

"Hoc solum deliqui, quod uiuo": Walter Map's Modernitas ¹

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Walter Map wrote these words at a time when intellectuals had a heightened awareness of living at a particular moment along a chronological continuum.² E. R. Curtius ascribes to Walter Map and other authors (John of Salisbury, Peter of Blois) an awareness which allowed them to position themselves quite self-consciously in relation to the past.³ Their new perspective enabled these writers to reexamine their contemporaries' reception of their works and especially the literary values and assumptions which governed that reception and shaped the reputations of Walter Map and others. Further, as Brian Stock observes, this perspective offered them the opportunity to interrogate the hermeneutic practices of the past:

Once the pastness of the past was widely recognized, archaic modes of thought were no longer able to envelop the present and to dissolve it as an independent realm of experience. The present became a vantage point from which the past could be discussed and debated. The inevitable contrast between the old and the new resulted in the first tentative stages of the "querelle des Anciens et Modernes."⁴

For Map and his contemporaries, *modernitas* meant "modern times," and *moderni* "men of today," or "moderns."⁵ Cassiodorus was the first to employ the term *modernus* with the meaning "the present period" or "the present generation;" he was followed by numerous medieval writers who used it chiefly to differentiate between their own era and the Patristic age.⁶ For them, the *Antiqui* included both Christian and Pagan authors.⁷ During Map's lifetime, both terms were used to locate an author in the many debates about the rapid changes occurring in a host of disciplines. As Stock remarks, "by the twelfth century, *antiqui* and *moderni* came to represent cultural positions in law, history, theology, natural philosophy, and the plastic arts."⁸

Identifying the chronological limits of this *modernitas* was important as well. M. D. Chenu notes that the "frontier of modern

times shifts variously” in the late twelfth century⁹ and that Map himself “with notable ingenuity computed the period of time during which one remained modern. He figured it to be about a century; during this period, which is outside the limit of man’s survival, the recent past remains still present in people’s memories.”¹⁰ Map offers this estimate in his conclusion to *Dist.* 1. 30, a chapter in which he describes the Cathars’ heretical practices:¹¹

Nostris hec sunt orta temporibus. Nostra dico tempora modernitatem hanc, horum scilicet centum annorum curriculum, cuius adhuc nunc ultime partes extant, cuius tocus in his que notabilia sunt satis est recens et manifesta memoria, cum adhuc aliqui supersint centennes, et infiniti filii qui ex patrum et avorum relacionibus certissime teneant que non viderunt. Centum annos qui effluerunt dico nostram modernitatem.¹²

[It is in our times that these things have arisen. By “our times” I mean this modern period, the course of the last hundred years now just approaching completion, and the memory of whose notable events is relatively fresh and clear, for there are still some centenarians alive, and there are very many sons who possess, by the narration of their fathers and grandfathers, distinct knowledge about things they did not actually see. I say that the hundred years that have just run out constitute our “modern times.”]¹³

Map’s musings about the nature of modernity do not end with simple calculation however. He creates a narrator for his *De Nugis* who presents himself unabashedly as a *modernus* and who complains quite consistently throughout its pages about his contemporaries’ seemingly unshakable veneration for classical texts, their suspicion of modern authors, and his own unhappy recognition that “moderns” gain their star status only when they themselves appear to be “ancients.”¹⁴ In voicing his many criticisms, however, Map pursues an odd rhetorical strategy which consistently exploits classical imagery in order to establish him as a *modernus*, and thus creates a notable tension between the language chosen and the cultural position adopted in the text. Further, Map constructs a markedly self-conscious, intrusive narrator who articulates these complaints throughout *De Nugis*, whether he is introducing his English history (*Dist.* 5. 1-6), or commenting on

the supernatural elements in one of his short tales (*Dist.* 4. 6 for example). Indeed, Map's narrator complains openly about his contemporaries' reception of his anti-matrimonial tract, the *Dissuasio Valerii* which forms *Dist.* 4. 5 of his *De Nugis*:

Scimus hanc placuisse multis, auide rapitur, transcribitur intente, plena iocunditate legitur. Meam tamen esse quidam, sed de plebe, negant. Epistole enim inuidet, decorem suum ei uiolenter auferunt et auctorem. Hoc solum deliqui, quod uiuo. Verumptamen hoc morte mea corrigere consilium non habeo.¹⁵

[We know that this tract has pleased many, that it is greedily seized, eagerly copied and read with great delight. Yet some common people deny that it is indeed mine. For they envy this letter, they snatch violently from it both its elegance and its author. I was found wanting in this alone, that I am living. Nevertheless I have no plan to correct this with my death.]

