

den Oberdeutschen und den Wittenbergern kam nicht zustande. Luther nahm die *Confessio* positiv auf, war jedoch der Meinung, dass die Schweizer der Wittenberger Konkordie, die 1536 von Oberdeutschen und Wittenberger Theologen unterschrieben worden war, beitreten müssten, was diese aber ablehnten.

Judith Englers Studie besticht durch eine sorgfältige Quellen- und Kontextanalyse. Deutlich wird, wie eng Schweizerische, Oberdeutsche und Wittenberger Bekenntnisbildung und Bündnispolitik miteinander verwoben waren und wie sich politische und theologische Frontstellungen vor allem in den 1530er Jahren konstituierten oder auch verschoben – aus politischen Gründen, aber oft auch aus persönlichen Sympathien oder Misstrauen. Eine rein theologiegeschichtlich angelegte Analyse der *Confessio* hätte all diese Ergebnisse nicht herausarbeiten können, weshalb sich Englers Zugang als gut gewählt erweist. Das eigentliche Kapitel zur *Confessio Helvetica Prior*, das im letzten Drittel der Studie steht, führt die zahlreichen Stränge, die in den vorherigen Kapiteln aufgemacht worden sind, zusammen. Das ist auch nötig: Die spiralförmige Anordnung der Kapitel bedingt manchmal Wiederholungen bzw. müssen Leser:innen immer wieder im Buch hin und her blättern, um sich bestimmte Zusammenhänge zu erschliessen. Vielleicht wären Register hilfreich gewesen, um das Navigieren im Buch zu vereinfachen. Diese wenigen Anmerkungen sollen aber nicht zu sehr ins Gewicht fallen und auf gar keinen Fall verschleiern, dass es sich bei diesem Buch um einen ausgezeichneten Beitrag zur Reformationsgeschichte handelt.

Andrea Hofmann, Basel

doi: 10.69871/rzsnfr3 | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Olivier Millet. Le discours de la Renaissance (XVe–XVIe siècles): Mythes, concepts et topiques, Genève: Librairie Droz, 2024 (Les Seuils de la Modernité 27), 280 p. – ISBN 978–2–600–26486–0.

Is it possible to say something new about the Renaissance? With this book of ten chapters and an introductory essay, Olivier Millet wagers that it is, in an attempt to restore the meaning of what the Renaissance

was in the eyes of the 16th century scholars, based on the very discourse that they carried about it, and the myths, concepts and topics that this discourse forged. A long introductory essay outlines the main features of this *Discourse of the Renaissance*, that is, the network of words, topics, and images associated with this period, whose existence is admitted, if only by its contemporaries, men of letters, conceived its myth (9). The essay focuses essentially on the French Renaissance, identified with both poetic figures (Marot then the *Pléiade* authors), literary and philosophical ones (Rabelais or Montaigne) and theological (Calvin or Beza). From the very first pages, the author characterizes the key aspects of the “discourse of the period [all translations by A. H.]”: its relationship to the past, through the “invention of a Middle Ages, an intermediary between antiquity and the present” (11), but also the absence of the idea of progress, at least in the sense that would later characterize the philosophy of history of the Enlightenment. This absence of the idea of progress, and therefore of a fundamental structure that gives meaning to the overall trajectory of the representation of time, required, for the humanists, a certain “bricolage” (14), which the book precisely endeavors to retrace by restoring the “typology, if not the coherence of these new representations” built around “constants” which constitute “the mental tools” of the Renaissance scholars (14).

The introduction outlines three plans of analysis of Renaissance discourses. The first plan is that of myths – which “describe a scenario that reveals a deep structure of history and the human condition” (15). Among these myths, the most recurrent and central one is that of the Golden Age, the revival of which serves to situate, for the contemporaries of the Renaissance, the originality of their time, which is both a time of blossoming and a return to a glorified past, in this case Greek and Roman antiquity, but also Hebrew, particularly in theological discourse. The second plan is that of concepts, which are “notions” (of Latin origin) consecrated “by tradition to designate a human operation carried out in favor of a positive change in things” (15). The introduction thus gives the example of *translatio*, *renovatio*, *reformation* and *restitutio* which form the lexical network by which the Renaissance scholars characterize their era. The introduction also describes the images and metaphors, particularly the play of light and darkness, which structure the humanists’ conception

of their time. Finally, the third plan, that of topics, refers “to the use of general ideas that make it possible to account for particular cases, and to compose discourses acceptable to contemporaries within the framework of a common culture” (18). The introduction thus characterizes the moral *topoi* that emerges with the discourse of the Renaissance, in particular the vice of envy, of which Renaissance opponents were regularly accused.

