



## Backwards into the Light

*Cultural Modernity and the Renaissance*<sup>1</sup>

Michael R.G. Spiller

HCM 1 (2): 161–186

DOI: 10.5117/HCM2013.2.SPIL

### Abstract

This article looks at the textual practices of humanist and Reformation writers who were concerned to modernise their textual legacies from classical and Biblical antiquity. By a process which I have called “textual proclamation” these writers were able to distinguish past from future and at the same time establish continuity. The problems faced by Reformation writers working with Biblical texts regarded as eternal are briefly discussed. It is argued that this was a process of modernisation which had to respect the continuity of authority, and that thus their *modernitas* differs from our own modernity, though linked culturally to it.

**Keywords:** humanism, self-definition, reading practices, Reformation printing

### Preliminary: Habermas’ Definition of Modernity

When Jürgen Habermas was awarded the Adorno Prize by the City of Frankfurt in 1980, his acceptance speech was subsequently published as a now celebrated paper, entitled (in its English translation) “Modernity, an Unfinished Project”. In this speech he alluded, necessarily briefly, to the history of the word “modern” and illuminatingly suggested that by distinguishing itself from the other, modernity was and had always been secretly connected to the classical, “referring”, as he said, “back to the past of classical antiquity precisely in order to comprehend itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.” And he added that that was true for the Renaissance, with which the modern age begins “for us”.<sup>2</sup> He could

not, however, take time in his acceptance speech to distinguish stages of classical antiquity, nor to identify the various responses to that antiquity of those considering themselves modern.

Habermas himself went on, as his Frankfurt lectures show,<sup>3</sup> to discuss the problems of the concept of modernity post-Hegel, with special reference to what was then new French poststructuralism. My own concern in this paper lies in the opposite chronological direction, with that Renaissance which Habermas identified as the beginning of the modern age “for us”. Remembering that Habermas was constrained by the occasion, we might distinguish here two overlapping uses of modernity and its cognate terms, both still in play in today’s debate.

First, “modernity” is often used as an “epochal concept”.<sup>4</sup> Anyone may identify a particular period – his own or another’s – as “modern”, and see modernity as starting at its outset – so James Simpson sees Luther’s – “Here I stand” speech in 1521 as a moment when “modernity of a powerful kind is born.”<sup>5</sup> This carries no necessary implication that the persons involved at the time so singled out were themselves aware of being “modern”. But second, there is Habermas’ definition of modernity as a kind of awareness of time that prompts a self-definition of transitiveness, a moving on to a future, and he assigned that awareness to the Renaissance.

It is fair to say, and this paper will argue, that the literate culture of the Renaissance had a sophisticated awareness of time, often imaged in the fortunes of empires as they were recorded, and its members were able to differentiate themselves as Habermas suggests, from an admired past which they had to assimilate and pass on into their future: it is this sense of futurity, not always displayed as one might expect, that occupies us here.

I cannot in these preliminary remarks avoid the question, “When was the Renaissance?”. To avoid doubling the length of this paper, I use the term in the sense employed by Burckhardt and subsequently refined by other scholars such as Greene<sup>6</sup> – a sufficient number of cultural changes appear, mainly in Italy, in the fourteenth century to justify saying that a renaissance in arts literature and politics is occurring, and that this develops and spreads throughout Europe in the fifteenth. In looking for signs of modernity in Habermas’s sense, I can only sample, but it seems sensible first to look at two early uses of the word *modernitas*, by Cassiodorus (fifth CE), alluded to by Habermas, and Walter Map (twelfth CE) before moving forward into what I will now simply call the Renaissance.

In reviewing the contribution of Habermas and others to the current debate on modernity, Mike Featherstone referred back to Habermas’ mention of the appearance of the word “modern” in the late fifth century, and

remarked that “Here the emphasis is on the consciousness of a new time, a break with the past, the start of a new epoch.”<sup>7</sup> But when Cassiodorus, writing at the end of the fifth century CE, and introducing the word “modern” to circulation, drafts a letter from his master Theodoric to a rich aristocrat, Symmachus, praising him as “antiquorum diligentissimus imitator, modernorum nobilissimus institutor” – “a most assiduous imitator of the works of the past, and a most distinguished founder of modern ones”,<sup>8</sup> it is in the context of supplying funding for the restoration of a Roman theatre, and it is continuity, not rupture, that he asserts.

Due allowance made for the secretarial tact that allows Theodoric to appear neither disrespectful of the Roman imperial past nor enslaved to it for the future, this neat antithesis locates a classical past, establishes a relation to it, and moves forward from it to a future in which – as the word “institutor” promises, the imperium will continue. Cassiodorus is not, of course, a Renaissance figure, but as this paper will argue, the characteristic Renaissance mode of self-definition involves reaching back into the past to re-present it to the future – not to break with it, but to act as its inheritors, perhaps inferior to their parents but nevertheless determined to use their legacy wisely in an envisaged better future. Featherstone rightly points out that those who modernise “address their present value concerns to reconstruct the lens through which they illuminate the past”,<sup>9</sup> but if the notion that Virgil in his Fourth Eclogue was empowered by God to prophesy the birth of Christ seems somewhat naïve to us, nevertheless it comes from a contemporary determination, not to break with Virgil, but to absorb him into the new order, so that, for example, Virgil – with his awareness appropriately brought up to date – becomes Dante’s first guide in his Christian pilgrimage, a text and a presence that is left behind only with huge reluctance for a Christian eternity at *Purgatorio* 30.49-57.

Breaks and ruptures there are indeed during the Renaissance, but only rarely do these appear to their makers or agents to be a repudiation of the past, either in fact or in intention. So, for example, when Martin Luther on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenberg’s castle chapel, we, using our own lenses on the past, see this as the beginning of modern Protestantism; Luther actually thought he was attacking modern Church practices and thereby advocating a return to the purity of the Church of the past.<sup>10</sup>

## Conceptualising the Modern: Cassiodorus, Walter Map, Petrarch

It is always very pleasing to the cultural historian when a person embedded in a culture notices, or thinks he/she notices, a transformation of that culture, and Cassiodorus, quite conscious of what he was doing, provides us with one such. He certainly did not conceptualise “modernity” as an aspirational condition, but he recognised a distinction between modern and classical ideas (and their embodiment in the buildings of imperial rule). The word “institutor” has in it an element of looking to the future, as any administrator must who hopes genuinely to preserve a stable present, and it directs us to one of the overarching ideas of the Renaissance, the continuity of the Roman imperium. However shadowy and ineffectual the death of Constantine XIII Palaeologus at the fall of Constantinople in 1453, it is in itself a testimony to the longevity of the idea of the Roman imperium that the name of Constantine should have been perpetuated for so long, and in looking for signs of Habermasian modernity in the Renaissance we shall find Francis Petrarch, a century before the fall of Constantinople, grappling with the vision of the changing Roman imperium in the Europe of his own day, and finding that mere longevity has perhaps turned into decay.<sup>11</sup>

But before Petrarch, at the end of the twelfth century, we find the introduction of the word *modernitas* by Walter Map (c.1140-1209), who if he did not invent it certainly took it upon himself to define it, not yet as a process, but as a period of time.

