

difference between the ways in which female mediation was manifested in Western and Eastern Europe, where, as we have seen, the persistence of medieval traits was continuous and organic.

'Modern medievalness' thus isolated the 'sacred' internal space from the external world even more than it had in the actual Middle Ages. It also maintained a public component within that internal space, translating every instance of reading into an act of ritual study. The text of the Talmud was read in singsong, even in solitude; the Bible and the traditional commentaries on Holy Scripture were read within the family, in particular within the framework of ritual meals; texts of religious edification were read in public in the synagogue – yet another means for emphasizing oral mediation between the authoritative, but often inaccessible, Hebrew text and readers. Above all, a fairly limited number of revered texts were read repeatedly, with the result that large portions of them were committed to memory. One text emblematic of these attitudes toward reading is the so-called *Hok-le-Israel* (law, but also daily ration, for Israel), an immensely popular pot-pourri of traditional commentaries and selected passages from the Mishnah, the Talmud and post-Talmudic literature. This work was organized around commentary on the weekly readings from the Pentateuch, and the week was conveniently divided into seven sections, one for each day, thus fulfilling the religious duty of daily 'study' in the home.¹¹² Perhaps just as emblematic was the extraordinary success (which continued to a fairly late date, especially in Yiddish culture) of manuals on the art of memory such as the *Lev Arie* of Leon Modena (first edition, Venice 1612, second edition, Vilna 1886).¹¹³ All this was the result of a clearer separation – indeed, a genuine divorce – between the sacred and the secular in the early modern age. Those two areas, which in the preceding age had been perceived as contiguous and in part complementary, were henceforth seen as opposed. That opposition was at times freighted with overtones of alienation, the alienation typical of the Jew in modern times.

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The Humanist as Reader

Anthony Grafton

On 10 December 1513 Niccolò Machiavelli wrote a letter to his friend Francesco Vettori. In the previous year, when Piero Soderini's government fell and the Medici regained control of Florence, he had lost everything he valued most. He had tried to build a citizen army; it collapsed. He had prized his position in the government; he was sacked. Suspected of conspiracy, he was imprisoned, tortured and ended up on his farm outside Florence. Here he yearned for any sort of political occupation, quarrelled and gossiped with his neighbours – and read. He described the life of his mind to Vettori in unforgettably vivid detail:

Partitomi del bosco, io me ne vo a una fonte, e di quivi in un mio uccellare. Ho un libro sotto, o Dante a Petrarca, o un di questi poeti minori, come Tibullo, Ovidio e simili: leggo quelle loro amorose passioni e quelli loro amori, ricordomi de' mia, godomi un pezzo in questo pensiero. Transferiscomi poi in su la strada nell'osteria, parlo con quelli che passano, dimando delle nuove de' paesi loro, intendo varie cose, e noto varii gusti e diverse fantasie d'uomini . . . Venuta la sera, mi ritorno in casa, et entro nel mio scrittoio; et in su l'uscio me spoglio quella veste cotidiana, piena di fango e di loto, e mi metto panni reali e curiali; e rivestito condecientemente entro nelle antique corti degli antiqui uomini, dove, da loro ricevuto amorevolmente, mi pasco di quel cibo, che solum è mio, e che io nacqui per lui; dove io non mi vergogno parlare con loro, e domandarli della ragione delle loro azioni; e quelli per loro umanità mi rispondono; e non sento per 4 ore di tempo alcuna noia, sdimentico ogni affanno, non temo la povertà, non mi sbigottisce la morte: tutto mi trasferisco in loro.¹

Leaving the wood, I go to a spring, and from there to my bird-snare. I have a book with me, either Dante or Petrarca or one of the lesser poets like Tibullus, Ovid, and the like: I read about their amorous passions and about their loves, I remember my own, and I revel for a moment in this thought. I then move on up the road to the inn, I speak with those who pass, and I ask them for news of their area; I learn many things and note the different and diverse tastes and ways of thinking of men. When evening comes, I return to my home, and I go into my study; and on the threshold, I take off my everyday clothes, which are covered with mud and mire, and I put on regal and curial robes; and dressed in a more appropriate manner I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men and am welcomed by them kindly, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born; and there I am not ashamed to speak to them, to ask them the reasons for their actions; and they, in their humanity, answer me; and for four hours I feel no boredom, I dismiss every affliction, I no longer fear poverty nor do I tremble at the thought of death: I become completely part of them.

Books for the Beach and for the Battlefield

Historians have often quoted this letter, because it moves on to describe the composition of Machiavelli's most notorious piece of writing: *Il principe*. But they have not often used it as a document in the history of reading. That seems a pity; for it reveals as graphically as any other the historical and physical diversity of the books that Renaissance humanists read and the emotional diversity of the forms of attention they brought to the act of reading.

Machiavelli describes himself as reading two sorts of book. The first he characterizes so precisely as to leave no doubt at all about its textual or physical character. They are the pocket-sized octavo editions of the classics – classics both of Latin and of the *volgare* – which Aldo Manuzio had begun to issue in the previous decade. These books, printed in an italic type which made it possible to cram whole texts into a few hundred pages in small format, had filled Aldo's customers with enthusiasm, and inspired his trade rivals in Lyons and elsewhere to pay him the ultimate homage of plagiarism.² They contained texts with prefaces and sometimes a few illustrations, but offered no commentary. And evidently Machiavelli used them in the simplest of ways, much as we would use the less classical – but equally handy – books that we take to the ocean in the summer: as a portable means of escape from problems of all sorts. They served as a stimulus not for thought but for reverie – as entertainments in which the reader could lose himself.

The other sort of book and style of reading Machiavelli describes allegorically. He personifies his authors (and their characters) as great

men who deign to speak to him in his study, but does not descend to such small details as their names. From the body of the *Prince* and from other texts, however, we can identify them as the works of Greek and Roman statesmen and generals, whose actions Machiavelli saw as the principal sources and models of practical wisdom for his own time. The authors in question included philosophers like Cicero and perhaps others, but above all the historians: Plutarch, Livy, Tacitus. Their texts Machiavelli read, evidently, not in the handy pocket size in which Aldo printed some of them, but in the larger folios and quartos which filled the shelves of Renaissance scholars' studies. He approached them – as his allegory makes clear – in a spirit entirely different from that in which he read his love poets by the spring. He asked of them not distraction but instruction. He raised specific questions and tried to evoke sharp answers. And he did so with a formality and lucidity, an interest not in ethereal erotic dreams but in practical political action, that his allegory of reading as formal discussion at court vividly evokes.

Two sets of ancient texts, two ways of reading: of the latter, one seems instantly recognizable, the other curiously remote. We find it easy to imagine reading ancient books for relief from present difficulties and stimulation of erotic feeling; harder, presumably, to imagine reading for lessons which can guide a government in its final crisis or explain the failure of an army and a polity. But Machiavelli practised both sorts of reading with no apparent sense of strain or difficulty, and clearly felt able to choose his mode of interpretation as easily as the text he meant to apply it to. Our task is simple to state, if difficult to execute. We must try to place Machiavelli's experience in its wider setting. What other possibilities flanked his on the spectrum of ways of reading that the humanists used? How typical were his choices of texts and methods?

'The unmediated text'

From the 1930s to the 1970s, great European scholars – above all Erwin Panofsky, Hans Baron and Eugenio Garin – taught that the humanists transformed the experience of reading in one uniform and powerful way.³ Medieval scholars, they explained, had read a canonical set of authorities – Aristotle and his commentators, the legal, medical and theological authorities, the Vulgate Bible, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae* – in a uniform way. For all their differences of origin and substance, medieval readers considered these texts the components of a single system. Official interpreters made all of them serve as the basis for the system of argument and instruction

known as scholasticism. They did so, quite simply, by treating the texts not as the work of individuals who had lived in a particular time and place but as impersonal bodies of propositions. By decades of hard work with hammer and chisel, they fashioned a complex Gothic set of walls and buttresses which preceded, surrounded and supported the texts: headings, commentaries, separate treatises. This apparatus succeeded in imposing a medieval outlook on the most disparate ancient texts. From a humanist point of view, however, it embodied and rested on a systematic error. The commentators had set out not to explain the text for what it was, but to bring its content up to date. If the *Corpus Iuris* mentioned *sacerdotes* and *pontifices*, for example, the commentator Accursius assumed that it referred to the presbyters and bishops of the Christian church he knew, and found in the ancient text the charter for modern practices.⁴ The texts, in short, remained popular, not because they depicted an ancient world, but because they served the needs of a modern one. And the very packaging that ensured their utility also distorted their content. A tight network of assumptions and instructions, given material form in the system of glosses, bound them to the existing scholastic system of instruction, rather than to their historical place and time.

From the start, the humanists set out to rescue the classics from the crenellated *hortus conclusus* in which the medieval commentaries imprisoned them. They claimed that the glossators had consistently distorted the original intent of the texts. Petrarch, for example, refused to go on studying Roman law because he found that his teachers failed to see or convey the 'history' in the law.⁵ He and other humanists tried to read the original directly. They normally claimed that they ignored the medieval commentaries, except to make fun of their errors. The need to penetrate the screen that the old apparatus interposed between reader and text would remain a commonplace of humanist polemic down to the sixteenth century. Mutianus Rufus ridiculed the standard commentary on Boethius's *Consolatio*, then ascribed to Aquinas, for thinking that Alcibiades must have been a woman. Erasmus lampooned the even wilder guesses that he found in medieval commentaries on the Bible: 'they turn trees into four-legged beasts and jewels into fish.'⁶

Once the stone wall of misreading was torn down, Petrarch and his followers explained, the reader could meet the ancients as they really were: not atemporal and ahistorical *auctoritates* fitted out for the fifteenth century, but people who had lived in a specific time and place. In the naked text the ancients came back to life in all their colours and dimensions, dressed in ancient clothing and inhabiting classical settings, for all the world like the heroes depicted in a Mantegna fresco. Historians have long taken this rhetoric at face value. They have described the

humanists as reading the classics 'directly', 'as they really were'; as innovators who treated books not as ingredients from which to construct a modern system of ideas, but as a window through which they could converse with the honoured dead. Petrarch, after all, actually wrote letters to the ancients, describing to Virgil his respect for the Latin poet's near-Christian virtue and to Cicero his shock at the great orator's involvement in the sweat and noise of politics. And one corresponds, surely, only with people, not with books.