The reception is plainly positive, as his choice of modifiers suggests; his audience receives his text "greedily," and they copy it "avidly." Criticizing his audience's literary assumptions, however, he accuses his public of assuming that if his epistle has outstanding merit, then it must be the work of a revered classical writer (an *antiquus*), not the product of a mere *modernus* like himself. According to Map's narrator, the true curse of modernity (properly understood), for literary men at least, is the following paradox: the more a text excites the public's admiration, the less likely it is to augment the author's personal prestige *as a writer*. In fact, his narrator stresses that public approbation is quite likely to lead to a loss of control over the literary product altogether ("they snatch violently from it both its elegance and its author"). Doubtless with such passages in mind, Chenu offers the following generalization: "He [Map] observed, however, that antiquity remains prestigious from generation to generation and that at all times modernity has been suspect, always on the edge of disfavor until the day when the halo of antiquity would rehabilitate the former moderns."¹⁶

While Walter Map chose to comment on his contemporaries' reception of literature (especially his own), he was one of many authors who pressed into service the venerable *antiqui-moderni topos* as they responded to the transformations taking place in ev-

ery important discipline of the period. A number of scholars have remarked upon the popularity of the *antiqui-moderni topos* among twelfth-century writers, including those in Henry II's court circle to which Map belonged.¹⁷ M. T. Clanchy, seeking to understand the connotations of "modernus" in English education and government at the time, recognizes that "ambivalence has indeed been an essential component of all controversies between ancients and moderns. Intellectuals, who deplore the present and advocate a revival of or return to ancient traditions, are necessarily innovators because they want to bring about a change of attitude in their contemporaries."¹⁸

Like Walter Map, other writers such as John of Salisbury, urged their readerships to readjust their reception of literary works. Unlike Map, however, John of Salisbury wished his audience to be guided by the "ancient traditions" Clanchy mentions when evaluating his own works. His chosen goad for this conservative readjustment was satire—at least in his *Entheticus*, as A. G. Rigg has suggested.¹⁹ The Prologue of this poem satirizes the moderns' disrespect for both grammar and literary works. The following lines articulate his readers' negative reaction to conservative literary projects. Should a twelfth-century author rashly cite a classical writer:

Undique clamabunt: 'vetus hic quo tendit asellus?
 Cur veterum nobis dicta vel acta refert?
 A nobis sapimus, docuit se nostra iuventus;
 Non recipit veterum dogmata nostra cohors.' (43-46)

[The cry goes up: 'The ass is off again:
 He harps on ancient sayings, old men's deeds.
 We're wise within: our youth is now self-taught—
 Our group can do without the ancients' saws.']²⁰

Of course, John of Salisbury is himself precisely this sort of "ass." As Rigg observes of the *Policraticus*, "John rarely quotes medieval literature. The *Policraticus* is a tissue of classical allusion; his exempla are almost all taken from the biblical or ancient world."²¹ Further, after satirizing the literary values of contemporaries, the core of the *Entheticus* sets forth the strengths of what John of Salisbury considers "true grammar" and classical philosophies.²² A number of twelfth-century literary figures would have agreed with him; Chenu, for example, cites Walter of Châtillon's

moralizing dirge: "We moderns ignore the path trodden by the ancients."²³

The views of these men were not unique, as Stock notes, "in general, *modernus* retained negative connotations; innovation was often equated with unwelcome novelty."²⁴ This association between the "new masters" and a problematic "novelty" first arose in theological circles. The title of "master" and the term "modern" were both used to differentiate between classical authorities and contemporary medieval instructors.²⁵ In the minds of many, the use of new methods was associated with a suspect kind of *subtilitas*. Clanchy sees this tension play itself out, for example, in the pages of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*. While the Prologue praises the *moderni*, the bulk of the text "consists of an attack on the new masters who have introduced novelty into everything."²⁶ In the body of the *Metalogicon* for example, John of Salisbury charges contemporary philosophers with excessively elaborate modes of expression, what Clanchy calls "subtlety pursued for its own sake."²⁷ Peter of Blois shared John of Salisbury's hostility towards this *subtilitas*. In one of his letters, Peter writes "nothing is more hateful than subtlety; such studies are useless for day-to-day business and only have significance in the schools."²⁸

Above all, the new methodologies were unsettling to many, and those who attacked or defended these new interpretive tools and the new masters who wielded them frequently employed the *antiqui-moderni topos* together with the *utilitas-subtilitas topos* often associated with it. There were some, however, such as William of Malmesbury, who in Stock's words, took "a more nuanced view."²⁹ Sounding very like Walter Map's narrator, in fact, William faults his audience's lack of appreciation for "his period's intellectual achievements" in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.³⁰ The following plaint, for example, interrupts his account of Marianus Scotus:

Quare saepe mirari soleo cur nostri temporis doctos hoc respergat infortunium, ut in tanto numero discentium, in tam tristi pallore lucubrantium, vix aliquis plenam scientiae laudem referat. Adeo inveteratus usus placet; adeo fere nullus novis, licet probabiliter inventis, serenitatem assensus pro merito indulget; totis conatibus in sententiam veterum reptatur, omne recens sordet; ita, quia solus favor alit ingenia, cessante favore obtorpuerunt omnia.³¹

[Therefore, I am accustomed often to wonder why this calamity defiles the learned men of our age, that among so great a number of learners, those burning the midnight oil in such sad pallor, scarcely anyone gains the full praise of knowledge. Thus does long-standing use please: thus practically no one grants the calmness of approval to new things on their merits (although found credible); with all its efforts public approval creeps back to the opinion of the ancients, everything recent is shabby; so, since applause alone nourishes genius, once the applause has ceased, everything grows numb.]

Not only does Map's narrator express similar frustration in the Preface to his English history (*Dist. 5. 1*) for example, but his diction recalls that of William of Malmesbury:

Sic torpescunt animi, depereunt ingenia; sic ingenua temporis huius strenuitas enormiter extinguitur, et lucerna non defectu materie sopitur, sed succumbunt artifices, et a nostris nulla est autoritas.³²

[Thus minds grow listless, geniuses run to ruin; thus the natural vigor of this age is destroyed outrageously, and the midnight lamp is dimmed not for want of material, but artists sink back, and from our talented men there is no authority.]

Both passages convey confidence in the true stature of contemporary literary works (if only it were properly recognized), as words such as *doctos*, *ingenia*, and *artifices* suggest. Both employ the motif of burning the midnight oil (*tam tristi pallore lucubrantium; lucerna*). And most strikingly, both authors characterize the damage writers suffer from the absence of public acclaim as a kind of enervated stupification (*obtorpuerunt; torpescunt, succumbunt*).

While the cultural positions adopted in these two passages seem clear enough, interpreting the use of the *moderni-antiqui topos* by twelfth-century authors can sometimes be tricky. Clanchy, for example, recommends a cautious interpretive approach when reading the works of Henry II's court circle, and grappling with their use of these *topoi*. He notes that while four courtiers, John of Salisbury, Richard FitzNeil, Gerald of Wales, and Peter of Blois were not

exact contemporaries, all had connexions with the circle centering on the court of Henry II and derived some of their materials from common sources. They do not therefore present individual independent testimony of the subtlety of moderns. They seem rather to be performing variations on the themes of *antiqui-moderni* and *subtilitas-utilitas* which were familiar to their circle. Nor should their criticisms be taken at their face value. They are ambivalent in their attitude toward change, as they were all on their own admission prepared to play the modern game and become courtiers and legists when opportunity offered. Peter of Blois in particular was no stern and unbending conservative; in Dr. Southern's words, he "is a man of this new world pretending to belong to the old."³³

Clanchy's cautionary words are sound but do not offer much guidance for interpreting the "variations" Map himself may have been "performing" in the pages of his *De Nugis*. If we do not take the often deliciously belligerent criticisms his narrator makes of his audience and their reception of his text "at their face value," how should we take them? Indeed, Clanchy's words recall the warnings of Map's editors, Brooke and Mynors, to readers of *De Nugis* who expect a strict one-to-one correspondence between his text and the "reality" of the late twelfth century: "One does not go to Map for a fair and balanced portrait of the Cistercian order."³⁴ Similarly, Robert Levine, commenting on Map's highly idiosyncratic manipulation of several well-worn *topoi*, notes Map's "sardonic, macabre variation of the humility topos."³⁵

Outwardly, Map's narrator is quite aggressive in claiming the status of a *modernus*, "a man of the new world;" and in this sense, he contrasts markedly with a figure such as John of Salisbury.³⁶ Further, his narrator does not explicitly echo Walter of Châtillon's call for a return to the literary values of the classical past. Yet, the rhetoric he has chosen to champion the cause of *modernitas* is certainly curious. On the one hand, Map's narrator dramatizes himself as a *modernus*, keen to preserve the noteworthy exploits of his contemporaries, those *presentes Caesares* (modern Caesars), as he calls them.³⁷ But on the other hand, as the phrase *presentes Caesares* illustrates, he presents his *moderni* using exclusively classical imagery and relies on its associations for his literary effects. While one would expect a classicizing rhetoric from someone like John of Salisbury, who adopts a conservative cultural position, Walter

Map as *defensor modernitatis* and his choice of such a rhetoric deserve some consideration.