I call our present times “this modern period”: that is the hundred years just passing away, of which at the moment the last portions remain [...]. The hundred years which have gone I call our modern period, and not those which are coming, because though they are the same as regards distance from us, past things belong to narratives, future things to prophecy.<sup>12</sup>

Though Map is using *modernitas*, “this modern period”, for a discrete period of time (he related it to what three generations could recall and pass on) he did, somewhat satirically, attach a valuation to this. After his death, he said with heavy irony, the passage of time would confer immense authority on him, because “tunc et nunc vetustum cuprum preferetur auro novello” – “then as now old copper is preferred to new gold.” And he added a suggestive epigram that ought to be better known than it is: “Omnibus saeculis sua displicuit modernitas” – “Everybody in their lifetime has been dissatisfied with their own modern period.”

Map does not explain what one might call Map's Law of Modernity, but he does two things that Cassiodorus did not: he identifies one's sense of presentness with dissatisfaction, and he transvalues the Golden Age to which, he says, we turn back in our unwisdom, and calls it an age of old copper against the new gold of the present. He does not explain what this "new gold" is, but he does accuse his contemporaries of lacking the patience to wait for the benefits that will come. The notion that one's *modernitas* is a state in which one can if one chooses wisely access a better future is showing here.

Francis Petrarch (1304-1374), whom cultural historians and others often turn to as an exemplar because the combination in his voluminous writings of high intelligence and self-awareness, being at the distance of almost a millennium from Cassiodorus, and nearly two hundred years from Walter Map, periodised the past, and thus imaged his own aspirations, rather differently. Though like Cassiodorus he cultivated princes, bombarded them with correspondence and undertook occasional diplomatic missions, he never governed for them, and it was the spread of knowledge and learning, rather than governance, that he wished to modernise (though he would not have recognised the verb). In obedience to Map's Law, he was very dissatisfied with his own age,<sup>13</sup> but rejected Map's view of the classical past as "old copper". Like all who knew of the classical past, Christian or pagan, he admired Virgil (whose transformation into a mediaeval mage and prophet is itself a study relevant to this paper) and: in the closing pages of his own attempt to follow Virgil, the long Latin poem on Scipio from the 1340's entitled *Africa*, he spoke to his own poem, and in voicing his hope for his text, positioned it in time, in a characteristic humanist manoeuvre which (with due acknowledgement of Thomas Greene's brilliant phrase "a new archaeological hermeneutic"<sup>14</sup>) I may call "textual proclamation":

But for you (i.e. his poem), if as I wish and hope you will long survive after me, there are better times ahead. This sleep of forgetfulness will not last for ever. Perhaps when the darkness is dispelled, our children's children will be able to return in triumph to the pure radiance of the golden age. Then you will see Helicon reinvigorated with a new stock, and the sacred laurels grow green; then great minds and spirits prompt to learn will arise again, in whom eagerness for the study of the arts will redouble former devotion.<sup>15</sup>

If as Habermas and others have suggested the problem of defining modernity is a post-Enlightenment one,<sup>16</sup> then Petrarch could not conceptualise "modernity", but he could certainly desire cultural change, something that

involves an element of self-differentiation, and he does that by imitating a text (or texts) from a distant past in his own writing, and then announcing his own text – with whatever gestures of modesty are appropriate – as a witness to a future which he hopes (this is not prophecy, so much as intense longing) will come. Allowance made for poetic exaggeration, Petrarch identifies his own time as darkness (*tenebris*), oblivious of what it ought to have known (*Lethaeus*) but capable of waking up (*sopor* rather than *mors*). The future will be radiant and glorious (*iubar* denotes the effulgence of a heavenly body or deity, and *remeare* has triumphalist overtones). *Saecula* may mean “centuries” or “lifetimes”, but the word *nepotes* (“grandchildren”) shows that Petrarch envisages the transformation within lifetimes rather than millennia. Like Map, Petrarch is dissatisfied with the present age, a topic which he enlarged on in one of the political poems inserted in his *Rime*, the canzone “Spirto gentil”; but unlike Map he is clearly envisaging a recovery of learning: what was valued in the past will be twice as much valued in the future in a new establishment of seats of learning (Helicon is the *place* of Apollo and the Muses) which will embrace and promote all the arts (*Pyridum* embraces all the Nine Muses). Modesty forbids him to say that his own text (the Africa) is now a sample of the glory of the future, but his hope that it will survive into that future points to his consciousness of his own merits.

To call this proclamation of Petrarch’s a break with the past would be wrong, but it is a kind of self-definition against the past, a proclamation, a “forward shout” of one’s textual and (for a humanist) intertextual identity. As a modernist wake-up call, this might have come from any Futurist café pamphlet of the early twentieth century – were it not for the single word *remeare*, “to return in triumph”. The repudiation of the present, the envisaging of a bright future, the promise of liberation and happiness for one’s children, all these mark in our own day the modernist (but not the post-modernist) consciousness; but the future, for Petrarch, is accessed by returning to a past buried in our present sleep. The light shines ahead from behind, if we can awake to see it.

This intellectual manoeuvre complicates, in a fashion perhaps unique to the European Renaissance, Habermas’s working definition of modernity as a condition that “[...] repeatedly articulates the consciousness of an era that refers back to the past of classical antiquity precisely in order to comprehend itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.”<sup>17</sup> For Petrarch, envisaging a Renaissance that he himself did much to forward, there were two “olds” in play, the centuries of sleep following the breakup of the Roman empire, and the glorious flourishing of the empire itself. He defines the

hoped for success of his epic poem *Africa* in terms of awakening to the light, where before there had been darkness and forgetfulness. There were two “past(s) of classical antiquity”, the more recent of which had to be overleapt to reclaim from the earlier that which would secure the future. Though Petrarch’s immortality and lasting influence have since been secured much more by his vernacular poetry than by his Latin verse, it was in him a reasonable hope that by writing a classical epic (which, eventually, he did not finish) he might establish in his grandchildren (the unit of time that Map called a *saeculum*) a set of values and beliefs that had, he thought, informed the greatest empire of antiquity, or at least some of its greatest figures, such as Scipio Africanus.

Petrarch’s grasp of practical politics, as shown for example by his support for the hopeless republican idealism of Cola di Rienzo, may have been shaky, but in true Renaissance humanist fashion he attempts to secure the future by textual proclamation. Here it is relevant to recall that Petrarch had an unusually strong perception of the ontology of self. He had himself quite literally uncovered lost evidence of the personality of Cicero – his *Pro Archia* in a manuscript he found at Liege in 1333, and his *Letters to Atticus* at Verona in 1345 – and his sense that *antiquitas* could communicate with the present on a level of personal intimacy that would inform moral behaviour becomes one of the *topoi* of the Renaissance, and bridges a gap between paganism and Christianity for Petrarch himself and later writers.