In fact, however, as Machiavelli's case suggests, the humanists read classical texts in many different ways. One who wished to treat ancient poetry as a pastime could do as Machiavelli did, taking a pocket Ovid out into the country to read about love. But one who wished to treat ancient poetry as the highest branch of philosophy could do that as well, reading a folio Virgil in his study and conversing, mentally, not only with the poet, but also with ten or eleven allegorical and moral and historical commentators, ancient and modern. Hieronymus Muenzer relaxed by reading – of all texts – the *Corpus Hermeticum*: 'I read and reread', he wrote in his copy, 'and refreshed myself with that sweetest of readings.' Isaac Casaubon found the same text infuriating; the book not only did not relax him, but provoked him to a sort of philological assault and battery. He worked through his copy phrase by phrase to show that it could not be authentic.⁷ In each case the reader, like Machiavelli, would adopt a particular physical stance and mental attitude, as well as a particular text to apply them too. Any history of this complex and protean enterprise must eschew grand theses and rapid transitions and accept the possibility of paradox and contradiction.

Classicism and the Classics: The Text and its Frame

Machiavelli, as we also saw, described himself not only as interpreting texts, but also as handling books: particular physical objects, which followed specific conventions of format and typography, and which he used in well-defined circumstances. From the 1960s on, scholars have devoted an increasing amount of attention to the physical and aesthetic development of books in early modern Europe. And they have shown that the humanists demanded, produced and consumed new kinds of book, as well as a new canon of texts. For the humanists objected not only philologically to the content of the medieval scholarly book, but also aesthetically to its form.

The *auctoritates* of the medieval scholarly world were produced by the specialized, efficient stationers of the university towns. They divided

model copies of the standard texts into *peciae*, segments which scribes could rent one by one and reproduce rapidly and uniformly. The texts thus produced were laid out in two columns and written in a spiky, formal Gothic script. They occupied a relatively small space in the centre of a large page. And they were surrounded, on that page, by a thick hedge of official commentary written in a still smaller, still less inviting script. This was, of course, the very mass of medieval glosses which the humanists so disliked on principle. Such books naturally repelled Renaissance scholars, to whom they seemed a visual as well as an intellectual distortion of their own content.⁸

From the start, the humanists saw Gothic script as the outward and visible sign of Gothic ignorance: ugly, stupid, impenetrable. Petrarch hated 'the tiny and compressed characters' that the scribe himself 'would be unable to decipher, while the reader ends up buying not a book, but blindness along with it'.⁹ His disciples and successors set out deliberately to replace the standard forms of writing with more appropriate ones. In the early fifteenth century Coluccio Salutati and Poggio Bracciolini devised a new, rounded, elegant minuscule, which they considered more classical than the Gothic of their own day. Scholars and artists – notably Alberti and Mantegna – learned from Roman inscriptions to draw capital letters in a convincingly symmetrical and grandiose style. Others – above all the scholar Niccolò Niccoli and the scribe Bartolomeo Sanvito – invented an elegant cursive. This could be used for less formal purposes, like the compilation of notebooks, and fitted more text into less space than the standard, straightforward humanist script. These new scripts were gradually taught to other scholars and, with difficulty, to professional scribes (who seemed to Poggio *faex mundi*, 'the excrement of the universe').¹⁰ Eventually they reached canonical form in writing-books and were adopted across Europe.

Humanist manuscripts were produced to fit every need. Vast presentation folios, splendidly illuminated, offered the results of philological research to patrons (the latter were often shown receiving the author's or editor's homage and his book in the first, illuminated initial or on an independent title page with an architectural border). Smaller, less formal books, in which the text covered the whole page, with no commentary to interfere between *auctor* and *lector*, became the core elements in humanist collections. Some private manuscript collections swelled to include several hundred texts in the new style.¹¹

Private and public libraries – from the *Studiolo* of Federigo da Montefeltro at Urbino to the Vatican Library, which took its original shape under Nicholas V and Sixtus IV – changed as dramatically as the books themselves. Large, open rooms and small, classical jewel boxes, designed to facilitate study and conversation, lighted by windows,

replaced the dark rooms and chained books of the older type. Two of the grandest and most coherent buildings programmes of the sixteenth century – the Piazzetta of Serlio in Venice and the rebuilt Vatican Library of Sixtus V – had public collections of books, splendidly housed, as their centre-pieces.¹² Just as glamorous, if less permanent, was the Florentine garden where the Rucellai circle discussed ancient history and rhetoric, with its busts of ancient writers and its collection of flowers mentioned in classical texts.

Sometimes the encounters between new readers and the newly available texts burst the formal boundaries of traditional learning. Humanist reading took place in settings even more unexpected than Machiavelli's spring. Petrarch never seems more modern than in the celebrated letter on his ascent of Mt Ventoux, in which he described how he carried his pocket-sized copy of Augustine's *Confessions* to the top of Mt Ventoux and consulted it there. The princes of the fifteenth century loved to emphasize the prominent place that books and reading held in their lives. Alfonso of Aragon invited the humanists at his court to hold *ore del libro* – public literary duels in which they competed to explicate and emend the hard passages in the text of Livy.¹³ Federigo da Montefeltro like to have himself painted text in hand. In one portrait, attributed to Justus of Ghent, he appears with his son, holding a splendid folio. In another, attributed to Fra' Carnevale, which appears in a fine manuscript of Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, he looks down at a courtier while grasping a small, portable book. In each case the engagement with literature seems as characteristic of the man as his formidable, beaky profile.¹⁴ Federigo could be swept away by his interest in a specific new book. He confessed to Donato Acciaiuoli that he had kept Acciaiuoli's messenger longer than he should in order to be able to read Acciaiuoli's new commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* immediately.¹⁵ Reading the right books, evidently, was as much a part of the new style of the Renaissance court as hiring the right architects or wearing the right clothing.

As printed books gradually replaced manuscripts, moreover, the new forms of books and new experiences of reading pervaded the world of European learning. The type-faces of learned printers reproduced the scripts of scribes and artists, sometimes detail by detail. The earliest classical texts produced by Sweynheym and Pannartz at Subiaco and Rome and by Koberger in Nuremberg already used a humanistic type-face.¹⁶ The Aldine octavos, at their first appearance in 1501, reproduced a humanist cursive – sometimes identified as that of Sanvito – feature by feature.¹⁷ It became second nature, as E.P. Goldschmidt showed, to assume that classical texts deserved a classical presentation. And even those printers and illustrators whose training did not fully equip them

to provide historically accurate illustrations and lettering did their best. The young Dürer, for example, tried to represent a Roman theatre for a Strassburg edition of Terence, only to go wrong and make the actors far too large and the seats far too small because he worked from a sketch which did not indicate the scale of the original.¹⁸

Perhaps more important, the printed book could infiltrate a still wider range of settings and activities than the manuscript it emulated. One of Aldo Manuzio's early customers, Sigismund Thurzo, wrote from Budapest in 1501 that the new Aldine pocket-books had given him a new lease, if not on life, at least on literature:

For since my various activities leave me no spare time to spend on the poets and orators in my house, your books – which are so handy that I can use them while walking and even so to speak, while playing the courtier, whenever I find a chance – have become a special delight to me.¹⁹

The new book, austere and elegant, practical and portable, had become the norm. And Machiavelli's range of contracts, in informal and formal settings, with small and large books, seems typical of his milieu. It was only a step from his experience of reading love poetry in the country to that of the young gallants described by the whores in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, clustered in the street below a young woman's window, their copies of Petrarch in their hands. To some extent, then, the history of the book suggests that Renaissance humanists really did encounter the classics in a new and dramatically more direct way.

Yet the historians of the book have also qualified the optimism of the historians of ideas in one vital respect. They have shown that the forms in which the humanists took their classics, whether small or large, love poetry or Roman history, manuscript or printed, were anything but classical. In the first place, even the purest humanistic manuscripts and printed books were not the revival of something old, but the invention of something new. Their components included genuinely classical elements applied to new ends, like the epigraphic capitals that came to define titles, headings and lists of contents. But scribes and authors also revived some medieval devices that had gone out of use in recent times. Their formal book hand imitated not an ancient script, since there was no classical minuscule for them to imitate, but the minuscule script of Carolingian manuscripts, as chaste in form as it was unclassical in origin. Modern forms and fashions like italic script and the floral illumination of many first pages made Renaissance books still more attractive. To be sure, the scribes and printers produced texts that *looked* classical to their readers. But, like all classicisms, theirs incorporated the aesthetic assumptions of their own day as well as genuinely antique

models and methods. In its final form the humanist's book emerged from complex and difficult negotiations among many parties. *Cartolai*, scribes, artists and scholars all had their say, and the medieval models that remained in partial use exerted their own subtle attraction, pulling scribes' and scholars' pens into what now seem clearly unclassical patterns of punctuation and abbreviation.