The first chapter (*Ad Fontes!*) delves into the meaning of this “watchword that summarizes and symbolizes humanist knowledge and strategy, as if progress could only come through a return to an origin and the restoration of lost realities and ideals, in line with the myth of the return of the Golden Age, omnipresent in humanist literature” (37). Noting the relatively late emergence of the expression, with Erasmus in 1512, the author describes the ambiguity of the word *sources*, which refers both to the recoverable vestiges of the past and to their historical and philological studies, while comparing its uses with those of other neighboring terms, particularly the image of the treasure, also omnipresent in humanist discourse. After noting that the watchword of the return *ad fontes* is based on a metaphor of the text as living speech, with the idea that the author’s person is present *viva voce*, the author reviews the classical, Greek and Roman origins of the image of the source: Hesiod, Plato, then Virgil, Lucretius and Cicero. Associated with the image of the source, the metaphor of the purity of the upstream is then contrasted with the muddy waters of the downstream, to bring to life the myth of the purity of origins. Applied to the Bible, this theme of the return to the original language of the text supports the claims of the *hebraica* and *graeca veritas* against the partisans of the Vulgata. Thus the watchword of the return *ad fontes* has both a mythical and programmatic value: It motivates a program of editing ancient texts and justifies the development of a study program that values the early learning of Greek and Hebrew languages, in a context marked by the polemics surrounding the institution of the trilingual college in Louvain. Two theological and exegetical issues then arise: A critical one – which editions should be considered authentic? – and a hermeneutical question – how are the restitutions of the literal meaning and the interpretation of the spiritual meaning articulated?

The second chapter (*La Renaissance en poésie française*) examines the discourse on the Renaissance in French poets of the very early 16th cen-

tury who preceded the *Pléiade*, notably Jean Lemaire de Belges (ca. 1473–1524) and Clément Marot (1496–1544). The author shows in particular that the exaltation of the Renaissance as a time of renewal of letters, and more broadly the myth of the Golden Age, is not yet articulated in them with a criticism of the poetic traditions of the Middle Ages, but that they intend on the contrary to situate themselves in the medieval lineage, enriched with new contributions, in particular those of Petrarch (59). The mythical theme of the Golden Age, on the other hand, undergoes a notable shift with the poetic work of du Bellay, who announces from the image of mold – which then designates the covering of the treasure of ancient sources by a rust that should be treated –, the program of a restitution of ancient culture (78).

Chapter 3 (*Le mythe de la Renaissance et le topos des trois générations*) opens with a fundamental question for the entire book: “how to think change in an era when the very idea of progress is not available and when the Christian conception of time knows only one essential event, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?” (85). This question is raised from the work of Rabelais, notably his *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. In Rabelais’ work, memory is at the heart of the writing device, because the “Rabelaisian novels explicitly articulate the three successive generations of Grandgousier, Gargantua and Pantagruel as those of three different but successive and contiguous eras” (87). The chapter shows how the “schema of the three generations” allows Rabelais, as well as in another register Marsile Ficin, to “think and represent a major cultural turning point in the history of European culture, by projecting on these figures a principle of continuity that legitimizes the innovations of new times” (102).

What place does humanism occupy in the narrative of the origins of Protestantism? Chapter 4 (*Le transfert de l’humanisme*) attempts to answer this question by investigating the conception of history developed by three generations of Reformers: Philip Melanchthon, John Calvin and Theodore Beza. Melanchthon’s inaugural lecture at Wittenberg (1518) emphasizes the importance of Florence in its role of restoring the Latin language, threatened by *scholastic barbarism*. From this point of view, Melanchthon seems to be indebted to the great Italian narrative, dating back to the *Quattrocento*, which legitimized humanistic studies with its com-

monplaces: The link between authentic Latin and Greek studies, the providential consequences, in the West, of the fall of Constantinople with the arrival of Byzantine scholars in Italy. However, Melanchthon's specificity lies in the fact that this narrative also serves to condemn the Church of Rome. Moreover, Melanchthon gradually substitutes this narrative for another, which highlights the specific contributions of the Reformation: It is the *key to reading* of the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel that has brought the study of the Bible out of its centuries-old obscurity. With Beza's *Icones* (1580), the author turns his attention to the genre of the compendium of the lives of great men. The *Icones* underline the Germanic origins of the Reformation, and thus relativize the importance of Italian humanism. At the same time, however, Beza also emphasizes the Florentine origins of Peter Martyr Vermigli and his studies in Padua. France occupies a third place in this chronology. A common topic emerges from these texts: The revival of the study of languages and the arts of discourse, and, more broadly, the restoration of the ordinary means of learning languages, played a preparatory role in the flowering of the Reformation. In short, Protestant narratives do not assume an explicit humanist heritage, but emphasize the instrumental role of Italian humanism, even taking up some Italian humanist *topoi* of the *Quattrocento*.