## A Development of the Idea of Modernity

Perhaps at this point we can identify a development of a notion of modernity in Habermas’s terms. Cassiodorus sees two ages, the imperial past and the governing present, both valuable and each with its distinctive useful practices, but it is the continuity of the imperium (which is why money is spent restoring a Roman theatre) that he insists on. Map (in satirical mood, let it be remembered) sees the present (defined as the hundred years immediately past) as a state of dissatisfaction, the past as delusive grandeur (“old copper”) and the future as having potential benefits which the dissatisfied and backward-looking moderns are too unintelligent to wait for. (“Simiarum tempus erit [...]” – “[...] it will be an age of monkeys, who have no patience to wait for what is good for them.”<sup>18</sup>) Petrarch sees the golden age of the past as sovereign, as having been forgotten by the present, but capable of being recovered through its textual legacy by an awakened and alert generation to serve as the foundation of a new age of prosperity. Like

Map he rejects the present, but sees it as sleep, unawareness, rather than disabling lack of intelligence.

All this, of course, takes its form in Latin, the language that simultaneously unites the educated elite of Europe and carries the presence of the Roman (and Greek) past on into their intellectual lives. But as we move on to what is often regarded as the second humanist renaissance, in the sixteenth century, we find this cultural continuity modified by two related things – nationalism and the vernacular. Petrarch wrote what we regard as his greatest work, his *Rime*, in his vernacular Italian, but affected to regard the poems as “trifles” (*nugellae*) and “bits and pieces” (*fragmenta*). When in his turn he was summoned from the past, by the poet and cleric Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) to serve as a master of style for the poets of the new Italian courts, it was for his Italian rhetoric that he was valued.<sup>19</sup> In selecting Boccaccio for prose style and Petrarch for verse, Bembo diffused the idea of a national style (in a descended version of fourteenth-century Tuscan) among the nascent courts of Italy, who were not otherwise unified by dialect or local cultures.

## Emerging Ideas of Self-Definition

After the century or so of quite appalling political, religious and military turbulence in Europe and the near East that followed Petrarch's death, kings and princes still seem confused as to where they should be: kings of France war in Italy, kings of England lay claim to France, the Holy Roman Emperor sacks the city of Rome in a manner neither holy nor Roman, disputing with the Papacy and with other European monarchs over frontiers and obligations, all these at the same time fighting family or dynastic wars within their own realms – if the term “realm” can even be clearly defined. Yet there is, in the early sixteenth century, a process of definition of national boundaries, with all the textual proclamations of these that accompanied the emergence of powerful national courts. Claude de Seyssel (1450-1520) saw the principle of modern cultural nationality (my words, not his) ahead of its gradual enactment over Europe in the sixteenth century:

All nations of sensible people prefer to be ruled by people of their own area and nation, who know their habits, laws and customs, and have the same language and lifestyle, rather than by strangers.<sup>20</sup>

Here we have something approaching the modern concept of indigenous cultures, based on locality (the word for area is “*leurs pays*” – a word for which there is still no exact English equivalent, though as a Scot I am happy to offer “native heath”) and way of life, things which the Latin humanist was almost conditioned by his studies to disregard. It takes de Seyssel five words – *m[o]eurs*, *loi[s]*, *coutumes*, *langage* and *maniere de vivre* – “habits, laws, customs, language and lifestyle” – to define what we would subsume under the single term “culture”, but the thinking is recognisably adumbrating that concept. While this is not of itself “modern”, it does suggest that identity and self-definition come from a set of characteristics of a social group defined by area.

In considering the cultural assessments made by the French poet Joachim du Bellay (1523-1560), we have a writer of great ability who grew up under the rule of a king who understood very well the value of what Leonard Tennenhouse calls “power on display”<sup>21</sup>; the humanist text could be as powerful a manifestation of rule as jewels or a code of justice, and Francis I (ruled 1515-1547), with his remarkable sister Marguerite de Navarre, patronised humanist scholars, clerics, poets, printers, artists, librarians and others during a long reign that if not uniformly peaceful nor economically prosperous firmly established the Court as central to civilised development. Petrarch had been unable to fix himself in such a centre, though he could wish for it: barely two centuries after his death there would be in almost every major European nation both a sense of nationhood and a physical centre where that sense was proclaimed and displayed. This sits very uneasily with the continuance of the Roman imperium (kings can co-exist with other kings, but find emperors difficult) and it is relevant here to note that Petrarch’s confidence in the capacity of classical texts to inspire and guide the future was combined with a lack of trust in the permanence of classical models of government. In his *Africa*, the elder Scipio foretells the future of Rome with a thoroughly equivocal image: Rome will survive

As strength and spirit gradually leave an aged lion, but there remains as it was his majestic appearance and terrifying roar, though he is slow in everything, a mere shadow, yet the whole jungle around him obeys his now harmless old age. But who can define the limitations of this, or set bounds to such greatness? Shall I go on? Your Rome, in ruins though she may be will live to the end of days, and in the very last age will come to her end along with her world.<sup>22</sup>

Petrarch and his fellow humanists did not suppose that Rome would last for ever (“peritura [...] sub extremum aevum”), but they did see the voices of the past (in both Latin and Greek) as speaking through them and through their imitations of the classical texts to the future. *Antiquitas* remains part of *modernitas* – and even as I write this paragraph, I read that the Mayor of London at the time of the 2012 Olympic Games has commissioned an ode in Pindaric Greek for recitation at the opening ceremony.<sup>23</sup>

Du Bellay, though he died young, lived to see the end of the “aged lion”, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who in 1556 gave up his crowns, and died in a monastery in 1558. Francis I of France, Charles’s rival in Europe, had died in 1547, and it was his able successor, Henri II, who occasioned du Bellay’s visit to the real city of Rome in the retinue of a diplomatic mission (April 1553- August 1557). Tourism has always had a problematic relation with modernity, and du Bellay was no exception. He found Rome a difficult city to live in – it took him three years to learn to be streetwise, he said – but he was profoundly impressed, as much by its ruins as by its texts. Near the beginning of his stay in Rome he composed an enthusiastic description of the city written almost as a tourist guide to its famous sites, and ended his *Romae Descriptio* with his own French humanist textual proclamation of the role of the voices of the past in the future:

[Rome], which had drained the whole world, has been the treasure trove of the world, and the riches that were the city’s are now the world’s. Learn from this what trust to place in things mortal, here in so short a reign of so great an empire. Mighty Rome has fallen: but everywhere great Virgil lives on, and the strains of Latin poetry live too. Ovid’s poems live, and the love poetry of Tibullus, and the lyrics of you, learned Catullus. Our greetings to your remains, our greetings, revered poets, whom famous Rome counts as its own, May I, a Frenchman, have the opportunity to let your wellsprings flow, profiting as I do from the freer inspiration of Heaven, composing poems in our so far unrecognised literature, and making them heard in strains not yet accepted.<sup>24</sup>

In his not always consistent textual proclamation, du Bellay has done several things that allow us to claim this as a moment of cultural modernity as Habermas suggests it, comprehending himself as the result (or perhaps one of the instigators) of a transition from the old to the new. He has – writing here in Latin – relaxed the grip of Latin, and he has relaxed also the dominance of epic and philosophical literature: while acknowledging Virgil, he chooses for imitation the lyric and storytelling poets Ovid, Tibullus, and

Catullus (whom very oddly he called “learned” like Virgil). He then says that conditions have changed, and defines himself as living in conditions more liberating (if “caeli genio liberiore” is anything more than polite flattery of his King’s toleration), where he can raise French vernacular literature to a national level.

