

Christoph Galle. *Hodie nullus — cras maximus: Berühmtwerden und Berühmtsein im frühen 16. Jahrhundert am Beispiel des Erasmus von Rotterdam.*

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Erasmus applied the adage *Hodie nullus, cras maximus* (4.1.88) to the situation in which “great renown befalls someone suddenly and contrary to expectations.” As the title of his book suggests, Christoph Galle investigates how Erasmus became and remained famous. The quotation of the adage in the title is ironic, however, and, curiously, Galle does not comment on the conspicuous irony. He does not believe

that Erasmus became a sensation overnight but that his becoming famous was the product of “a process that lasted years” (101).

Galle positions himself in opposition to scholars who believe that Erasmus achieved fame as a result of one bestseller, e.g., *The Praise of Folly*, or a succession of publications that established his reputation. He insists that we must turn to Erasmus’s biography as revealed by and large in his correspondence to track his rising star. While, as Galle believes, the correspondence constitutes an indispensable source for charting Erasmus’s rise to renown, the reception of Erasmus becomes the essential metric for determining fame. To be famous means to be well known: despite the slight difference between the words in German, *Berühmtheit* and *Bekanntheit* may be taken as synonyms.

For Galle, Erasmus’s fame depends on a differentiated recognition afforded by three partial public spheres, or *Teilöffentlichkeiten*: humanists adept in Latin, readers proficient only in the vernacular, and the illiterate. Since Galle has little to say about the third group’s reception of Erasmus, one wonders why he mentions the illiterate at all. He pays attention mostly to the first group through the volumes of correspondence edited by P. S. Allen. The terminus a quo, 1495, makes sense. A university student in Paris, Erasmus accepted the invitation to write the postface of Robert Gaguin’s *Compendium de origine et gestis Francorum*. His letter to Gaguin was his first publication. Galle does not explain his choice of 1530 as the terminus ad quem. Erasmus continued to write and receive letters until 1536, the year of his death.

Galle engages the second group through German translations of Erasmus’s works. These were mostly theological in nature and reached their zenith in several editions in the early 1520s, as what Erasmus called the Lutheran tragedy unfolded. The translations demonstrate that “in these years the transformation from becoming famous to being famous had taken place” (207). Galle rejects the argument that Erasmus’s works were translated not for their own sake or for the sake of his fame, but because they resonated with the “theological problems of the Reformation.” This argument must yield to the notion that “the consideration of Erasmian ideas and texts speaks directly for his authoritative significance” (208). Later, Galle contradicts his position, flatly siding with the argument he had initially rejected. He writes: “Thus we must again emphasize: Erasmus was not appropriated (*rezipiert*) in the vernacular for his own sake, but those people who had a share in the translations — the philologists, printers, or publishers — pursued various interests, which could range from mere financial profit to the instrumentalization of Erasmus and support for their own opinions.” “Contemporary problems” determined the interest in his translated texts (333).

Galle’s book is a tedious performance. A dense underbrush of footnotes — some of them unnecessary, many of them too long — frequently competes for space with the principal presentation in the *mise en page*. The historical background — “conditions for a literary career in the sixteenth century” — is needlessly elaborate (38–155). Abbreviated, the quantitative analysis of Erasmus’s correspondence and editions of his publications (155–227) might work better as a journal article. The qualitative survey of Erasmus’s life (228–365) is exasperatingly chronological. A

thematic approach could have presented Erasmus's rise to fame in a more concise and interesting way.

Has Galle missed the forest for the trees? In his meticulous exposition of the humanists' recognition of Erasmus, one explanation for Erasmus's fame, established firmly enough in scholarship at least since Lisa Jardine's *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (1993), has eluded him. Erasmus was the most energetic and cleverest promoter of his exalted, erudite stature within the Renaissance republic of letters.

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