In the second place, humanists continued to use many books that were not physically set out in new, chaste form. Petrarch loved his copy of Virgil, now in the Ambrosian Library; he confided to it both his sorrow at Laura's death and the date of their first meeting. But that vast manuscript, as Petrucci has pointed out, was in fact a 'modern' – that is, a medieval – manuscript, with anachronistic illustrations by Simone Martini.²⁰ And this second medieval form of classical text – literary rather than technical texts in Gothic script, often equipped with illustrations in which the characters wear modern dress, meant for courtly rather than learned readers – had a powerful afterlife in the Renaissance, even as the *auctoritates* of the university were discarded. Some of the purist humanists of Florence disapproved of illustrations; but the courtly readers of Milan and other northern states liked their eloquent Latin ancient histories, classical though the texts were, bedecked with the great illuminated initials of the medieval romance. In the famous example of a north Italian Plutarch now in the British Library, Antony wears the armour of a knight, Sertorius is murdered before a tapestry at a medieval feast, and Pyrrhus meets his death amid the walls and towers of an Italian city.²¹

Even in the heartlands of Renaissance classicism, then, medieval and Renaissance conventions, the desire to bring the ancient world up to date, and the desire to reconstruct it as it was, coexisted. In 1481, Petrucci shows, classical style and classical content met in a copy of Aesop executed for the Aragonese court by Cristoforo Maiorana: 'per lo principio', says the treasury record, 'ha facto con spiritello, animalii et altri lavuri antichi et in la lictera grande sta un homo anticho' – no doubt Aesop himself, dressed *all'antica*.²² The reader of this Aesop would know from the start that he had made contact with an ancient writer. But the reader of Gherardo di Giovanni's Florentine Aesop of the same period, now in the Spencer Collection of the New York Public Library, would have learned exactly the reverse. He would have seen Aesop portrayed as a modern (and a well-fed one, to boot). And he would have seen Aesop's human and animal characters depicted in the most up-to-date terms, settings and clothing. They moved through a Tuscan landscape, inhabiting Florentine shops and bedrooms, hunting outside the walls of a city dominated by the Duomo. Even a wart-hog sharpens his tusks on a modern rotary grindstone. Only the gods seem

ancient – naked, white and equipped with the proper attributes. And even they mingle and speak with Tuscan men and women. The result, as visually satisfying as it is anachronistic, is a spectacularly alluring evocation of an ancient world that hovers near the present and is hardly classical.²³ No wonder, then, that classical schemes of decoration did not always replace medieval ones in specific textual traditions.²⁴

Even the most humanistic books now remind us less of antique than of Renaissance canons of taste and elegance. Many Italian bookmen deliberately combined classical and contemporary, humanist and chivalric conventions. And in the many non-Italian environments from Dijon to Cracow where medieval and Renaissance, vernacular and Latin traditions converged like currents of different temperatures in an ocean, all sorts of whirlpools formed. New mixtures of classical and modern, cosmopolitan and vernacular features appeared in the margin of the script or print alike. The magnificent experiments in publication carried out for Maximilian I by Dürer and others – his hieroglyphic *Ehrenpforte*, the *Weisskunig*, the *Theuerdank* and the unfinished *Prayerbook* – offer a spectacular series of cases in point.²⁵

Like the interpreters, in short, the bookmen did not experience or present the ancient world as it really was. They re-created it in images that they found coherent and pleasing. No one would claim that their work was insignificant; it amounted, indeed, to an aesthetic revolution in the processing and presentation of literary texts.²⁶ But it also amounted as much to an imaginative construction of a lost paradise as to a historical re-creation of a lost society. And Machiavelli's two ways of meeting his classics, as little octavo love poets and as grand, austere folio statesmen, in the dreamy peace of the countryside and in the engaged intellectual activity of the *studiolo*, both reflect the economics and aesthetics of Renaissance publishing.

How, then, do we move from the varieties and vagaries of individual experience to the normal conditions of humanist reading? How can we identify what really changed and what remained stable in the world of the book? Only a wide range of complementary investigations can yield the information we seek. We must study the tastes and follow the activities of the middlemen who chose the texts and defined the physical forms of the humanist books that would become most popular.²⁷ We must enter the schoolroom and listen to the weary chanting of master and schoolboys as they grind their way through set texts. Only thus can we identify the particular hard-won skills with which humanists were trained to approach any classical or classicizing book. Finally, we must follow some individual humanists into their studies and watch them actually using their books. Only thus, in the end, will we come to understand either the physical form in which the humanists embodied

the texts that meant most to them or the intellectual tools by which they extracted meanings from them – not to mention the interaction among these. Though we must pay a high price of entry to these scenes from a lost past, we may hope for rich rewards. We may even gain a new understanding of the forces that shaped reading in the last age when European intellectuals saw books as the principal source of facts and ideas.

Meeting the Middlemen: Cartolai, Printers and Readers

Books are not the result of parthenogenesis. Entrepreneurs and merchants hired and instructed the scribes, typesetters and illuminators who produced them. And those who dominated the economics of publishing also had much to do with the identity and physical form of the books that the humanist public read. This simple set of facts – which obviously holds true for the age of printed books – also holds for the age of manuscripts that preceded it. On the other hand, customers also shaped the products they bought – both in the normal sense that the bookmen tried to provide what they wanted and, as we shall see, in a more thoroughgoing sense as well.

Historians have tended to model the transformation of the world of books by printing on the later history of the Industrial Revolution. A craft system of production, in which each book is designed and executed for a single customer, is replaced by an industrial system. Wholesale supersedes retail; uniform mass production replaces the artisanal techniques of the scribes. The book thus becomes the first of many works of art to be altered fundamentally by mechanical reproduction. Its reader now confronts not a warmly personal object whose script, illuminations and binding he has chosen, but a coldly impersonal one whose physical form has been determined in advance by others. The emotional charge the book carries as an object comes from its place in the owner's personal experience, from the memories that it calls up, more than from its own physical character.²⁸ Some contemporaries, like the *cartolaio* Vespasiano da Bisticci, deplored these developments. He denounced the ugly, short-lived products of the press, which seemed to him unworthy of places in a really great library. Others, like Erasmus, delighted in them. Even Ptolemy Philadelphus, he wrote, could not match the services to learning rendered by Aldo Manuzio. Where the great king had built a single library that was eventually destroyed, Aldo was building a 'library without walls' which could reach any reader and survive any cataclysm. Both sides agreed that printing fundamentally transformed reading; or so, at least, historians have often told us.²⁹

This long-accepted story omits a good many vital facts. The stationers, or *cartolai*, of Renaissance Italy, as R. H. Rouse and M. Rouse have now shown, stood as squarely as the printers would between ancient authors and modern readers. They shaped the experience of texts for the vast majority of the reading public.³⁰ The *cartolai* dominated the production and sale of manuscript books in the early fifteenth century; after 1450 they often collaborated with, and sometimes became, printers. Like other late medieval and Renaissance entrepreneurs, they worked on a grand scale. They bought up large supplies of paper or vellum – normally the most expensive item in book production. They hired scribes and illuminators, and chose the texts the craftsmen worked on. And they often produced multiple copies of individual works, not because customers had requested them, but in order to stock their shops for retail sales. True, the *cartolai* did not anticipate the book fairs of the age of print. In other respects, however, they laid down the paths that printers would follow. They created books in large quantity and on speculation. They advertised their wares systematically, and fought off competition from unregulated outsiders, just as the printers would.³¹ Above all, they worked with their employees and their customers to create a canon of the books that most deserved readers and a vision of the physical forms these should take.

The Rouses show that the *cartolai* not only chose which texts to reproduce, but also arranged for many of the illuminations which gave them their stamp of classicism. The most splendid of these they provided on commission for individuals who had requested them. The grand architectural frontispieces of the great Renaissance manuscripts in Urbino and elsewhere, in which authors, scholars and patrons, carefully posed in classical settings, introduce the texts, were specially ordered. Some of the most creative painters in Italy, like Botticelli, illuminated manuscripts. Other forms of decoration, however, were produced wholesale. The *cartolai* provided dozens of their products with a 'mass-produced, almost assembly-line sort of frontispiece ... *bianchi girari* frontispieces, comprised of a two-, three- or four-quarter frame made of intricately interwoven white vine-stem, usually with two putti at the bottom supporting a wreath left blank for a heraldic device'.³² The fact that the wreaths or roundels remained blank shows that the decorations were as ready-made as the texts they preceded. The individual owner would have his arms inserted in these highlighted spaces when he bought the book. But the general presentation of the book – and the general appropriateness of the characteristic Renaissance decoration *all'antica* to high classical texts – were determined by the businessmen who paid for them, not the readers who consumed them. Obviously, then, the printers who left space for similar vine-stem decorations in their

mass-produced products – or emulated the *cartolai* by leaving initials to be filled in for each owner by the illuminator – merely made their own the practices of the entrepreneurs of the age of manuscripts – just as they hired the same scribes to decorate the printed books who had once performed that service for manuscripts.³³

Rich evidence shows that the *cartolai* made conscious choices in these questions of taste. No text reveals more about the attitudes of bookmen than Vespasiano's memoirs, that vivid collection of biographical sketches which helped to inspire Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Vespasiano usually figures in histories of the book as a die-hard reactionary, a lover of fine individual books and hater of print. He recalled with pride that Federigo of Montefeltro's library at Urbino consisted entirely of manuscripts: 'In quella libreria i libri tutti sono belli in superlativo grado, tutti iscritti a penna, e non v'è ignuno a stampa, a che se ne sarebbe vergognato.'³⁴ And he appears as an entrepreneur only in one famous case: that of the library of Cosimo de' Medici, which he produced regardless of expense in only twenty-two months, hiring forty-five scribes to do the work. He seems a nostalgic character, obsessed like a Renaissance Chesterton or Belloc with an imagined past – a clean city made noisy only by the songs of happy artisans doing good work for the love of God.

