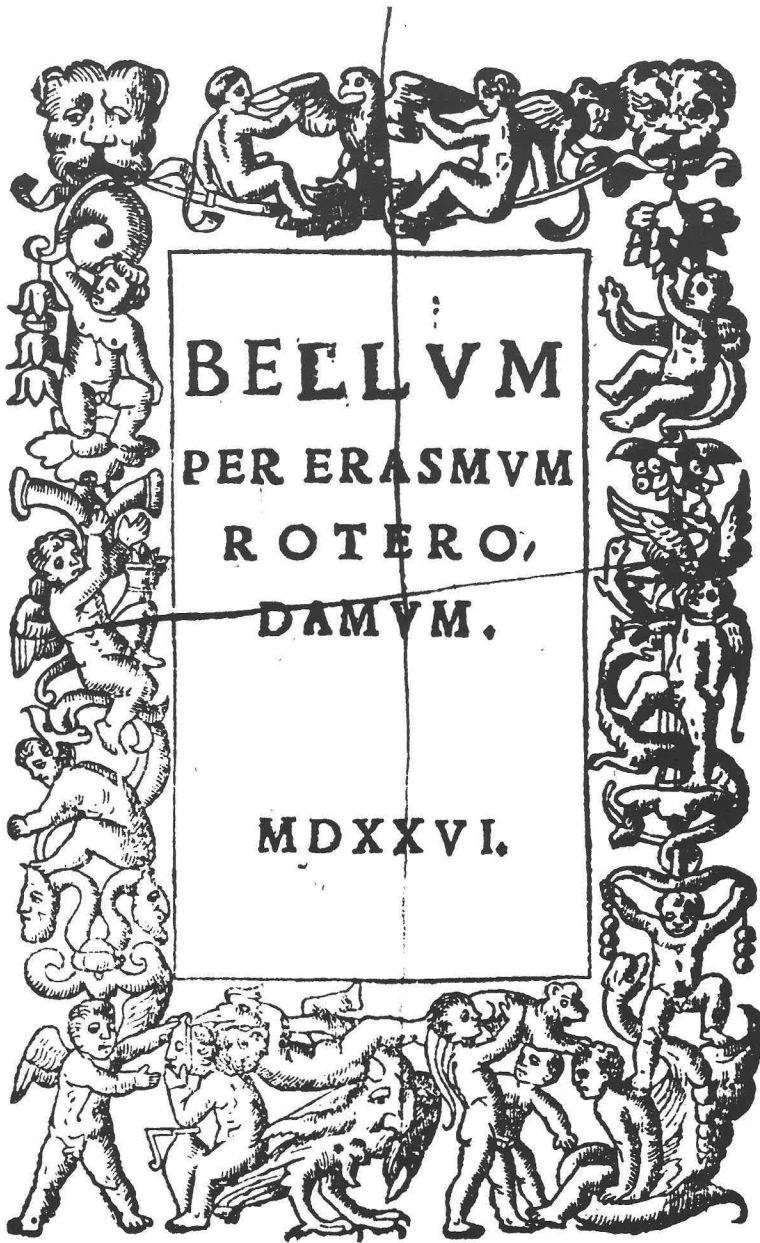


Fig. 7. Padua, Biblioteca Civica, F 3331, int. 5: example of ritual censorship, title of the publication unknown (Venice, Gregorius de Gregoriis, sumptibus Laurentii Lorii, 1526).

ERASMI
ROTERODAMI
PARABOLARVM,
SIVE SIMILIVM
LIBER.



Fig. 8. Padua, Biblioteca Civica, F 3331, int. 3: example of ritual censorship, *Parabolae sive similia* (Venice, Gregorius de Gregoriis, sumptibus Laurentii Lorii, 1526).