

Fall 2011

Review of Erasmus, *Controversies: Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 78, trans. Peter Matheson, Peter McCardle, Garth Tissol, and James Tracy.

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Recommended Citation

Regier, Willis Goth (2011). Review of "Review of Erasmus, *Controversies: Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 78, trans. Peter Matheson, Peter McCardle, Garth Tissol, and James Tracy," *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*: Vol. 9 : No. 2
Available at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrcl/vol9/iss2/5>

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Erasmus, *Controversies: Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 78, trans. Peter Matheson, Peter McCardle, Garth Tissol, and James Tracy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 498 pp. (+ xxii) ISBN 9780802098665.*

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Erasmus reached the peak of his fame in 1516 by publishing his *Novem Instrumentum*, a new Latin translation of the New Testament. To do his work well he compared Latin manuscripts to Greek ones, noted how the New Testament had been quoted by early Church fathers, studied Jerome's translations, and then translated anew, removing errors and blurs from the Vulgate. He believed he had done an overdue service to scholarship, to God, to clergy, and to Christians everywhere. He expected thanks and got plenty but was soon attacked for meddling with scripture. Against his own advice, he took part in a series of public controversies with men he called "barking dogs." They hounded him to his grave.

The present volume is the seventh of what will be a set of fourteen volumes of *Controversies in the Collected Works of Erasmus* (hereafter *CWE*). In them we can see how foes of the humanities huffed and puffed and how the humanities were defended when they emerged from the shadow of theology. They show how Erasmus, the champion of translation, pioneer of modern philology, and scholar of sacred texts, struggled and suffered for his glory. He wrote, "I think nothing more disastrous than to be involved somehow in controversy" (*CWE* 5.167) and then confirmed it. His controversies with Jacob Latomus and Martin Dorp (*CWE* 71), Edward Lee and Lefèvre d'Étaples (*CWE* 72 and 83) address large questions: whether detachment is a virtue, whether interpreters must know the original languages of their texts, how much difference of opinion can be tolerated, what constitutes authority, who may challenge it, and how to answer fools. For his last twenty years Erasmus spent much of his time disputing such matters. He thought his first controversies were melodramas, the later ones tragedies. As a body, they are a standing warning to any scholar on the brink of a fight. "How much better it would be to agree together, and pass our time in the garden of the Muses!" (*CWE* 7.81).

Controversies swarmed around Erasmus, stinging and biting. He was blamed for inciting rebellion against the Church and for being too loyal to it, for favoring paganism, for sycophancy, cowardice, and heresy. "Anything they do not like, anything they do not understand, is heresy. To know Greek is heresy; to speak like an educated man is heresy. Anything they do not do themselves is heresy" (*CWE* 7.115). To defend himself and the humanities, Erasmus published a hurried series of pamphlets, books, and public letters battling churchmen of Cologne, Louvain, Paris, Valladolid, Strasbourg, and Wittenberg. They thought he was impious, arrogant, and vain; he thought they were vain, ignorant, and mean. "In this whole business their weapons are clamour, audacity, subterfuge, misinterpretation, innuendo; if I had not seen it with my own eyes--felt it, rather--I would never have believed theologians could be such maniacs" (*CWE* 6.391).

The present volume includes annotated English translations of six texts:

·First and most important is the *Spongia* (1523), his rebuttal of the attacks of Ulrich von Hutten, once a beloved friend. Hutten accused Erasmus of betraying his principles and deserting the

cause of the Gospel. Erasmus, as usual, complimented himself on his restraint, asking readers to notice how he sponged off the muck flung at him without flinging it back.

·In the *Delectio Praestigium* (1526) Erasmus denies that he and Luther concurred in their teachings on the Eucharist. After his earlier disputes with Luther (CWE 76 and 77), Erasmus dreaded any affiliation with him.

·*The Epistola contra quosdam qui se falso iactant pseudevangelicos* (1529) breaks with Gerard Geldenhouwer, another former friend and confidante. It proceeds to attack the teachings, ethics, and sanity of Swiss and South German reformers, whose fuss and bother inflamed a learned dispute into a public calamity. "Now it is not safe to open one's mouth, even concerning things that can be said in all piety and truthfulness" (CWE 78.244).

·*The Responsio ad fratres Inferioris Germaniae ad epistolam apologeticam incerto autore proditam* (1530) answers Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg, and his "great, terrible, and poisonous lies" (CWE 78.321).

·*The Admonitio adversus mendacium et obstrectationem* (1530) denounces Heinrich Eppendorf for treachery and extortion.

·*The Purgatio adversus epistolam non sobriam Martini Lutheri* (1534) is Erasmus' parting shot at Luther.

Year by year, Erasmus' exasperation with the reformers rose as he watched the Christian world splinter and fight. "Nothing is easier than to sow discord, while it is a most difficult task to cure the evil once it has started" (CWE 78.32).

The volumes of *Controversies* so far published (CWE 71, 72, 76-78, 83, and 84) track Erasmus' lifelong touchiness and deepening gloom. His humor dimmed and his sorrows grew. Popes and bishops encouraged war. Christians killed Christians all across Europe. Books were burned and people too; dear friends were executed, or converted into raging enemies. Erasmus, the tireless scholar who dreamed of the coming of the kingdom of God, was horrified by belligerent priests, peasants' revolts, and the stubborn pugnacity of the Reformation.

By temper and training, Erasmus was primed for controversy. He cited lofty precedents: the controversies of Peter and Paul, of Origen and Cyprian, Rufinus and Jerome, and Jerome and Augustine (CWE 61.41-45; 72.339; 78.306-07). He argued for free will, for peace with the Turks, and for the freedom of priests to marry. Was he not reckless? Maybe dangerous? Was he a heretic? Why did it matter what Erasmus thought?