The fifth chapter (*L'édition des Opera Omnia de Budé*) aims to situate the edition of the *Opera Omnia* of the French jurist and humanist Guillaume Budé among the Basel editorial program of the *Opera omnia*, which saw the publication, between 1530 and 1580, of many editions of the complete works of authors, the most famous being obviously those of Petrarch and Erasmus, to whom Budé is also constantly compared in the paratexts, particularly on stylistic issues. After having described both the specificities of Budé's *Opera omnia* and the general features of these editorial devices, where an ecumenical and multi-confessional character is particularly attested, despite Basel's belonging to the Protestant and reformed arc of Europe, the author questions the formal but also intellectual choices of the editors, in particular through the division into disciplinary volumes (theology, law) and the study of Curione's dedication.

The sixth chapter (*Penser et agir à la Renaissance*) examines the links between Michel Servet's concept of *restitutio* and his adversary Jean Calvin's

concept of *reformatio*. The chapter opens with a preliminary distinction: In Jean Calvin's case, intimate thought and profession coincide within the framework of the function of theologian and Genevan pastor; on the contrary, Servet's clandestinity leads to a dissociation of the two. Two contradictory theologies of history then emerge: Where the conversion of Rome to Christianity and the integration of law into theology are seen by Servet as the act of a betrayal and even the victory of the Antichrist within the Church of Rome, Calvin makes them the implicit paradigm of his theology. Finally, Calvin and Servet are distinguished by their opposing objectives: Reform of the Church for the former *versus* restitution of authentic Christianity for the latter. These oppositions are all the more remarkable as the two men are characterized by many common points: Same generation, same humanist and legal studies, same self-taught character of their exegetical studies – "two laymen without a degree in theology" (148). The author then underlines that Servet is constantly accused in Calvin's work: As early as the *Psychoppanychia* of 1534, Calvin attacks the doctrine of the sleep of souls after death; in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (early 1540s) and in his treatise *On Scandals* (1550), he sees in Servet this prototype of heretics inflated by self-love (*philautia*) and vain curiosity. The ground for the condemnation of 1553 was thus largely prepared. The author then focuses on the question of the two men's self-understanding of their missionary role, emphasizing their absolute certainty of the well-foundedness of their vocation. In Calvin's case, this theme of vocation is omnipresent in the correspondence of the years 1538–1540, the Reformer notably emphasizing the evidence of this divine vocation by the natural resistances of his solitary and timid "temperament," which would have pushed him much more towards private studies than towards the public defense of the faith. Servet's corpus is less rich in autobiographical accounts: Only 18 handwritten pages, inserted at the head of a copy of the *Christianismi restitutio*, enlighten us on how Servet understood the meaning of his *vocatio*. The manuscript thus insists on the eschatological role of intellectual and witness, which here too contrasts with a lack of natural aptitude, in particular the absence of eloquence. For Servet, the role of witness passes through the restitution of authentic Christianity, freed from its Trinitarian errors and its legal corruption. On the stylistic level, this "eschatological moment, fundamental

in his worldview, produces statements in excess on the enunciative level (epigraph, handwritten autobiographical passage, prayers punctuating the text),” which the author contrasts with Calvin’s doctoral style (164).

The seventh chapter (*L’Antichrist dans la Christianismi Restitutio de Michel Servet*) continues the investigation of this topic of *restitutio* in Servet’s *corpus*, starting from a quotation from the Italian historian Claudio Manzoni who, in the current of Delio Cantimori’s writings, makes Michel Servet the “most radical and consistent representative of humanist religiosity” (165). The author then underlines that if Manzoni’s interpretation, centered on Servet’s humanism in the current sense (anthropocentric theology) rightly underlines Servet’s inscription in the Neoplatonism and Hermeticism of the Renaissance, it neglects on the other hand the millenarist dimension of his work. In particular, Manzoni seems to have missed the importance, for Servet, of the figure of the Antichrist, and the quasi-Manichaeic conception he adopted of the struggle between good and evil since Creation. This Manichaeism goes hand in hand, on the hermeneutic level, with a very figurative reading of Holy Scripture, where an ideal of progressive deciphering in history is accompanied by the conviction of the absolute obscuration of truth with the victory of the Antichrist, which designates the Roman Church and all papal dogmas, whose reign is predicted by Servet for 1260 years. Beyond this common opposition to *papism*, Servet’s work then proposes a philosophy of history fundamentally opposed to those of the Reformation. In Servet’s case, corruption is not medieval but ancient, and dates to the very act of Constantine’s conversion, and then culminates at the Council of Nicaea. This opposition to the philosophy of history of the Reformation is also manifested in an opposed hermeneutics, which, in Servet exegetical works, promotes figurative reading and marks the limits of literal interpretation.