What du Bellay – and the poets of the Pleiade, with whom he is associated, knew, was that court life used extensively songs, dances, ballads and verse of humble origins in the vernacular (or vernaculars, since Provençal was widely used). He proposed, as he had said in his *Deffence et Illustration de la Lange Francoyse* (1549) to dignify the vernacular by using as models the Latin writers of odes, elegiacs and lyric verses. He was no folksong archivist: he dismissed the forms of popular verse as “sweetshop rubbish” (*epiceries*),<sup>25</sup> but aimed at producing a national poetry in French in dignified, mainly lyric, forms inherited from Rome and Italy.

In pursuing this goal, he wrote the first amatory sonnet sequence in French, *L’Olive* (115 sonnets, 1550), and then after his *Romae Descriptio*, probably but not certainly during his stay in Rome, a sequence of thirty-two sonnets called *Les Antiquitez de Rom*, to which was joined a set of fifteen sonnets called “Un Songe ou Vision sur le mesme subject”, the whole published in 1558 after his return to France. *Les Antiquitez* is an astonishing work: although du Bellay uses the title word in its now modern sense of “objects from antiquity”, and though he had access by staying in Rome itself and reading the tourist handbooks to a detailed knowledge of the sites and buildings, none of the sonnets actually “looks at” any one object, ruined or not. Instead the whole sequence forms a sustained meditation, from varying angles, on the passage of time over the city of Rome. He could have obtained hints of this from the Roman authors he mentions in the quotation above, and there was an extensive later literature on the poetry of ruins.<sup>26</sup>

But nothing like this lyrical elegiac collection had appeared before, and certainly not in French. One of the strangest, whose poetic status we shall consider in a moment, is the fifteenth sonnet:

You pallid spirits, you of shades and dust,  
 Who once enjoyed the clarity of light,  
 And made this haughty building rise upright,  
 Which now we see in fragments and in rust,  
 Say, spirits (may the Stygian banks, though made  
 To let no one return from that dark land,  
 But keep them in a three times triple band,  
 Yet fail to hold the image of a shade),

Say then to me (for of your ghostly race  
 One may yet lie concealed beneath this place),  
 Do you not feel it much increase your pain  
 When from some slope above these Roman lands  
 You gaze upon the labours of your hands  
 Now nothing more than dust upon the plain?<sup>27</sup>

Converse with the spirits of the dead was a familiar classical topos, but nearly always to obtain forgiveness or information about the future, as in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI. Here Du Bellay, possibly imitating Petrarch's similar appeal to the dead in *Rime* 161, creates a triple incantation to raise the dead (the number nine is at the dead centre, as one might say, of the sonnet) solely in order to ask if the spirits suffer more by being aware of the flux of time. The effect is not unlike that of Shelley's *Ozymandias* sonnet; but before we hail du Bellay as a nineteenth-century romantic *avant la lettre*<sup>28</sup> it is opportune to note what he proposed to do with the sequence to which this slightly uncanny sonnet belongs. Because the sonnet is a short poem and discrete from its fellows in a sequence, it is possible to deploy varied and even contradictory attitudes without formal complication: so the immensity of the ruins is often insisted on, which lauds the prowess of the ancients and gives a model to imitate; then also the erasure of everything by time makes all human endeavour transitory and even futile. Du Bellay's balancing of these themes as he gifts the sequence to his king, Henri II, shows a complicated awareness of how his poetry fits into the new Court's world:

#### To the King

Since I cannot give you these antiquities for your Saint-Germain or Fontainebleau, I give them, Sire, in this little depiction, painted, as best I could, in poetic colours. This, published under your protection for the general public, if you are gracious enough to look at it in its most favourable light, will carry the boast that it has rescued from the grave the dusty relics of the ancient Romans.

May the Gods give you one day enough time to rebuild in France a similar greatness, which I would then wish to describe in your own tongue: and perhaps then your Majesty, thinking back on these verses of mine, may say that they have been a fortunate forecast of your monarchy.<sup>29</sup>

We do not know if Henri II read these poems, but we do know that they were read by his Chancellor Olivier, who declared in the year of publication, 1558, that “I have read Bellay’s poems three or four times, and I always keep getting more and more out of them” though he was candid enough to add that “[...] there are quite a lot of things in them that escape me, because obviously I don’t really know about the objects themselves.”<sup>30</sup> Scholars are still discussing what it was in *Les Antiquitez* that du Bellay really wanted his readers to “see”; we are concerned here with exactly how du Bellay thought his poetry was located in time as a cultural product, an awareness in a most intelligent Renaissance mind of cultural modernity.

If du Bellay was thus well regarded in court circles, we can reasonably infer that he knew what would please his king when he offered the volume to him. A glance at the text shows that there are no fulsome compliments, indeed, that the ordinary politeness of the sonnet, courtier to King, is dominated by conditional tenses dealing not with the King’s present glories, but with a possible future. The traditional humanist movement from a glorious antique past textually proclaimed to transform the future is visible here, but in du Bellay’s registration of this several things have happened.

First, the King is the patron of cultural centres (as the “Privilege du Roy” in the 1558 edition makes clear), and two of these, the courts of Saint Germain and Fontainebleau, established by Francis I, could and did receive actual objects of classical antiquity for display. These quite literally, in a gallery or showcase, made the past visible in the present as the past, but valued for the future (or the expense of obtaining it and displaying it would be wasted, and would not add to the prestige of the sovereign). Du Bellay might then on his mission in Rome, have been expected to add to this collection, but he modestly says that as he could not bring the actual Roman ruins back, he has instead put them into textual form for public display (the King’s imprimatur and copyright protection will make his poems available to the general public). Anticipating a little what mid-nineteenth century tourism was to do with photography, he calls his poems a picture (*un petit tableau*) painted in poetic colours. This picture (if the King looks at it and thus commends it) will then display the antiquities and keep them from oblivion, fragmentary (*poudreuses*) as they are. Archiving the past, in the sense of collecting and displaying in an organised fashion has now become part of what it is to be modern, and it is at this time, in the sixteenth century, that the word *antiquary* appears.

The sonnet then turns at the ninth line, as sonnets were supposed to do, to a new area, and looks at the future. The problem is that the ruins are, as du Bellay says, crumbling and dusty: what Henri will do is to rebuild a

similar grandeur in France – the ruins have their own grandeur as ruins, but Henri will *rebuild*, so that the new grandeur will be at once Roman and modern. When that happens, du Bellay will again write poetry in French to celebrate them (ll.9-11). The last three lines are less clear, because there are now two sets of poems in play, *Les Antiquitez* and the ones that du Bellay will write if the King's projects are realised: but it seems that “mes vers” which the King may in the future reflect upon (*repensant*) are the poems of *Les Antiquitez*, which are now like a picture in the King's gallery – and because of the process of printing, also in a hypothetical national gallery – which serves as a foretelling (words), or foreseeing (paint), of the achievements of the Monarchy.