In fact, however, these versions of Vespasiano rest on a very limited selection of his statements about the world of the book. He painted a picture with much harder edges, a collective portrait of sharp characters operating in a competitive, profit-minded literary market-place, where frequent bulletins identified the level of each writer's stock on the exchange of reputations. He also insisted, still more significantly, that he (and other *cartolai*) could spot a potential bestseller – and that their intervention could be crucial in the career of book and author. Of Sozomeno of Pistoia's reworking of the Chronicle of Eusebius and Jerome, for example, he remarks that after producing a really excellent piece of work, Sozomeno 'non si curava darne copia'. Fortunately, Vespasiano intervened: 'Sollecitato e confortato da me, la dette; e fu di tanta riputazione, che la mandò per tutta Italia, e in Catalogna, e in Spagna, in Francia, in Inghilterra, e in corte di Roma.'³⁵ Even in the manuscript book trade, it took an intermediary with flair to perform the quintessential act of the gifted publisher: to identify the 'exciting' book whose potential the author or editor himself could not see.

Producing a successful book, moreover, did not only mean choosing a valuable text. Then as now, a book needed a proper apparatus and design to bring out its full potential. Vespasiano mentioned, for example, that the Florentine Francesco di Lapacino had seen the possible interest of a very rich but very difficult text: the *Geography* of Ptolemy, which

had been translated into Latin at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but had thereafter been ignored, since 'fu fatto il testo senza la pittura'. The Greek manuscripts, by contrast, were in a spectacular large format, with massive collections of splendid maps. Francesco took care 'di fare la pittura di sua mano', and to give the Latin equivalents of the Greek place names. He thus imposed on Ptolemy's great atlas what became its immensely popular canonical form: 'dal qual ordine sono usciti infiniti volumi che si sono di poi fatti, e ne sono andati infino in Turchia'.³⁶ Vespasiano knew, in short, that the format and splendour of the maps – rather than the Latin version of the text – gave Ptolemy's text its cachet. This was considerable; Vespasiano's atelier and others made it the chief coffee-table book of the Italian renaissance, as the many surviving luxury manuscripts of it – all quite useless from a scholarly standpoint – show. When Federigo of Montefeltro's young son Guido demonstrated his command of the *Geography*, showing that he could find any two places on the maps and recite the distance between them, he followed a cultural fashion that had begun in a *cartolaio's* shop.³⁷ No wonder that the printers soon followed Vespasiano's example, producing edition after edition that matched the manuscripts in size and elaboration – and that still depended, in the famous case of the Ulm editions of 1482 and 1486, on illustrators to colour each map by hand.³⁸

The intermediaries, then, helped to shape the experience of reading for all Renaissance intellectuals. And the intermediaries had pronounced preferences. They liked rich materials: Vespasiano showed the Florentines' characteristic expert eye for textures as he lingered over the gold brocade and scarlet cloth bindings of Federigo's books. He even spoke with enthusiasm of the fine 'lettera antica', 'carta di cavretto', illuminations and binding that Matteo Palmieri used for the unique copy of his heretical *Città di Vita*, which he had locked away until his death – a work which was – rightly, so Vespasiano thought – not published in the Renaissance.³⁹ The editors and printers imitated the *cartolai*; they put out limited editions printed on vellum for connoisseurs, as well as larger ones on paper for the ordinary market, and they hired the most skilled illuminators for special customers. Koberger must have been one of the first to have his own binder, who covered the boards of many copies of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* in vellum. In the mid-seventeenth century, Joan Blaeu offered 'the most expensive book that money could buy', his *Atlas maior*, with plates coloured or uncoloured, and in standard vellum with gilt tooling or a variety of special bindings in purple velvet and other precious fabrics.⁴⁰ The owners – who included a Barbary pirate, Admiral Michiel de Ruyter and the Sultan of Turkey – clearly appreciated this bibliographic treasure, as is clear from the splendid cabinets in which some of them housed their copies.

The intermediaries thus conditioned the customers whom they took most seriously to treat books in a certain way. On the one hand, they made clear that the external appearance of a book told a story about its content and its intended public. Just as an intellectual in 1991 brought one set of expectations to the stark white products of Gallimard and another to the elegantly lurid creations of Zone Books, so an intellectual in 1491 or 1511 brought different expectations to a book in humanistic or Gothic script, with or without commentary, in folio or octavo, splendidly illuminated or austere printed, produced by Vespasiano or by Aldo. Individual writers knew perfectly well that a particular physical form could ensure a market and prepare a reader for what they had written. Erasmus wrote to Aldo, as early as 1507, that an Aldine edition of his translations for Euripides would make him immortal, 'especially if printed in those little characters of yours, which are the most elegant in the world' – 'tuis excusae formulis . . . maxime minutioribus illis omnium nitidissimis'.⁴¹ A century and a half later, Nicolas Heinsius would plead with his printers, the Elzeviers, not to crowd his edition of Ovid into their favourite, and unreadably small, format.⁴² Both agreed, heartily, that format and typography mattered.

On the other hand, the *cartolai* and the printers who followed them also supported another range of practices – one far more alien to us than the previous set. They suggested that the properly educated reader would not simply buy a ready-made book and consume it *tel quel*. He would personalize it. In the first place, the educated buyer would normally have his own books bound. As we have seen, splendid or durable binding materials were the covering of choice for good books, and a well-educated reader knew that he must pay for these. Fine binding became a speciality – even an obsession – for Renaissance bookmen. The great collectors, from Federigo of Urbino to de Thou, encouraged the development of new styles of ornament and new methods for stamping these on leather and vellum. They employed famous artists to design intricate traceries for the leather-covered boards that protected their books. Patterns from ancient coins and medals often gave these a classical patina, and the owner's name or initials or motto, which often figured amid the classicizing ornament, identified the patron whose tastes were on display. The great man's book could certainly be told by its cover. And even plain men, paid scholars, considered it tasteless to keep a book in paper wrappers. 'I can't stand to read books unless they're bound' – so Joseph Scaliger commented as he made a rare exception to read a polemic against him and a friend by the Jesuit Serarius. The catalogue of his library, made for its sale by auction on 11 March 1609, confirms his statement. Of the almost 250 books designated as containing his marginal notes, not a single one figures in the

section of 'libri incompecti'.⁴³ The book was thus defined, from its entry into a public or an individual library, as both a precious object and a personal possession – the point at which a cultural and an individual style should intersect.⁴⁴

The cultivated reader, moreover, learned from those who produced his books to adorn their bodies as well as their carapaces. As we have seen, *cartolai* and printers alike assumed that a customer of standing would have his arms inserted in the front of a book. They also assumed that he would wish at least the opening pages of his text to illustrate its content in an appropriate way: with a framework of classical element or vine-leaves, with characters from history, myth or modern times that illuminated its content. The most discerning customers lavished resources on the production of an appropriate visual setting for their texts. When Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga had a Greek and Latin text of the *Iliad* written for him in 1477, the scribe inserted the first page of the Latin into a huge and splendid architectural frame. The top of this, divided into three parts, contained three scenes from the poem separated by pilasters – and thus gave the reader a more vivid foretaste of the pleasures to come than the summary of Book I that also preceded the text could.⁴⁵ Sixtus IV's copy of Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, translated into Latin by Theodore Gaza, advertised its contents even more spectacularly. Aristotle, wearing a rich robe and a splendid tall hat, appears at the start of the text. He sits writing at a desk, in front of a curved wall flanked by columns. Before him appear the animals he will describe in the text – including a nude man and woman and a stately unicorn.⁴⁶ Even the oldest of manuscripts might need illumination to make them seem really antique. When the canons of the chapter of S. Pietro gave the unique (and famous) ninth-century Orsini manuscript of Plautus to Leo X, they took care to embed the opening of the text in rich classicalizing decorations, which were executed on strips of parchment that were then glued to the first two leaves.⁴⁷

Evidently the patrons learned their lessons well. And the vision of antiquity which they liked to enter – like that of the *cartolai* – had nothing in common with the austere world of white sculptures and noble simplicity that the neo-classicists of a later century would admire. Where antiquity was concerned, too much decoration was barely enough. Rich colours and elaborate textures defined the harmonious cities and Arcadian landscapes that the remainder of the text would evoke by its content. This taste for elaborate opening illustrations – like that for rich bindings – not only survived, but flourished wildly in the age of printing. The printed title page could, of course, offer as elaborate a pictorial stage setting for the text as a drawn one. Drawn or printed book markers – Dürer produced these for his friend Pirckheimer

– could make a book as personal a possession as a coat of arms in the first initial. And sometimes individual readers went still further to impose personal stamp on the start of an ancient book. Thus Willibald Pirckheimer had Dürer illuminate the opening page of his Aldine Theocritus with a spectacular illustration of pastoral life, keyed detail by detail to the text.⁴⁸ Patron and artist – like *cartolaio* and craftsman – could shape the impression a text made by designing these elaborate gateways.

