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Mansfield, Bruce. *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century: Interpretations c. 1920-2000*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. Pp. xiv + 324. CDN\$70.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8020-3767-4.

Reviewed by David J. Collins, Georgetown University

*Erasmus in the Twentieth Century* is the third and final installment of Bruce Mansfield's magisterial study of Erasmus interpretations that began appearing in 1979. This volume takes the reader, as the subtitle suggests, from 1920 through to the end of the last century and concludes with an essay on the *status questionis* at the cusp of a new millennium. All three volumes give evidence of the author's insightful familiarity with Erasmus and his interpreters, but Mansfield has saved the best for last. Achieving far more than a collection of book reviews, Mansfield analyzes hundreds of works about Erasmus and highlights the most important interpretive tendencies and conflicts through the course of the twentieth century. Moreover, inasmuch as the subjects of this volume are the scholars and interpretations that have shaped and shape our encounters with Erasmus today, many readers will have the thrill of recognizing themselves, their colleagues, their *doctorväter* and *grossväter* in these pages, and also the possible frustration of not finding them or judging what they find underappreciative or misinterpreting. In either case, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century* will not fail to be a stimulating read for both experts and neophytes in the world of Erasmusian scholarship.

Mansfield organizes his analysis in part by chronology, in part by theme. He identifies three chronological milestones as points of concentrated scholarly production and popular interest: the quarter- and sesqui-quatercentenaries of Erasmus's death (1936 and 1986) and the quincentenary of his birth (1967-1970). Inspired by pre-war anxieties about Europe's fate, the scholarship at the time of the first anniversary focused on Erasmus as a political thinker as never before. Mansfield points, in this regard, to the popular biography by Stefan Zweig<sup>[1]</sup> that portrayed Erasmus as an eloquent spokesman for peace and tolerance and the scholarly biography by Johan Huizinga in which Erasmus surfaced as an Enlightenment philosophe *avant la lettre*.<sup>[2]</sup> Mansfield then takes a three-step approach, drawn from Quentin Skinner, to the bulk of the scholarship on this issue, examining how Erasmus's interpreters imagined practical problems of their own day in terms set by Erasmus; how they treated Erasmus's political thought in historical context and understood it as essentially responsive; and how they considered Erasmus's ideas at the level of action to stimulate the political action of others in the past.

Mansfield links the second anniversary to two somewhat divergent events of the 1960s: the student rebellions and the Catholic church's Second Vatican Council. Mansfield describes in the context of the council how Catholic scholarship finally reconciled with the man whom many earlier church historians, even up to such looming post-war figures as Hubert Jedin and Joseph Lortz, had vilified. Now, liberal Catholics could find in Erasmus a patron saint. Mansfield's prose exudes his excitement at this process. Indeed Mansfield has favorites in this conflict, as in several others; and his critical eye, for example, seems more sharply cast on Jedin, Lortz, and Emile Telle, whose negative judgments on Erasmus's Christian orthodoxy so clearly disappoint him, than on those who, perhaps condescendingly, see the teachings of Vatican II finally catching up with Erasmus. Still, to suggest aloud that Erasmus had not "encountered the Master," as the church historian Lortz notoriously did, can surely not be that much less professional than to be convinced that he had. Mansfield regains his balance in his painstaking explanation of how the rediscovery of and debate over Erasmus's Catholic orthodoxy is significant beyond narrow sectarian circles. In fact, the most compelling parts of Mansfield's book show how Erasmus's reappropriation as a religious thinker came to dominate in the twentieth-century scholarship precisely because of the sophisticated approaches taken by scholars in multiple disciplines. Three carefully analyzed authors represent the complex ways in which religious questions dominated the twentieth-century interpretations of Erasmus in Mansfield's book: The first is Marcel Bataillon, who argued in 1937 for the recovery of a theological Erasmus, otherwise lost in the ideological battles of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and nineteenth-century Liberalism, but whose thought belonged at the heart of an early sixteenth-century so-called *Préréforme*.<sup>[3]</sup> The second is Jacques Chomarat, whose *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme* challenged the by that point well-developed exuberance for Erasmus the theologian by drawing attention to Erasmus's concern for style and rhetoric over theological content.<sup>[4]</sup> The third is Silvana Seidel Menchi, whose *Erasmus in Italia* drew on such sources as Inquisitorial records to show how sixteenth-century readers had understood Erasmus and how early modern Italy had thus become closed to Erasmusian ideas of religious and cultural reform.<sup>[5]</sup> Mansfield's reflections on these three seminal works stand on their own as important reading for current researchers.

In addition to the aforementioned authors, Mansfield provides helpful analyses of Cornelis Augustijn, Charles Béné, Peter Bietenholz, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, Georges Chantraine, André Godin, Walter M. Gordon, L.E. Halkin, Manfred Hoffmann, Albert Hyma, Lisa Jardine, Jean-Claude Margolin, James Kelsey McConica, John W. O'Malley, John B. Payne, Margaret Mann Phillips, Augustin Renaudet, Richard Schoeck, M. A. Screech, and James D. Tracy, and many others. Given the formidable task that Mansfield has taken in this book of modest length (230 pages of text, 47 pages of notes, and 26 pages of helpful bibliography), what is astonishing is how much material Mansfield succeeds in covering. Still, every reader will surely discover some oversight or perceive some misapprehension. This reviewer, for example, wishes that Erika Rummel and Irena Backus had received Mansfield's more thoroughgoing consideration. Rummel's analysis of humanists in the theological and confessionalized contexts and Backus's of humanists' and reformers' exegetical positions and appropriation of the church fathers contribute substantively to the religious reinterpretation of Erasmus that is otherwise so central to Mansfield's book. Rummel's and Backus's works have enriched our appreciation of Erasmus in various intellectual contexts and helped us understand Erasmus's genius in a broader intellectual and humanistic context. Both made substantial contributions in the last century and are still hard at work. Rummel receives passing mention; Backus, none at all.

These are random quibbles, however, in the face of a book of such accomplishment. At the end of the next epoch of Erasmus scholarship, the future author of a successor volume will face the very high standard that Mansfield has set in *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century*.

## Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Erasmus*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Viking Press, 1959).

<sup>[2]</sup> John Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, translated by F. Hopman (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001).

<sup>[3]</sup> Marcel Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne* (Paris: Droz, 1937).

<sup>[4]</sup> Jacques Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981).

<sup>[5]</sup> Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987). Mansfield cites the German edition, *Erasmus als Ketzer: Reformation und Inquisition im Italien des 16. Jahrhunderts*, translated by Ulrich Hartman (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