Here we have, I suggest, a sustained referring back to the past of classical antiquity, to quote Habermas again, precisely in order to comprehend – and to proclaim, given du Bellay's relationship to his King – the monarchical French present as a result of transition from old to new, with a destiny ahead. When Petrarch had recovered the letters of Cicero, he treated the text as the voice of a living person, to whom he could speak; Du Bellay in *Les Antiquitez* (not a word that Petrarch would have used) has a very strong sense of the classical past as ghostly and subterranean, and of himself, and his King, as standing in the light.

We are looking here at a quite sophisticated, and as one might say elegiac, cultural awareness of antiquity, which later became the underpinning of what we know as the Grand Tour. This awareness, which is diffused throughout Europe at quite a high social level of education and wealth until late in the nineteenth century (when a new kind of nationalism begins to make it unacceptable to transfer antiquities from one country to another) brings with it a developed proclamation of texts, a word which we can now understand in the postmodernist sense of “any surface displaying meaning”.

## Modernity and the Word of God

A problem of detecting and defining modernity of a different kind arises when the author of the venerated text is not a dead Roman or Greek whose words, however inspiring, are fixed in time, but an eternal being outside time, whose words are fixed from the beginning of time to the end of it. The gift of God's words, or the Word, as I may now call it, to human beings, as recorded in all the Abrahamic religions, makes reading a teleological activity (among others: the Word may well give everyday practical advice on property rights or the advisability of abstaining from certain foods)

and this process may, as it does among certain fundamentalist sects and certain branches of the Islamic religion, simply foreclose on modernity and freeze the worshippers in time, as far as their own mortality permits. For the Protestant reformers, or “evangelists” as James Simpson calls them in his study of their problems in controversy,<sup>31</sup> faced a difficulty that their humanist classicist fellows did not have (though a man might be both at once). The humanist sought to have as many texts from the past by as many authors as he could obtain. These texts he absorbed, selected from, and represented to himself for onward presentation to the future in his own works, as we have seen du Bellay select the lyricists of the late Roman empire for his purposes at the court of Henry II of France. The Protestant reformer sought to restrict what he proclaimed to a single text, the pure Word of God, the idea that is denoted by the phrase *scriptura sola*.

The defence of the purity and simplicity of the Word mounted often by the Protestant reformers, arises from what one might call an accident in the theology of grammar. When St. Paul exhorted Timothy to “preach the word” (2 *Timothy* 4.2) he used the ancient classical Greek word “logos”, used in the Greek versions of the Old Testament writings, and before them put into circulation by Heraclitus (fifth century BC)<sup>32</sup> in his attempt to explain the governing principle of the universe. Now *logos* is in Greek both singular and masculine (*ho logos*), as God himself is usually taken to be, and this makes possible ever afterwards a decisive ambiguity very consequential for the Reformers in the Renaissance. It is the ambiguity so decisively signalled by John in the opening of his Gospel:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John I.1)

Had *logos* been neuter in gender, John would have had to write “καὶ Θεὸς ἦν τὸ λογόν.” and the development of Christianity might have been very different. Such speculations aside, this usage first of all gives a monolithic coherence to everything that God is recorded as having said; second, because the word is singular, it suggests that God’s teaching is simple and clear – “great was the company of the preachers”, but they all preached the Word; and third, it suggests that masculine speech is creative and ordering (the legacy of Heraclitus): so it was that Milton described God’s creativity in *Paradise Lost* as a speech act: when God begins to create the world.

Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou Deep, peace,  
Said then th'Omnific Word, your discord end. (PL. VII 216-7)

But any reformer (and they came in many guises with many purposes, particularly in the German-speaking areas of Europe in the sixteenth century) would know that although the Word was eternal and thus outside time, its written manifestations were subject to human transmission and human error, and thus that scholarship and learning had to be employed to recover “the true Word” and proclaim its text, as St Paul had enjoined. Though here we are mainly concerned with Protestant reading practices in Europe, it is worth noting that in the Abrahamic religions, there is a kind of spectrum of reading attention; Islam venerates the written text of the Koran and the Hadith, and treats even the material substance of the books as sacred (the Koran was not printed in areas under Muslim rule until the eighteenth century, though Luther provided a preface to a Latin version of the Arabic text in 1542); it is extremely reluctant to dispute the meaning of words or passages in the text, and, considerable though Islamic scholarship is, has discouraged what in the West is known as textual criticism, to the extent of banning access to manuscripts that might be considered variant. Judaism likewise venerates the text in its material form, but given the immense historical spread of the Jewish biblical books, has recognised that human intervention and interpretation are necessary for its transmission, as in the Massoretic punctuation work of the sixth to tenth centuries AD and it has from early times been receptive to textual criticism, embracing the archaeology, palaeography and comparative criticism developed in the West in the nineteenth century. Christianity venerates the Word, in the senses discussed above, but has by comparison little veneration for its material substance, at least subsequent to the invention of printing; it has been extremely eager, from the earliest times, to obtain “good” copy of Biblical texts, and has encouraged the use of the full apparatus of textual criticism (as appropriate at various ages) with the scientific disciplines that became ancillary to textual criticism in the nineteenth century, mainly but not entirely in Protestant learning centres.

Such generalisations are likely to be contentious, and value judgements attaching to them still more so: but it may be said that Protestantism, by both insisting upon the primacy of the Word and permitting extensive critical study of its manifestations in history, was in a position to create and indeed help to finance what we might call an information explosion in the first half of the sixteenth century. As James Simpson has said, modernity and reading are inextricably bound,<sup>33</sup> and the reformers, handling an eternal

text, were certainly aware that they were pushing out information to the world, and accused their opponents of trying to capture and restrict it.

The late twentieth century information explosion of the Internet and World-Wide Web came in on the back of the invention of the personal computer, and as these became cheaper and proliferated, so did the transmission of information, with concomitant attempts by various authoritarian regimes to regulate it. In similar fashion, the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century was followed by various improvements, notably the availability of small founts of type and cheaper paper, which made books of all kinds – with certain exceptions such as atlases – potentially smaller, cheaper and much more portable. Pocket editions of classical texts were invented and marketed with great success by Aldus Manutius of Venice from 1500 onwards. The rapid printing of pamphlets and broadsides also increased, to the dismay of civil and religious authorities, and the apparatus of censorship followed the invention of printing very speedily.<sup>34</sup>

## **The Book in the Hand: Erasmus and Tyndale**

When those who wished to reform the Catholic Church in Europe, either from inside, like Luther, or from without, like Calvin and Knox, thought about renewal, they thought, like the secular humanists, of recovering the admired world of a historical past; but this could not, given the eternal nature of God's word, be done by imitating a previous text: it had to be done by recovering the original text itself. Now something like four centuries of Biblical scholarship since the time of the Reformation have taught us moderns how fraught with problems the concept of "the original text" is; and it would be naïve to suppose that scholars such as Erasmus were unaware of the multiplicity of manuscripts of the various parts of the Bible that were available, and of the problems of authenticity and variant readings that these created. Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) knew nothing of the Dead Sea Scrolls nor of the Codex Sinaiticus, but he knew that he needed the help of Greek scholars and access to manuscripts to produce his edition of the Greek New Testament (1516, revised 1522), and he knew also that if he succeeded, his text could be fixed in print and sent all over Europe, from which (his text itself, produced by the scholar printer Johann Froben, being relatively expensive) other scholars could make translations into their vernaculars. And it is from Erasmus himself that we have an early glimpse of a social change in textual reception.