Sometime the collaborations between writer, reader and artist became more systematic and intricate. One famous case is Sebastian Brant's edition of Virgil, in which a sequence of illustrations served as the most striking commentary on the text. This seems familiar enough; we still produce and consume illustrated editions of the classics. But other cases have a period flavour. Holbein, for example, adorned an annotated edition of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* with a series of comic sketches, some literally keyed to the text, others more imaginative. Myconius showed these to Erasmus, and recorded the author's responses to the artist's responses to the text.⁴⁹ The book, as Sandra Hindman has shown, thus became not the model for an illustrated edition, but the deposit of a unique effort to capture all the implications, explicit and implicit, literal and unintended, of a notoriously polyphonic text. And other efforts to combine text and pictures, narrative and commentary, also seem to reflect the effort to produce not a model for multiple copies to be sold, but a treasure to be shared with a few particularly discerning friends.⁵⁰

Finally, the *cartolai* and their customers developed what has ever since been the dominant attitude of the rare book trade, but has been forgotten by the retailers of ordinary new books. Sellers and buyers agreed that the transfer of books is a terribly important and valuable activity, a dramatic transaction, cultural as well as financial, which requires almost the same level of taste and knowledge as writing them.⁵¹ Certainly Renaissance readers took the occasions when they acquired their books very seriously. They often recorded in the books the places, dates and circumstances of acquisition. And they expanded these originally short, limited entries into what amounted to partial diaries, writing themselves into the margins and endpapers of the books they had chosen so carefully. Petrarch drew up a list of the books that meant most to him ('libri mei peculiare'); he used many of them as the parts of a diary in which he could vent not only his love for Laura but also more mundane matters, like his irritation at his peasants.⁵² The Nuremberg scholar Hieronymus Muenzer, to take a less celebrated case, noted that he had imported one of his medical books from Venice in 1478, another from Bologna in 1490; still another he had bought during his own

Italian journey while studying in Pavia in 1477. Muenzer too moved outside the realm of acquisition into that of unrelated anecdote, as when he recorded in a manuscript that he had met the man who wrote it for the first time 'after 32 years', with great pleasure, on 26 April 1501.⁵³ The book, bought with such care, dressed with such meticulous attention to detail, became far more than a mere text. It served as a record of one's life, a chart of one's network of literary connections, and a confidant for one's feelings.

The book that a humanist read, whether manuscript or printed, was something both familiar and alien to us. It usually originated in mass production; but it then underwent a metamorphosis and took on individual form, as the owner fused his own vision with that of the entrepreneur who produced it. In the shop, it usually sold for a modest amount, and stood next to other copies of the same work that resembled it closely in content and layout.⁵⁴ But in the owner's hands even a printed book often became as rich, strange and valuable as any manuscript. The humanist approached his book, in the first instance, as the Californian teenager of the 1950s approached a car made in Detroit. He bought a product with a specific, vivid look, something that experts had designed to appeal to his tastes and desires. But he redesigned the product as he used it, changing the very look he appreciated, adding unique decorations, customizing the result of mass production. An active, even an artistic form of collaboration between consumer and producer was the norm. This relation between owner and book would persist, in the upper orders of European society, for centuries. It lasted longer, indeed, than has our present relationship, in which we passively accept books in the form imposed on them by the factory. And it was created by extravagantly gifted entrepreneurs, whose names we often forget, as well as by the sympathetic collectors whose calf- and vellum-bound collections still line the shelves of our libraries and museums.

Meeting the Intermediaries: The Schoolmaster and the Reader

In 1435 Ambrogio Traversari visited Vittorino da Feltre's school near Mantua. He heard the young Gonzaga prince, then fifteen years old, recite 200 Latin verses on the emperor's entrance to Mantua, so well that Traversari 'found it hard to believe that Virgil pronounced book 6 of the *Aeneid* more gracefully before Augustus'.⁵⁵ Around the same time, Guarino of Verona wrote a famous letter to his pupil Leonello d'Este: 'Whatever you read,' it begins,

have ready a notebook . . . in which you can write down whatever you choose and list the materials you have assembled. Then when you decide to review the passages that struck you, you won't have to leaf through a large number of pages. For the notebook will be at hand like a diligent and attentive servant to provide what you need . . . Now you may find it too boring or too much of an interruption to copy everything down in such a notebook. If so, some suitable and well-educated boy – many such can be found – should be assigned this task.⁵⁶

These two texts reveal some of the élite learning and professional teaching strategies of the Renaissance – a set of varied and sometimes curious techniques that left a stamp on every educated reader.

Vittorino's young prince recited his text. The humanist had trained him to see ancient literature on the page as the script for an oral performance, one that required a trained memory and enunciation. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the aural qualities of written texts would continue to be central to the ways that students encountered and adults appreciated them. Young boys like Piero de' Medici boasted of the large quantity of lines they had memorized and could recite.⁵⁷ A rarer bird, the educated young woman Alessandra Scala, won warm praise for her ability to recite the lines of Euripides' *Electra* with what seemed to her audience native Attic charm.⁵⁸ And as late as the end of the sixteenth century, great scholars like Justus Lipsius and Joseph Scaliger won astonished praise for their ability to produce classical texts, impeccably pronounced, from memory. Lipsius offered to recite the entire text of Tacitus while a dagger was held to his throat, to be plunged in if he went wrong; Scaliger translated a whole book of Martial into Greek, working from memory, as he lay in bed. The humanist read a text in the first instance, then, for the formal qualities that made its wording memorable. Metre, alliteration, particularly striking combinations of sounds, became the landmarks of a text mapped out aurally rather than visually. The humanist met the text most intimately not as he interpreted the words on paper or vellum, but as he rolled their sounds sensuously between his lips. Petrarch started something important when he fell in love with the sound of Latin as written by Cicero and Virgil.

But the sense of the text also, obviously, had a vital place in its interpretation. To this the student gained access by staged exercises. In the first instance, the teacher would paraphrase the classical document in question, line by line. Prose and verse, philosophy and history, all were ground up and repackaged as dry, if correct, Latin narrative. Only then would the teacher go through the same passages for a second time, more slowly. On this trip he would identify historical individuals and facts, explain myths and doctrines, and reveal the logic of tropes, using

the many problems that came up as the pretexts for digression into every imaginable subject. The student thus learned that each text was not only a straightforward story but a complex puzzle, the deeper logic of which the teacher had to unlock with a whole pocketful of skeleton keys.

Classical texts printed for colleges in sixteenth-century France and elsewhere make clear the sequence and relation of these processes. The printers put a metal bar between each two lines of type, producing a thick white space between the printed lines. Here the student could enter the teacher's running Latin summary. The printers also left wide margins, and in these – especially in the earlier portions of their texts – students would record the more detailed, technical comments, usually in a hand so neat as to reveal that they were making fair copies of earlier notes in rougher form. These routines long persisted. When P. D. Huet prepared his series of Latin texts for the dauphin after 1670, he equipped them with both a running paraphrase, or *ordo verborum*, and a more detailed variorum commentary.⁵⁹

The range of practices that the printers codified was hardly new. Neither was the belief which underpinned them – that a text had to be broken up for schoolboys into hundreds of smaller segments, each to be discussed independently. One can find both general precedents and specific sources for the methods of the humanist commentator in the schools of late antique Rome, of Byzantium and of the twelfth-century Latin Renaissance.⁶⁰ The basic mental skills that one learned to apply to a classical literary text thus remained basically similar over a period that is almost too long to be called *la longue durée*.

The young reader amassed a great deal of history, mythology and geography as he picked his way across the curriculum texts, twenty lines a day. More important, he developed an attitude, and mastered a set of tools. Michael Baxandall has argued that by identifying perceptual skills that had to be learned with great effort, we can reconstruct a period eye – the way in which identifiable individuals were trained by their culture to see works of art.⁶¹ Similarly, and more directly, we can use the practices of the humanist school to re-create a period style in reading. Hundreds of commentaries converge on certain basic interests and techniques. The young reader learned to understand writers' choices of words and images as instances of the rules of formal rhetoric. He learned to search for allusions, to treat any major text as an echo chamber in which the words before him interfered with and altered the subtexts that the writer had expected to share with his similarly educated readers. All humanist writers expected their readers to be masters of this art of decoding. When Dirck Volckertzoon Coornhert attacked Justus Lipsius for recommending that governments execute

contumacious heretics, Lipsius felt deeply injured. To be sure, he had urged the authorities to burn and cut, 'Ure et seca'. But, he pointed out, he had expected his readers to recognize that he was using a phrase from Cicero's *Philippics*, which referred not specifically to the stake, but generally to the need to use serious remedies, like surgery, for serious ills.⁶² What made these practices novel, in the Renaissance, was not their content but their audience. The humanists insisted on teaching young laymen to apply them, and claimed that such an education was more appropriate than a scholastic one for young ecclesiastics as well. But these changes have to do with the social history of readers – and education – rather than the history of reading as a cultural form. The actual formal skills with which a schoolboy learned to dissect a text, laying bare its muscles, nerves and bones, were classical ones; and to that extent the methods of humanism were as much a classical revival as the canon of texts they were applied to.

The main technical innovation we can identify came when the student passed from construal and interpretation to the higher task of application – putting the text to use. Guarino's young aristocrat, like those at Vittorino's school, read the classics. But Guarino told him to do far more than pronounce his syllables clearly. He should find another young man, one who was a scholar by necessity rather than by choice, and ask him to digest and process the classical material for re-use. Reading thus became a social rather than a private activity – a game rather like cricket, carried out by collaboration between a gentleman and a player. Often teachers – like Guarino himself – eliminated the intermediaries and provided their own predigested introductions to the classics, which naturally became the core of Renaissance pedagogy.⁶³

The young prince, nobleman or cleric did not encounter the ancients by plunging unaided into their books, to sink or swim. Rather, a humanist expert packaged the ancients for him, processing them and transforming them from jagged, unmanageable, sometimes dangerous texts into uniform, easily retrievable, reproducible bits of utterance and information. This form of instruction rendered the ancient texts reliably useful; it also gave the young reader a model he could imitate if he set out to do the same job of processing in later years, when reading on his own. It took place in classrooms across Europe; and by the early sixteenth century some of the most innovative teachers were providing the same sort of guidance in the print, creating an imaginary classroom far larger than an individual class could really be. At this point the separate histories of ideas, of the book and of reading converge suggestively.