The notion of *restitutio* is still at the heart of the eighth chapter on Guillaume Postel (*La notion de restitutio chez Guillaume Postel*). This chapter opens with the observation of the polysemic character of the notion of restitution in Postel’s *corpus*, which itself refers to the author’s “exacerbated and generalized typological allegorism” (187). Beyond the assumed influence of Servet, Postel’s originality lies in the chronological depth of his conception of *restitutio*: *restitutio* is not the moment of salvation or

revelation, but a process that presupposes a history and a time, a history thought in terms of “globalization” and universal diffusion of Christian truth (201). Moreover, for Postel, *restitutio* does not designate the end of the world: The author does not reveal any clearly apocalyptic conception of *restitutio* that would “make time tip over into eternity through the Last Judgment,” but rather emphasizes “the historical realization of the divine plan, before its tipping over into eternity, which attracts everything that precedes it” (202). For Postel, *restitutio* finally designates a “universal renaissance,” marked by a “real communication” of the soul of Christ, the mediator to all mankind (201).

This originality of Postel’s conception of *restitutio* is also investigated in the following chapter (*L’âge de la Renaissance selon Guillaume Postel*), devoted to Postel’s conception of the Age of the Renaissance. The Renaissance is the *restitutio* in the process of realization, which Postel places in the fourth age of mankind. Postel distinguishes himself, in his doctrine of the ages of history, from the ancient theories of Augustine or other Fathers of the Church. The Renaissance is seen as an act of clarity, after centuries of obscurity, which manifested themselves in the disunity of Christians and which were incarnated in the vanity of the “tyrannical pretensions of the Roman papacy” (216). Postel’s originality lies in grasping the main effect of this decadence in terms of disunity, which paradoxically culminates in Renaissance times, with the appearance of the Protestant Reformation. From this point of view, Postel’s judgment on his contemporary time remains ambivalent, both enthusiastic about the brilliant renewal of culture, and especially of religious culture, but also critical, particularly with regard to the multiplication of quarrels and controversies. The renewal of culture is seen as the condition for a “finally complete” knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (224). This conception is not without a certain circularity on the relationship between humanism and spiritual renewal: The renewal of letters is the condition and the instrument of spiritual *restitutio*, but in return “it is indeed the spiritual renaissance of Christianity, collective and individual, that gives meaning to the humanist enterprise” (227).

The last chapter of the book (*Montaigne et son époque, ou la Renaissance contrariée*) implies a certain chronological shift with the study of Montaigne’s work, which represents “the autumn of the Renaissance”

(228), and which distinguishes itself in many respects – in particular its much more distant relationship to the spiritual cause – from the authors, humanists and Reformers, studied previously. The article is centered on the study of Montaigne’s relationship to his “century” (the term designates a generation for him, [230]). This relationship to time is marked by the criticism of the accumulation of knowledge and the piling up of glosses, but also, more broadly, by a devaluation of the present time. Montaigne’s dark view of his century, dominated by the image of troubles and divisions, especially the wars of religion, is also critical to the reign of the kings of France. In terms of knowledge, in addition to the criticism of glosses, the author notes in Montaigne a suspicion of letters themselves – and of the *verbiage* of the Renaissance, which would have been lost in *words* instead of practicing *things*, particularly in connection with virtue. At the same time, Montaigne’s work allows for a revaluation of imagination and sensibility, which offer a more authentic access to things than words. To his contemporaries who like to “play the ingenious,” Montaigne opposes the image of the “lead century,” as a counter-narrative to the humanist myth of the return to the Golden Age (239f.). This ambiguity is also found in Montaigne’s judgment on the discovery of the New World, which was accompanied by significant progress in the fields of knowledge of the world and cartography, but which also highlighted the brutality and cruelty of the Europeans in the face of the innocence, often idealized by Montaigne, of the natives.

Overall, Millet’s work offers an erudite and original journey into the study of the discourses of authors whose originality and subtlety he knows how to capture better than anyone, despite their classical nature.

Arthur Huiban, Geneva

doi: 10.69871/9f2eb352 | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0