In the preface to his Greek New Testament, Erasmus looks to the future reception, not of his text specifically, but of the texts that will be affected by his:

It is probably preferable to veil over the mysteries of kings, but Christ desires his mysteries to be as widely published as possible. I would wish all working girls to read the Gospels, and read the Pauline epistles. And I would that these were disseminated into all languages of all peoples, so that not only the Scots and Irish, but also the Turks and Arabs could know and read them.<sup>35</sup>

Since Erasmus's scholarship did prove enormously influential upon the translators of the Bible who followed him, it is worth looking closely at this expressed wish. First, he contrasts the mysteries of kings, better left unexplored, with the mysteries of Christ which, it is clear from the epistles of Paul, were to be explained as widely as possible. In envisaging the impact of his own text, he then goes in two directions: geographically to the ends of the earth and out into non-European languages; and socially down to the lower orders: where he might simply have said that he wished all *women* to read the texts (the word would be *mulieres*), he chooses the much rarer diminutive *mulierculae*: servant women, ancillary women, very young women. His more often quoted wish that the ploughman, the traveller and the weaver might sing the Scriptures does not have the same geographical and social outreach.

We find the same glimpse of the potential to spread the word in fixed form in the famous rebuke given by William Tyndale (c.1485-1536) to an orthodox cleric who is alleged to have said that one were better to be without God's law than the Pope's: Tyndale, already planning his translation of the Scriptures, rejoined that "if God spared his life, ere many years he would cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scripture than he did."<sup>36</sup> Again, the emphasis is upon putting the Word of God quite literally into the hands of ordinary people – which meant translating it out of Latin into the vernaculars. Though there had been some thirty vernacular Bibles printed in the fifteenth century – including one in Italian – it was the Lutheran controversies of the early sixteenth century that revealed, to the delight of the printing trade, the huge popular appetite for religious printed matter: some 4000 copies of one of Luther's tracts sold in a few days in 1520. This image of placing the Word into the hand is what information theorists call a *mememe*<sup>37</sup>, an idea given iconic form in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

## The Problems of Distributing the Word

But the many attempts to make available vernacular translations – something that could be profitable but also dangerous for translator and printer alike – were not encouragements to the huddled masses to break free. At least as regards the Bible, or parts thereof, in English, it was an attempt to place the authority of interpreting the Word of God elsewhere than in the hands of the Catholic Church in Rome. That every man – and working girl – should be free to believe what he or she chose from the Bible in their hands would have appalled any of the Reformers who struggled, and suffered, to place that same Bible there, but they did not doubt that if the plain Word could be recovered from beneath the sacramental mysteries that the Catholic Church deployed, then a national Church under a sovereign who likewise had the Bible in his or subjects' vernacular would, as John Foxe said, be “not the beginning of any new church of our own, but the renewing of the old ancient church of Christ.”<sup>38</sup> To change and renew was once again to recover the old – the difference from conventional humanist antiquarianism being that the old was actually eternal, if one could but find the right words, and could and should be understood by those who had “small Latin and less Greek”, or none at all.

The printing press became a weapon: for if a scholar or translator succeeded in giving the Word in vernacular form, it could be without error multiplied in thousands of copies, and these copies, in practice, made small enough for any person to carry. No wonder then, that though the scholarship and presswork of those who declared themselves true Catholics was as fine and as devoted as that of the reformers, John Foxe could polemically annex the entire industry to the Reformers' cause: “How many printing presses there be in the world, so many blockhouses there be against the high castle of St Angelo, so that either the pope must abolish knowledge and printing, or printing at length will root him out.”<sup>39</sup>

The Reformers' sense that the Catholic Church had reserved the power to interpret the Word by holding it in Latin, and that they were fulfilling Christ's and Paul's original purposes in placing the Word in the vernaculars in the hands of the worshippers themselves, was tempered by an awareness that the Bible (in parts or in whole) was an extremely complicated text, and that even the New Testament, in which, as John Jewel said, “we hear God talk with us familiarly [...] as a father talketh with his child”<sup>40</sup> required effort to understand.

This recognition had two related consequences. The servant girl and the ploughman could not obtain, and could not understand if they had them,

learned commentaries on the Word of God, such as the three Abrahamic religions had always produced, even before the invention of printing. But what they could purchase, or have available in their communities, was an authoritative text with helpful glosses (hence the quite crucial importance of the availability of small fonts of type, as can be seen on any page of the Geneva Bible, for example). When the civil and religious authorities intervened upon the production of a translation of the Word, it was frequently not the act of translation itself to which they took exception, but the provision of glosses and explanatory material which controlled the reader's understanding of the text. So Henry VIII, in one of his moods of tolerance, allowed the English translation of the New Testament, edited by Miles Coverdale, to be circulated, but then immediately clamped down on discussion of it. It "pleased the King's Majesty", said the 1537 royal proclamation, "to permit and command the Bible, being translated into our mother tongue, to be sincerely taught and openly laid forth in every parish church";<sup>41</sup> but immediately the spectre of dissent raised its head and "[...] if at any time by reading any doubt shall come to any of you touching the sense and meaning of any part thereof, then [...] not giving too much to your own minds, fantasies and opinions [...] ye shall have recourse to such learned men as be or shall be authorised to preach and declare the same."<sup>42</sup>

The words "authorised to preach" in the sentence above shows the King's awareness of the next pit about to open under the royal feet: you may licence a translation of the Word, and thus control its possible meanings: but when doubts arise, how do you then make certain that those explaining things to the puzzled populace themselves are reliable? Some of the expedients proposed by worried authorities would be laughable, had their infringements not involved, as they often did, torture and persecution: the 1551 Edict of Chateaubriant, in the reign of the intelligent and relatively liberal Henri II of France, du Bellay's sovereign, attempted to forbid the printing and selling of any kind of commentary on the Bible written in the previous forty years;<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth I of England retained control over all licensing religious matters when she came to the throne, in order, as Archbishop Parker said, "to draw to one uniformity";<sup>44</sup> but on the more practical level (Elizabeth was a supremely practical ruler) she tried to make copies of the Bible extremely large, so that they had to remain on a lectern in the churches, and commanded rather plaintively that in churches "no man [is] to reason or contend, but quietly to hear the reader."<sup>45</sup>