Consider the *Adages* of Erasmus, that vast collection of proverbs and commentary which reached its canonical, though not its final, form in the Aldine edition of 1508. This book grew from an original short

collection of 800-odd Latin sayings, printed in Paris in 1500, to a vast heap of almost 4,000 essays, some long enough to be printed independently, on Greek and Latin aphorisms of the most diverse origins and nature, drawn from the whole range of Greek literature and lexicography. Despite its formidable size, the *Adages* became one of the best-sellers of the northern Renaissance, as the records of publishers and the library lists of the many students who died in sixteenth-century Cambridge both show. Its neatly potted morals taught the learned young many sound lessons in morality and Latinity, all packaged in a compressed and effective form. Readers of the *Adages* could urge a friend who tended to irritate his elders and betters *ne ignem gladio fodias*, 'not to pole the fire with a sword'; they could encourage a friend dissatisfied with his lot to believe that *Spartam nactus es, hanc orna*, 'You've got your job, now make the best of it'; they could warn a friend unable to finish a dissertation that every scholar and artist must learn to take *manum de tabula*, 'his hand from the picture'; and they could warn beligerent young kids that *dulce bellum inexpertis*, 'war is great fun to those who haven't tried it'.⁶⁴

So much is well known. What is less well known, however, is that the *Adages* were designed to serve not only as an aid to the production of good Latin prose, but also as a manual of techniques for reading – and a collection of predigested texts to apply them to. Erasmus not only compiled lapidary sayings; he identified their sources in the classics, tracing the alterations they had undergone in the course of Greek and Latin literary history. And he embedded them in a framework as elegant and effective as the drawn and painted frameworks of the humanist manuscript: an exposition that ensured their utility for modern, Christian readers.

One exemplary tag, by Erasmus's own account, is *Festina lente*, 'Hasten slowly', which he discussed at length. This adage began, he explained, as an oxymoronic twist on a normal Greek phrase found in Aristophanes' *Knights*: *speude tacheos*, 'hasten quickly', that is 'hurry up'. Though clearly compressed, it contained a wealth of meaning. It taught a lesson that princes above all needed to learn: that haste and wilfulness caused more harm than good. Erasmus used this simple lesson in the generally Stoic ethics of humanism as the peg on which to hang an extraordinary range of classical materials. He showed its application to a properly moral reading of a basic poetic text: the beginning of Book I of the *Iliad*. Here Agamemnon, deprived of his female slave Chryseis, takes Achilles' female slave Briseis in return:

Homer appears to have portrayed Agamemnon with a too great slackness and supineness of mind, the *bradeos* ['slowly'] part of the proverb, so that

no high deed or show of spirit is recorded of him except that he flew into a rage over the removal of Chryseis, and stole Briseis from Achilles. To Achilles, on the other hand, he attributes undisciplined impulses, that is the *speude* ['hasten'] part; unless it is an example of both ['hasten slowly'] when he draws his sword in council to fall upon the king, and is persuaded by Pallas to limit his indignation to violent abuse.⁶⁵

From mortality in literature Erasmus passed; with no evident strain, to morality in history. Fabius Maximus, he pointed out, was one of the few historical heroes who had won immortal fame by hastening slowly. And those two model emperors, Augustus and Vespasian, had made this proverb one of their favourites, Vespasian had even stamped it, in hieroglyphic form, on his coins: these showed an anchor with a dolphin wrapped around it, expressing the same oxymoronic notion of speed and slowness combined as the original phrase.

From adage to hieroglyph, from the crystallized verbal pith of morality to its physical embodiment, was never a long journey in the Renaissance. Erasmus made it with lightning speed, finding in this single hieroglyph the pretext for a long digression on the pictorial writing of the Egyptians. He collected information about the hieroglyphs from a number of sources, notably the then unpublished Greek text of Horapollon. Like a good humanist, he traced these texts back to their original source, a lost work by the Stoic Chaeremon.⁶⁶ But he said more about the nature of hieroglyphs than their history. They both caused pleasure and earned respect, he explained, by their use of the real qualities of natural objects to teach moral and physical lessons. They were a model of good pedagogy: though sharp and memorable, the hieroglyph required its readers to work, at least a little, to interpret it:

the Egyptian soothsayers and priests . . . thought it wrong to exhibit the mysteries of wisdom to the vulgar in open writing, as we do; but they expressed what they thought worthy to be known by various symbols, things or animals, so that not everybody could interpret them. But if anyone deeply studied the qualities of each object, and the special nature and power of each creature, he would at length, by comparing and guessing what they symbolised, understand the meaning of the riddle.⁶⁷

Festina lente, with its perfect visual embodiment in the natural properties of the dolphin and the anchor, seemed to Erasmus a piece of 'the mysteries of the most ancient philosophy'.

To explicate a hieroglyph, finally one needed to know the natural properties of its constituents, the creatures whose images made up the symbolic vocabulary of the Egyptian sages. Accordingly, Erasmus explicated at length on the swiftness of the dolphin, quarrying stories from

that beloved omnium gatherum of misinformation, Pliny's *Natural History* (again, he took care to identify Pliny's source, Aristotle):

Its extraordinary speed can be judged from this, that though its mouth is set far apart from its snout, as it were in the middle of the belly, and this must necessarily greatly delay it in hunting down fish, since it must snatch at them in a twisted and curved-back position, nevertheless there is hardly any fish which can escape its swiftness.⁶⁸

Erasmus thus transformed a single axiom into the strong, if slender, backbone to which he affixed a highly selective reconstruction of ancient culture as whole. He made rhetoric and epic, history and natural philosophy, all teach the same moral. He had Greek and Roman, Egyptian and Christian intellectuals all send the same literary and artistic message. He gave implicit and explicit lessons on how to detect allusions in classical texts. And he used the decoding of the hieroglyph, the discovery of the inner message beneath the apparently difficult surface, as the dominant metaphor for a reading of the classics which always looked for acceptably Christian senses under the surface of pagan writings. One essay – one tiny fragment of a vast and vastly influential book – reveals the shape of the larger enterprise.

Erasmus's work was by no means idiosyncratic. Throughout the sixteenth century, in fact, other northern intellectuals set out to organize and frame basic elements of the classical heritage for students.⁶⁹ Some of these works were fairly elementary, like the *Officina* (Workshop) of the Nivernais schoolteacher Ravius Textor. This provided just what the title promised for the growing lad to adorn his compositions: working materials. Textor assembled short passages from ancient history, and docketed them, not to inform the boy about antiquity, but to provide cases in point of moral and immoral behaviour. The reader encountered not the mountainous Roman history of Livy, hard to scale and sometimes terrifying to contemplate, but a neat and diverting gallery of stories, organized by associative principles easy enough to discern. Men who killed themselves, men who died in latrines, men who were skinned, men who were suffocated, women who died in childbirth, and men who were beheaded follow one another in a Latinate Grand Guignol, unified not by the historical continuity of the past, but the pedagogical and rhetorical needs of the present.⁷⁰ The most dramatic and stately works of Latin prose were butchered to make a schoolboy's holiday – or rather to facilitate a schoolboy's work of gaining acquaintance with the range of classical anecdote that a learned person needed to know. This form of contact with a classical world, tamed by its very presentation, proved long-lasting; one of its best-known species took

root in the Jesuit colleges of the *ancien régime*, where students read anthologies instead of straight texts, and encountered a castrated – or at least bowdlerized – Martial.

Other efforts to frame the ancient texts for modern use showed far higher intellectual ambitions. As the available texts multiplied and the question of how to read them became more pressing, scholars sought to provide elaborate and systematic arts of reading. Jean Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, for example, offered a method for the reading of all historical texts, ancient and modern. Instead of providing an anthology, Bodin instructed the student to make his own, systematically gutting his books for information about which historians he could believe and which constitutions could work for which peoples. His influence was pervasive. Montaigne, in his *Essays*, both responds to the questions Bodin raises and reveals that he had made some sketchy notes on historians of the sort Bodin prescribed. Yet even Bodin sought not to discover the truth about the past as it really was, but to represent it as instructive. He knew, for example, that history was really philosophy taught by concrete examples. And he taught his student to read it in that light, using marginal symbols (*CH* for *consilium honestum*, *CTV* for *consilium turpe utile*) to force each story of a speech or battle into a highly traditional framework.⁷¹

These textbooks and manuals had a pervasive impact, one less dramatic but far more widely diffused than the teaching of any single master. They continued, and spread across Europe, what in the fifteenth century had been the work of individual masters like Guarino. The young men of the Renaissance, in the main, read their classics at first in a single way: not to search for ancient wisdom as it really was, naked and challenging, but to admire antique *sapientia* as set out in a sort of printed museum – divided into rooms, framed and labelled in ways that predetermined the meaning of the relics displayed.