One thing for sure, controversies were blessings for printers. Erasmus' printers printed fast and printed thousands of copies. Soon after his polemics appeared they were pirated. Printers found it profitable to publish his opponents, too. "So many barbed pamphlets, full of bitterness and such grievous insults, fly about far and wide" (CWE 78.310).

In his last decade Erasmus complained that he wrote what he had to, not what he wanted to write. Except for new editions of the works that had made his name, he spent most of his time defending himself and counterattacking those who attacked him. He held his reputation "most dear" (CWE 10.226) and his name was worth appropriating. Books he'd known nothing about appeared with his name on the title pages (CWE 78.223, 299) or affixed by rumor (CWE 6.351, 370-71; 7.112), allying him with men and ideas for which he had no sympathy. "Any publication that is likely to cause trouble is laid at my door" (CWE 6.368). He felt that unless he quickly and publicly responded to their slanders and imputations, his reputation would be ruined. He was compelled to choose, to show his colors, and to throw his weight to one side or another.

Erasmus' fame attracted parasites and snipers. "They are wondrously aggrieved by my popularity and influence, although they make a sport of spitting on Erasmus" (CWE 78.361). Shameless enemies made hash of his words and high-minded men used his words against him: Edward Lee wherever he was (CWE 72), Alberto Pio in Italy (CWE 84), and the Germans Hutten, Jud, Bucer, and Luther in CWE 78. With practice, Erasmus perfected his polemics and his publishing tactics, relying on a network of printers to publish his responses speedily. Introductions to each of the *Controversies* report how quickly and widely controversies spread.

Erasmus replied to his critics point by point, professing that they "will never provoke me to act the callow calumniator and descend to such discourteous behaviour. . . . Have I ever proceeded against anyone, however insolent, with accusations? No one's wickedness will ever shift me from this honorable behaviour" (CWE 78.278). Yet the *Controversies* are replete with his accusations of hypocrisy, wickedness, cruelty, and sedition. Erasmus frequently labeled others' attacks as "shameless" [*impudens*], "silly" [*vano*], and "slandereous" [*calumnioso*], emphasized their severity as "downright lies" [*mera mendacia*] or dismissed them as "trifling" [*nugalis*]. He called them self-contradictory, illogical, unreasonable, and ungrammatical (CWE 78.195).

He accused his opponents of sins against quotation: misquoting by truncation and by butchering (CWE 78.173), pulling quotations out of context, forgetting and confusing sources, and putting words in his mouth (CWE 78.294). He complained of Leo Jud, "He has impudently mangled, overturned, and corrupted my words" (CWE 78.177). If someone accused Erasmus of cowardice or incomprehension, he replied in kind. "They see that these things can be thrown back at once into their faces" (CWE 78.306). In quotations and paraphrase he ventriloquizes: "Yet there are quite a few people who in their published works continually call them heretics, schismatics, enemies of the church, blasphemers. What can be read in my books of that kind?" (CWE 78.277). "Someone harsher than I might say" (CWE 78.354) says what he refrains to say.

Complying with the wishes of clergy and kings, Erasmus reluctantly rebutted Luther, at first trying to do so on the basis of scripture, tradition, and logic (CWE 76 and 77), eventually matching *ad hominem* with *ad hominem*, calling Luther "demented," "a man crazed by hatred," "raving," "absurd and deranged" (CWE 78.414, 432, 450, and 451), but pointedly refusing to call him a heretic. As evidence of Luther's lunacy, he chides Luther's habit of prating "about nothing except Satan, devils, spectres, Furies, and other tragic terms," language presaging "the onset of madness" (CWE 78.423).

Erasmus was a student of annotation, setting a high bar for the annotators of the *CWE*. The annotations for *CWE* 78 connect the book to Erasmus' letters and other writings. Introductions and notes provide ample context for understanding how each piece fits into the exchange of attacks and counterattacks. After Erasmus' translations, the translators took sensible liberties with his idioms, sentence length and structure, and paragraphing to make the English text vivid, clear, reliable, and inviting. I am grateful that the edition has headers that key each page to the Latin texts of the Leiden *Opera Omnia* (vol. 10, 1706) and the Amsterdam critical edition (vol. IX-1, 1982). The *Controversies* volumes of the *CWE* are limited to Erasmus' side of the issues, but notes and introductions do all they can to be fair to his opponents too, referring to editions where their views can be found and pointing out where Erasmus was hasty, careless, picayune, or overwrought.

As a scholarly enterprise, *CWE* 78 is an impressive achievement, at last giving English readers access to works previously reserved for Latinists. It is also a saddening reminder of a frenzied period, when people killed each other ruthlessly in the name of God. Erasmus wished to be out of the fray but could not; he believed engaging in the controversies exposed him to danger but if he did not take up his pen like a gladiator's sword, he would cede religion and literature to superstition and imposture (*CWE* 78.88, 205, and 311). In 1519 he wrote, "Posterity, I feel, will recognize, and will confess it owes me something for it, that in an unpromising age, and in a part of the world where liberal studies had been quite extinct and were resented, I have fought a long and unpopular fight against the most obstinate opponents of the humanities" (*CWE* 6.288).

The Erasmus of the *Controversies* is not the charming humanist or gentle pacifist admired in the twenty-first century. Here he is an unhappy old man, afraid for his life and seeking pity (*CWE* 78.133-34). By 1517 Thomas More thought that Erasmus had nearly grown sick of fame (*CWE* 5.18). In his *Controversies* he paid the price for it.