The parallels with our own information explosion are clear, and have been pointed to many times:<sup>46</sup> even the problem of authorising the learned to preach has been faced by Wikipedia, which has tried to furnish an au-

thoritative text without restricting its compilation to recognised authorities. If then we have here a recognisably modern event,<sup>47</sup> that is, the translation of the Word into vernaculars and its shaping into small portable cheap units that even those who could not themselves read could have near them, there remains the question of how far the Reformers' awareness of what they were doing fits the definition of modernity used in this paper; the Reformers were constrained by their ideology of primitive Christianity to insist that they recovered the old and pure text; but as might be expected, it was their opponents, determined to contradict, who insisted that this was a novelty: when in 1538 Myles Coverdale tried to demonstrate the genuineness of the translated Word by publishing a diglottal New Testament, English translation and Latin Vulgate in parallel columns, he exclaimed in his preface, addressed to Henry VIII, that those who opposed vernacular translation were trying to alienate Henry's subjects from their devotion to their King, and

their inward malice doth break out into blasphemous and uncomely words, insomuch as they call your loving and faithfull people heretics, new-fangled fellows, English biblers, cobblers of divinity, fellows of the new faith, with such other ungodly saying.<sup>48</sup>

We do not have modernity, but we do have new-fangledness, which must have been a cant term of the time, as J.A. Froude recorded of a rather lax curate in Somerset, who "entered the pulpit, where he had set no foot for years, and admonished his parishioners to give no credence to the new-fangled fellows which read the new books."<sup>49</sup> The effects of this reading practice have been linked to modernity as we understand it, through what has been called the inadvertent fragmentation of the dominant religious culture.<sup>50</sup> Something has already been said<sup>51</sup> of the unease that the practice generated both in those who advocated it and those who opposed it: a single iconic image of a book in a hand crystallised this in the seventeenth century:

I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book and read therein, and as he read, he wept and trembled.

John Bunyan's very widely read vision of the plight of man in his time (1678) certainly contributed to the growth of individualism, as Steve Bruce phrases it.<sup>52</sup> But if we recognise here a movement from a past through a present to

a future, then we must also recognise that the past is a moral past (*Isaiah* 64.6), the present an individual state of self-definition, not a social one (“*from his own house*”) and the future in an eternal realm not of this world (“*on the other side*”, where the trumpets sounded for Mr Valiant -for- Truth).

This paper has considered the application of ideas of cultural modernity, using the definition suggested by Habermas, in two areas of the Renaissance period: the humanist transmission of classical texts to the future of one’s children, and the Christian transmission of the Word of God to a future reading public which had not yet had it “in their hands.” There are many other areas of change in this period which might have been referred to: the introduction of “modern” mathematics with the adaptation of the zero and Arabic numeration, with all the consequences for trade and accounting that that brought; Renaissance cartography, which modernised in an almost literal sense the “view of the world”; the development of improved weapons – in all these areas modernisation, as we should recognise it, was going forward. What makes textual transmission of particular interest is that texts are usually conscious of themselves as texts, and articulate their purposes: even if the concept of culture as we have it was not familiar to the Renaissance (the word *cultura* existed, but meant either literal cultivation of the soil or education of the mind), and the word *modern* was used in a strictly temporal sense, as by Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*, without any sense of repudiation of the past in view of certain betterment in future; yet there is, as I have shown, a recognition of the need to pass what is valued to that future – often by imitation and adaptation, so that a rebirth occurs. For the humanists, the Eternal City of Rome was visibly ruined, and rebuilding was needed: using those fragments, and the recovered voices of the Greek and Roman texts, they had to build renown in their own place and time. The Reformers, because of the eternal nature of the Word of God, could not present their changes as any kind of novelty or alteration of existing truth: the New Jerusalem was for them not a modern city, but an eternal one, a problem of exposition and proclamation that produced what James Simpson brilliantly describes as “hermeneutic anarchy” and yet “a powerful strand of modernity”,<sup>53</sup> a forward thrust and a differentiation that masked itself as a return to a lost purity.

## Notes

1. Latin, French and Italian texts are presented in this paper in my translation. The original text of each is supplied in the notes.

2. J. Habermas, "Modernity: an unfinished project," trans. Nicholas Walker, in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, ed. M. Passerin d'Entreves and S. Benhabib (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 38.
3. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).
4. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 5.
5. James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 121.
6. J. Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C Middlemore (Vienna: Phaidon Press, n.d.); T.M. Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).
7. M. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London and California: Sage Publications, 2007), 150.
8. M. A. Cassiodorus, *Selected Variae*, ed. and trans. S.J.B. Barnish (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 79.
9. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture*, 150.
10. J. Atkinson, *Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 155.
11. Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance*, 92.
12. Nostra dico tempora modernitatem hanc: horum scilicet centum annorum curriculum, cuius adhuc nunc ultimae partes extant... centum annos qui effluxerunt dico nostram modernitatem, et non qui veniunt, cum eiusdem tamen sint rationis secundum propinquitatem, quoniam ad narrationem pertinent preterita, ad divinacionem futura. Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. M.R. James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), 59.
13. See the text of Petrarch's canzone, "Spirto gentil" (*Rime* 53) and a useful discussion of the background to this in Marc Laureys, "Antiquarianism and Politics in 14<sup>th</sup> Century Avignon; the Humanism of Giovanni Cavallini," in *Petrarch and his Readers in the Renaissance*, ed. Karl Enekel and Jan Papy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 31-52.
14. Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 94.
15. At tibi fortassis, si, quod mens sperat et optat,  
Es post me victura diu, meliora supersunt  
Secula: non omnes veniet Lethaeus in annos  
Iste sopor. Poterunt, discussis forte tenebris,  
Ad purum priscumque iubar remeare nepotes.  
Tunc Elicona nova revirentem stirpe videbis,  
Tunc lauros frondere sacras; tunc alta resurgent  
Ingenia atque animi dociles, quibus ardor honesti  
Pyeridum studii veterem geminabit amorem.  
*Africa*, IX, 453-461  
Francesco Petrarca, *L'Africa*, ed. N. Festa (Florence: Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Francesco Petrarca, G.C. Sansoni, 1926), 278.
16. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 7, 51-82.
17. Habermas, "Modernity: an unfinished project," 39.
18. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, 158.
19. M. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 46-7.
20. Toutes nations de gens raisonnables aiment mieux estre gouvernees par ceux de leur pais et de la nation mesmes, qui congnoissent leurs meurs, loix et coustumes et ont le meme langage et maniere de vivre comme eux, que par estrangers.  
Claude de Seyssel, *La Grande Monarchie de France*, (Paris: Galliot du Pre, [1558]) V.ix, fol.79r.