The general enterprise of modernization that Erasmus and others undertook was hardly new. James Hankins has recently argued that the similar tactics of Decembrio had made it possible for fifteenth-century Milanese intellectuals to read and revere Plato – precisely because they could not see how alien his ideas and values were.⁷² Ancient Neoplatonists had done the same for Homer long before, making him palatable to modern readers with a grounding in philosophy.⁷³ But the mechanically reproduced, universally visible frames of the Erasmian *Adages* and similar works, with their tight union of interpretation and interpreted material, fixed the nature and extent of the sixteenth-century schoolboy's contact with antiquity as a whole. And it domesticated – for most young readers, most of the time – what might otherwise have been the challenge of a non-Christian history and morality. Far more young men

in sixteenth-century Europe knew the story of 'Pandora's box' from Erasmus's moralizing account of it than had read the original, less domesticated, account of Pandora's jar in Hesiod.⁷⁴

The humanist's packaging of ancient authorities, ultimately, shaped readers' expectations about important texts in two other vital ways. In the first place, by early in the sixteenth century the humanists had managed to remove many of the medieval commentaries they disliked from distribution. But they did so not by doing away with commentaries altogether, as some modern sources suggest, but by replacing outdated commentaries with modern ones. The glosses of humanist teachers, usually offered first as lessons in classrooms, then rewritten for print, twined themselves like the illuminators' vines around the texts of popular poets like Ovid, Virgil and Juvenal, of major prose texts like Boethius's *Consolatio* and Cicero's *De inventione*, and even around the Bible itself. These commentaries appeared in humanistic, not Gothic, script. They attacked trivial and technical problems, problems of all sorts, often so profusely that they threatened to drown the original texts. And despite the efforts of individual critics, like Poliziano, to stamp out their weed-like growth, they flourished throughout the sixteenth century, and were still being harvested in the variorum editions of the century to come.

The humanist reader in the age of print, accordingly, did not expect his classical text to arrive on his desk neat. The more important its author and subject, the deeper it should be plunged in banks of commentary. Eventually, humanist editors and readers decided that non-classical Latin literary texts also needed glosses; there was no other way to assert their literary claims. Badius Ascenius commented on Book XIII of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which was written by the humanist Maffeo Vegio; Gerardus Listrius commented at length on Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, which looks in its glossed form exactly like a classical text, and was often printed or bound with genuinely ancient works. Paradoxically, then, the humanist text had returned to the position of the medieval *auctoritas*. Its authoritative glosses were less opaque than the medieval ones; not a Gothic wall, but a classicizing tracery of vines. But the new commentary imprisoned and shaped the text as powerfully as the old ones had. Wreathed in humanist exegesis, the text seemed important not only for its own sake, but also because it was tied once again to a system of instruction and interpretation.

The humanists, finally, made one other vital innovation. Traditional teachers had always stressed the unique virtues and excellences of their authors. Medieval and early Renaissance lecture courses on an ancient writer normally began with a substantial, if stereotypical, account of his life. This set his works into a dramatic historical context – often a

fanciful one, to be sure – stressing his high birth, good deeds and close relations with great men. The humanist, by contrast, tended to dramatize his own life and the circles he himself had moved in. Erasmus, in the *Adages*, lavishly and mendaciously celebrated all the services that Aldo and his merry men had offered him as he worked in their printing shop. He and his associates, like Vives, made their annotated editions of individual texts the occasions for all sorts of dramatic tale-telling about their discoveries of manuscripts, their collaboration with great men of an earlier day, their virtue and their energy.⁷⁵

The humanist text celebrated its editor and his benefactors as eloquently as its author. And it led the reader to look – much as the modern reader does in a critical study of a major writer – for two sorts of narrative in a single book. An annotated text naturally had as its core a classical tale told by an ancient, which might be poetic or historical or philosophical. Alongside that, however, it wove a double modern narrative by the editor, which might be dutifully rhetorical and philological in its manifest content, but was often alluringly autobiographical in its subtext. Annotated copies of such books reveal the eagerness with which readers – especially those in remote places – scrutinized them for evidence not only about the ancient world, but also about the modern literary circles that had graced the Florence of the Medici or the Louvain of Erasmus. Nothing fascinated the young Lucas Fruterius more in Muret's edition of Catullus, for example, than the material it offered about the grand literary quarrels of Poliziano and Marullus and the more recent polemics of Muret and Pier Vettori.⁷⁶ The humanist commentary became the warrant that a text belonged to the high culture of its day; it also linked that text, as firmly as the glosses of Accursius had, to a specific literary and pedagogical regime.

In the Study

Reading, of course, did not end with schooling, as Machiavelli's case shows. Mature individuals could make the technical skills they had mastered in school serve entirely unpredictable purposes. The young Johannes Secundus would prove capable of reading Catullus, and a middle-aged Machiavelli of reading Cicero, in ways that would have shocked any schoolmaster.⁷⁷ Secundus's *Basia* and Machiavelli's *Prince* – like many other high literary works, from More's *Utopia* to Montaigne's *Essays* – self-evidently could not have been written had their authors not smashed the humanist frame and made off with the ancients, whom they interpreted with freedom and brilliance. These

elaborate, but implicit, interpretations of classic texts are too complex, too varied and sometimes too removed from the experience of reading to be described in detail here. But any full history of reading in Renaissance Europe will have to confront them and integrate them with other forms of evidence.

A second qualifying point is also vital. Renaissance readers bought and appreciated a very wide range of texts, some of them in no sense classical or humanistic. Cosimo de' Medici amused himself in two ways in his spare time: by cultivating his olive trees and reading that medieval classic, Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*.⁷⁸ Federigo da Montefeltro loved the highly scholastic Aristotelian commentaries of Donato Acciaiuoli. He made his library an encyclopaedic collection, which included substantial holdings in theology and other non-humanistic fields. And he made his son memorize not only a new text in a new form, Ptolemy's *Geography*, but also that most medieval of *auctoritates*, a historiated Bible.⁷⁹ Giannozzo Manetti read the Hebrew Bible as a humanist, using the best tools of philology to restore the original sense. But he could also read it in the utterly traditional way of the mendicant preacher, as when he found reason in it to predict a terrible fate for a dishonest businessman: 'Io ho voltate molte carte della Scrittura Santa a' mia di,' he warned; 'tieni questo per certo, che tu hai a essere punito, tu e tua famiglia, d'una punizione che sarà di natura, che sarà esemplo a tutta questa città.'⁸⁰ Savonarola – whose public use of the Bible to attack his enemies fascinated Machiavelli – would not have quoted the text differently.⁸¹

These matters can only be touched on here. In a volume of this kind, moreover, we obviously cannot consider another vital set of data in the records: the many surviving catalogues of personal and public libraries. Like the many varieties of implicit reading embedded in works of literature, the manifold resources that weighed down the humanists' bookshelves require a different and more extensive kind of study.⁸² But we can set out and consider evidence relevant to some more circumscribed questions: the circumstances in which mature humanists read, the preparations they made for doing so, and the ways in which the intellectual and the aesthetic came together in their responses to the text.

The humanist sometimes read casually, as we do now. But often, as Machiavelli's letter to Vettori shows, reading in the Renaissance resembled dancing in the same period: an activity governed by a highly complex code of rules and demanding continual attentiveness. In the first place, the humanist read with pen in hand, writing as he moved through his text. Sometimes he had no choice; for often the only way to obtain a book was to copy it. Since the beginnings of Renaissance

scholarship in the eighteenth century, scholars have known that Poggio and Niccoli copied the texts they procured from monastic libraries. They had no other way to possess the new texts or give their associates access to them. But it has only recently been discovered that through the second half of the fifteenth century at least, humanists and *cartolai* copied their texts as often as they bought them. Often, to the astonishment of modern editors, they turn out to have copied not manuscript but printed texts of the works they wanted. Of sixteen surviving manuscripts of the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, 'ten certainly and two probably derive from printed editions'; of thirty-one manuscripts of Calpurnius's *Eclogues*, six are copied from the 1471 edition by Sweynheym and Pannartz.⁸³ And throughout the sixteenth century, humanists often copied out whole Greek and Latin texts.

Modern scholars have often assumed that such activities were pursued for scholarly ends, with publication in view. The humanist copied, in other words, what he intended to edit. Frequently, this interpretation is perfectly sound; but sometimes it derives not from the evidence but from anachronistic assumptions. Writing, after all, was in itself a form of reading, a letter-by-letter homage to the power of the original. The beauty of the script – of which, as we have seen, all humanists were acutely conscious – made it appropriate to the task of appreciating a beautiful text. Trithemius urged that one could not master a text profoundly except by copying it, and many intellectuals far more modern than he shared this view.⁸⁴ Joseph Scaliger copied out a uniquely valuable codex of Petronius that belonged to his teacher of Roman law, the great collector Cujas. Modern students of the text of Petronius often berate Scaliger for the ineptitude with which he copied and the carelessness with which he adulterated his unique source with readings drawn from other sources – including printed books. In fact, however, he probably never meant to edit anything more than a few poems attributed to Petronius in the original manuscript. The full transcript, legibly written out in his splendid, informal book hand, was a personal possession, a unique text that he meant to enjoy himself. 'Je l'ayme mieux qu'un imprimé,' he remarked, indicating at once the value he set on his transcript and his lack of interest in reproducing it or producing a text based on it.⁸⁵ Just as the schoolboy might know his text word for word because he had memorized and recited it, the mature scholar often knew his because he had copied it out line by line – and enjoyed consulting it not in a form that he shared with others, but in that imposed by his own script as well as his own choice of readings.

The scholar also sharpened his nib for other, more analytical purposes. From Petrarch to Scaliger, scholars wrote in the margins of texts

that they had not copied. They compiled technical information; often, they systematically recorded the variant readings they found in other versions of the text. Angelo Poliziano, as is well known, hated the inaccuracy of the editions of the classics that came out in his time. But he also used them meticulously as working materials, filling their margins with textual and exegetical evidence compiled with passion and precision from a vast range of sources. At the ends of volumes he often emulated the Roman scholars of the fourth century AD, entering summary *subscriptions* which specified the places where and dates when he had worked, the texts he had used, and the names of the young men who had helped him.⁸⁶ Casaubon compiled in his copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* the damning list of coincidences between it and the Bible and other pagan texts that enabled him to prove it inauthentic.⁸⁷

Humanists also responded in writing to the literary and philosophical qualities of their texts. Petrarch's copies of Virgil, Augustine and many other authors mutated as he read and wrote in them into elaborate scripts, discussions between text and margin that sometimes involved several voices.⁸⁸ Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, humanists inscribed their reactions and interpretations in the margins and blank leaves of their texts; and they often did so with a degree of literary and artistic care that now seems remarkable.

Montaigne thought his summary evaluations of Plutarch and Guicciardini worthy to be included in his *Essays*. Scaliger used most of his books as tools, entering only information. But even he crossed out the whole text of one book that angered him, writing 'cacas' over and over in the margins, and took the time to dispute in correct and bookish Latin with another humanist commentator who provoked him, Melchior Guilandinus, inscribing carefully crafted marginal replies. Gabriel Harvey, whose vast, now-scattered library has been studied with care by G. C. Moore Smith, Virginia Stern and Walter Colman, filled the margins of his books with comments written out in a painstakingly elegant italic hand that became famous – especially among his enemies, who made fun of it. These recorded Harvey's reactions to the texts he read, explained his assessments of collateral sources, and often provided dramatic accounts of the occasions on which he had discussed the texts or heard them discussed or performed in public.⁸⁹

The presence of so many systematic annotations is deeply suggestive. Often, of course, it did mean that the articulate readers was preparing to publish something on the text in question. Scaliger's elaborate notes on Guilandinus were the first draft for an elaborate attack on him; Huet's notes in his copy of Scaliger's *Manilius* were the main source for his full-scale attack on Scaliger.⁹⁰ But annotation did not always serve these reassuringly familiar ends. Humanists often insisted on the

bindings and title pages of their books that they meant them to serve not only their needs but those of friends as well. 'Angeli Politiani et amicorum', 'A book that belongs to Angelo Poliziano and his friends' – some variant of this declaration of ownership occurs in dozen of cases in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, notably Harvey's.

If we examine the care that went into such men's annotation of their books, we may be led to take these formulas strictly and seriously. The humanist created in his book a unique record of his own intellectual development and of the literary circles he had moved in. He often did this, moreover, in a script so elaborately neat and decorative as to suggest that he considered his notes of permanent value. Perhaps whole libraries of such annotations were systematically assembled by men like Harvey, not with publication in view, but as a common reference for members of their circle. Certainly we know that collectors, by the late sixteenth century, prized and competed for printed books that bore the annotations of earlier scholars. The University of Leiden Library, for example, carefully decorated books and manuscripts that came from the library of Scaliger with a printed slip that identified their provenance – often incorrectly, since librarians and others tended to take any set of neat annotations as Scaliger's. Collectors like Huet loved and exhibited their *libri annotati*.

It was not easy to adorn dozens of books with autobiographical narratives, elaborate cross-referencing and thorough discussion of textual details. The humanist had to keep his books in order and to consult many of them at once; he needed to be able to retrieve data from a vast range of sources. By the late sixteenth century, a number of new devices had appeared to make this sort of literary work easier. In particular, the humanist could now use a book wheel – a large vertical wheel, carefully geared to turn slowly and stop whenever necessary. It carried books around on small rotating shelves like passengers in the cars of a ferris wheel. The humanist who owned one could sit quietly, as Ramelli says in his description of such a device, while working through a library of texts. These splendid machines, a number of which survive, were flanked and complemented by other devices in the most advanced libraries. Cujas, for example, had not only a wheel with which he could turn his vast collection of books, but a barber's chair in which he himself could turn rapidly from task to task in his study. Curiously, though, he worked without using any of these devices: 'Il étudioit le ventre contre terre, couché sur un tapis, ses livres autour de lui.'⁹¹ Evidently, then, reading in the Renaissance had something of the expensively dramatic quality that writing now possesses. The sophisticated reader needed a set of elaborate, expensive machines, and once in possession of them, he enjoyed the same advantage – or feeling of

advantage – over lesser readers that the possessor of the most up-to-date computer and printer now possesses. Like the computer owner, too, he sometimes used his clever devices not as practical tools that facilitated his work, but as expensive fetishes that imparted glamour to his occupation.

Reading, finally, whether private or public, was often directed to very concrete ends – political as well as intellectual ones. We began with Machiavelli reading history in private, in order to understand his fate. Later, of course, he would read history in public, in a standard Renaissance sense of the term: that is, he would give lectures on Livy to a group of Florentine patricians in the Rucellai gardens.⁹² In each case, the conversation with the ancient text had the same end in view: action, practical results, in the present. At the end of the sixteenth century, Gabriel Harvey was only one of many English intellectuals who were evidently paid to read historical texts with men of political influence. Harvey worked through Livy's description of Hannibal with Thomas Smith Jr before Smith went off to die in Ireland while establishing English control and protecting his family's investment. He worked through Livy's account of the origins of Rome with Sir Philip Sidney before Sidney went off on his embassy to the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II. And he probably designed his own, heavily annotated copy of Livy, in which he recorded these readings, as both a memorial to his personal efforts to make knowledge serve power and a source that he could draw from as his own career moved onwards. Harvey's case was hardly isolated; contemporaries singled out the lectures of Henry Cuffe, who read classical texts with Essex, as the inspiration of his doomed rebellion.⁹³ Hobbes himself would blame the Civil War on classically educated young men who had taken the republican political views of the Greek and Roman historians too zealously to heart. Evidently, reading the ancients could still be a move in the most up-to-date early modern politics. And that sort of reading, pragmatic rather than aesthetic, deserves a prominent and distinctive historical place in any account of the uses of the book in the Renaissance.

Huet: The End of a Tradition

By the middle of the seventeenth century, philosophers had begun to argue that reading alone could not yield certain knowledge about natural or human history. Descartes began his *Discourse on Method* by telling the story of his own disaffection with the humanist education he had received from the Jesuits. Reading about the past, he had learned,

could impart only a modest level of sophistication, which one could gain just as well from travel. The zealous reader, like the zealous tourist, learned that different peoples lived by different moral codes and regarded one another, with equal lack of right, as barbarians. Only rigorous reasoning modelled on mathematics could arrive at deeper truths. The humanists proved all too ready to accept these criticisms, or at least to admit that most of the learned young accepted them. Skilled readers and editors of classical texts like J. F. Gronovius and N. Heinsius practised their craft gloomily, aware that the age of philology had passed and a new age of mathematics had replaced it.⁹⁴

No one witnessed these changes more attentively or regretted them more deeply than Huet. By the end of his life, he felt like a revenant, a ghostly witness to the lost world of his youth, in which scholarship had enjoyed a high reputation and attracted men of great ability.⁹⁵ Yet he went on editing his classics for the dauphin. He went on collecting and annotating scholarly books in careful Latin, using a small, neat script. And he went on considering books a primary source for knowledge about both the natural and the human sciences. It seems appropriate to close with a vignette from his life.

No vernacular text of Huet's own day appealed to him more deeply than the *Guirlande de Julie*, the manuscript collection of miniatures of flowers and madrigals prepared by the duc de Montausier as a New Year's gift for Julie d'Agennes. Huet lovingly described the presentation manuscript, 'magnificently bound and placed inside a small bag of fragrant Spanish leather', which Julie awoke to find on 1 January 1633/4. And he recalled with delight how one day the duchesse d'Usèz had let him read the work. She brought him to her library, which he described as neither large nor plentiful, but full of well-chosen books 'elegantly bound and decorated, the sort of thing women can appreciate'.⁹⁶ And there she locked him in for four of the happiest hours of his life, from dinner to sunset. He felt, as he later recalled, that in reading he actually 'conversed with the men of that time who were most outstanding for their urbanity and wit'.⁹⁷ Huet's delight in the physical form of books, his passion for a unique manuscript, his desire to recapture, from the text, the flavour of the social circle which had produced it – all these emotions clearly derive from the tastes and practices of the humanists. So did the physical form and organization of the duchess's library. Even if Latin erudition was on the wane, fine printing, fine binding and humanistic ways of reading could be transferred to the new vernacular classics of the day. Naturally they were systematically retained in the Latin schools of the Holy Roman Empire, the Low Countries and Scandinavia. The humanist approach to reading forms part of the afterlife of the classical heritage, and is rightly associated with the Renaissance. But

it had an afterlife of its own as well, in both the high Protestant scholarship of the Refuge and the high vernacular culture of the *ancien régime*. A definitive history of how the humanists read will have to include in its coda Huet and Hardouin, Mme Dacier and Mr Bentley, Montausier and Julie d'Angennes.

8



Protestant Reformations and Reading

Jean-François Gilmont

Was the Reformation the daughter of Gutenberg? The conviction that printing played a fundamental role in the diffusion of Luther's ideas was already widespread in the sixteenth century. In 1526 François Lambert of Avignon went so far as to assert that the appearance of printing in the fifteenth century had been willed by God so that the Reformation could occur: 'Concerning the *ars chalcographica*', he states, 'I wish to add here that it is principally for that reason that God inspired, some years ago, the discovery of that invention so that it might serve to disseminate the truth in our century.'¹ Other Reformers praised the invention enthusiastically. It is traditional to quote Luther's *Tischreden*, where he states: 'Printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one. Indeed, by means of it God wants to spread word of the cause of the true religion to all the Earth, to the extremities of the world.'² John Foxe, author of the *Book of Martyrs*, speaks of the 'divine and miraculous inventing of printing'.³ There was nothing original, what is more, about calling printing 'divine'. The adjective was often used from the moment typography was born: it appears as early as the colophon of the *Catholicon* published in Mainz in 1460.

Historians have quite naturally repeated that the success of the Reformation owed much to printing, a statement that is often a commonplace more than the result of scholarly analysis.

Before discussing Protestant publications, it may be useful to recall that the outbreak of the Reformation coincided with an important revolution in means of communication.⁴ Gutenberg's discovery