21. L. Tennenhouse, *Power on Display* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).
22. Qualiter annosum vires animusque leonem  
Destituunt, sed prisca manet reverentia fronti  
Horrificusque sonus, quanquam sit ad omnia tardus,  
Umbra sit ille licet, circum tamen omnis inermi  
Paret silva seni. Sed quis vel noscere certam  
udeat aut rebus tantis prefigere metam?  
Vis loquar? In finem, quamvis ruinosa. dierum  
Vivet et extremum veniet tua Roma sub aevum  
Cum mundo peritura suo  
Petrarca, *L'Africa*, ed. cit. II. 318-326
23. *Times*, 23 July 2012, 11.
24. Orbis praeda fuit, totum quae exhauserat orbem,  
Quaeque urbis fuerant, nunc habet orbis opes.  
Disce hinc humanis quae sit fiducia rebus:  
Hic tanti cursus tam brevis imperii.  
Roma ingens periit: vivit Maro doctus ubique,  
Et vivunt Latiae fila canora lyrae.  
Nasonis vivunt, vivunt flammaeque Tibulli,  
Et vivunt numeri, docte Catulle, tui.  
Salvete o cineres, sancti salvete poetae,  
Quos numerat vates inclyta Roma suos.  
Sit mihi fas Gallo vestros recludere fonteis,  
Dum coeli Genio liberiore fruor,  
Hactenus et nostris incognita carmina Musis  
Dicere et insolito plectra movere sono.  
Joachim Du Bellay, *Poems*, ed. H.W. Lawson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), ll.129-142.  
Perhaps it was only a metrical convenience for du Bellay, but the word "fas" carries the sense of "what it is right, according to the gods or the law or both, to do in a given situation." – something both opportune and appropriate in a social context.
25. Joachim Du Bellay, *La Deffense et Illustration de la Langue Francaise* (Paris: Nouveaux Classiques Larousse, 1971), 86.
26. G.H. Tucker, *The Poet's Odyssey: Joachim du Bellay and the Antiquitez de Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 55-104. See also F. Giordani, "Utilisation et Description Symboliques de l'Espace dans les Antiquitez de Rome de Joachim du Bellay," in *Du Bellay et ses Sonnets Romains*, ed. Yvonne Bellenger, (Paris: Champion, 1994), 26-30.
27. Palles Esprits, et vous ombres poudreuses,  
Qui jouissant de la clarete du jour  
Fistes sortir cest orgueilleux sejour,  
Dont nous voyons the reliques cendreuses:  
Dictes, Esprits (ainsi les tenebreuses  
Rives de Styx non passable au retour,  
Vous enlacant d'un trois fois triple tour  
N'enferment point voz images ombreuses),  
Vous enlacant d'un trois fois triple tour  
N'enferment point voz images ombreuses),  
Dictes moy donc (car quelqu'une de vous  
Possible encore se cache icy dessous)  
Ne sentez vous augmenter vostre peine,

Quand quelquefois de ces costaux Romains  
 Vos contemplex l'ouvrage de vos mains  
 N'estre plus rien qu'une poudreuse plaine?

Joachim Du Bellay, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, eds. D. Aris and F. Joukovsky (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1993), II, 13.

The conjunction of dust and shadows (in whatever language) goes back to Horace, *Odes* 4.7: "Nos ubi decidimus ... pulvis et umbra sumus." But the raising of the dead by calling them as dust and shadows seems to be from Petrarch (whose poetry du Bellay knew well), who in the last lines of *Rime* 161 calls to the dead to listen to his woes:

O animi gentili et amorose,  
 S'alcuna a 'l mondo, e voi, nude ombre e p;olve,  
 Deh, restate a veder quale e il mio male!

(O gracious and loving souls, if the world has any such, and you, bare shadows and dust, ah stay to see what my suffering is!)

28. See Yvonne Bellenger, ed., *Du Bellay et ses Sonnets Romains* (Paris: Honore Champion, 1994), 11.
29. Au Roy  
 Ne vous pouvant donner ces ouvrages antiques  
 Pour vostre Saint-Germain ou pour Fontainebleau,  
 Je les vous donne (Sire) en ce petit tableau  
 Peint, le mieux que j'ay peu, de couleurs poetiques:  
 Qui mis sous vostre nom devant les yeux publiques,  
 Si vous les daignez voir en son jour le plus beau,  
 Se pourra bien vanter d'avoir hors du tombeau  
 Tire des vieux Romains les poudreuses reliques.  
 Que vous puissant le Dieux un jour donner tant d'heur,  
 De rebastir en France une telle grandeur  
 Que je la voudrois bien peindre en vostre langage:  
 Et peult estre qu'alors vostre grand' Majeste,  
 Repensant a mes vers, diroit qu'ilz ont este  
 De vostre Monarchie un bienheureux presage.  
 Du Bellay, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, 5
30. Tucker, *The Poet's Odyssey*, 226.
31. Simpson, *Burning to Read: passim*.
32. H. Boeder, *Seditions: Heidegger and the Limits of Modernity*, trans. M. Brainard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 92-97.
33. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 2-4.
34. Christopher Small, *The Printed Word* (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1982), 14-34.
35. Regum mysteria coelare fortasse satius est, at Christus sua mysteria quam maxime cupit evulgari. Optarem ut omnes mulierculae legant evangelium, legant Paulinas epistolas. Atque utinam haec in omnes omnium linguas essent transfusa ut non solum Scothis et Hybernis, sed a Turcis quoque et Saracenis legi conosicque possint.  
 Desiderius Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum omne, tertio iam ac diligentius ab Erasmo Rotero-damo recognitum* (Basle: Johann Froben, 1522) sig. A4v.
36. J. Foxe, *The Second Volume of the Ecclesiastical Historie... Newly recognised and enlarged* (London: Company of Stationers, 1610), 982.
37. J. Gleick, *The Information* (London: Harper Collins, 2012), 312-323.
38. W. Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), 136.
39. Haller, *Foxe's Book*, 110.

40. Ibidem, 95.
41. J. Eadie, *The English Bible: an External and Critical History. Volume I.* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1876), 336.
42. Eadie, *The English Bible*, Vol I., 337.
43. S.L. Greenslade ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 438.
44. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 161.
45. Ibid., 159.
46. Gleick, *The Information*, 413.
47. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 2, though he offers no definition of “modernity”.
48. Eadie, *The English Bible*, Vol. I, 303.
49. Eadie, *The English Bible*, Vol. I, 389; J.A. Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada, Volume III* (London: J.W. Parker and Son, 1856-70), 240-243.
50. S. Bruce, “Cathedrals to Cults: the evolving forms of the religious life,” in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. P. Heelas, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 30.
51. See Simpson, *Burning to Read*, chapter 5.
52. Bruce, “Cathedrals to Cults,” 30.
53. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 54, 2.

## About the Author

**Michael R.G. Spiller**, MA (Edin.), BLitt (Oxon.), is Honorary Senior Lecturer in English and Cultural History at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. His principal interests are European Renaissance poetry, on which he has published books and articles, including *The Development of the Sonnet* (1992), and cultural history, a subject which he helped to establish as a degree course at Aberdeen, the first such graduating course in the UK at that time. He is now retired, but contributes regularly to collections of essays on early Scottish literature.



© 2013 Spiller / Amsterdam University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.