The following three examples of self-dramatization articulate issues which obsess the narrator of *De Nugis*: his deliberate choice of “modern” subject matter, his contemporaries’ assessment of his literary work, and the presuppositions upon which they base their evaluation. In the Prologue to *Distinctio* 3, the narrator presents himself as a modern, literary warrior (of a plainly antique cast) who although overmatched, faces his contemporary critics undaunted:

Non enim fori lites aut placitorum attemto seria; theatrum et arenam incolo nudus pugil et inermis, quem in armatos obtrectancium cuneos talem ultro misisti. Teatrum tamen hoc et hanc arenam si Cato visitauerit aut Scipio uel uterque, ueniam spero dum non districte iudicent. ³⁸

[For I do not attempt the serious disputes of the court or assemblies; I am a naked and unarmed fighter in the theater and arena, such a one you have sent against the armed troops of my detractors. Yet if Cato or Scipio or both should visit this theater and arena, I hope for forgiveness, provided they don’t judge me severely.]

Curiously declining the obvious option of representing himself as a lone knight, he chooses instead to draw on associations with Rome’s gladiatorial spectacles. Characteristically, he avoids the language of chivalry altogether. Since he claims to have eschewed the “serious disputes of the court or assemblies,” the weighty debates about law or policy which occupy the best minds, he implies that his own writing perhaps lacks a mature seriousness. But if his own subject lacks *gravitas*, he claims its reception is charged with mortal danger. Indeed, in this histrionic portrait, that reception is a life and death struggle.

His role as combatant in the “arena” showcases his powerlessness and vulnerability. He foregrounds the inadequacy of his verbal defences (“I am a naked and unarmed fighter”) while at the same time hinting that these crushing and perilous disadvantages are his patron’s fault (“such a one *you* have sent” [emphasis mine]). The obliquely self-pitying reasoning here, echoed throughout *De Nugis*, suggests that his patron has chosen the wrong man for this particular contest. Significantly, while his opponents in the arena

are the hostile critics of his own day, the ultimate arbiters of the contest are figures from antiquity, who watch remote from the fray. He is reduced to begging these august, distant authorities for a merciful reception. Perhaps implicit also is the notion that he has transgressed classical literary norms ("I hope for forgiveness"). If this is so, then these are the standards most important to him.

This passage reifies in the image of physical combat both the narrator's anxieties about the reception of his work and his literary reputation, as well as the antagonism he feels for his contemporaries. His attention is divided between the assessment of his own generation and the judgement of the classical giants, Cato and Scipio. How well will his twelfth-century words compare to theirs? Map's narrator keeps a wary eye on both.

The gladiatorial arena presents the act of literary production in the late twelfth century as one of rather desperate high heroism. In *Dist. 1. 25* of *De Nugis*, Map uses another strategy to dramatize the ill-will and contentiousness he claims his writings occasion. This chapter unleashes an energetic satire of the Cistercian order that details their many transgressions. These range from allegedly tampering with an order of bacon to hanging a man in the thickets of Woolaston.³⁹ In the concluding section, he narrates the satire's reception among the White monks and assigns himself a new role as the rapacious monks' most recent casualty.⁴⁰ Just as John of Salisbury gives voice to critical modern readers ("the ass is off again") in his *Entheticus*, Map's narrator summarizes the assaults the monks make on his literary competence and his reputation. These are just the sorts of attacks the bold, forthright *modernus* can expect from his contemporaries, he implies. Again, as in the arena, when he frames his relationship with his modern readership, he is always the victim.

Most importantly, while parrying the attacks on his satire, the narrator ennobles his bickering with his Cistercian adversaries by framing the charges and countercharges in a classicizing rhetoric and by an unorthodox refashioning of the tried and true humility *topos*. While the monks assault others to seize their physical, tangible property (estates, oxen, ploughs) they target the narrator to destroy a less tangible but supremely important possession—his literary reputation (*Olfecerunt iam hunc Hebrei libellum, et me religionis persecutorem dicunt*; "the Hebrews [that is, the Cistercians] have already sniffed out this little book and call me a persecutor of religion").⁴¹ The monks vilify his character on two grounds: he is an enemy of the church and he is an incompetent

writer. He answers the first charge with the pious assertion that "I condemn vices not morals, false professors not a well-ordered institution" (*uicia reprehendo non mores, professores falsos non ordinem bene institutum*).⁴² He refutes the charge that he is a terrible writer by agreeing with it and transforms this admission into a further insult:

Video me iam illis factum in detraccionem et fabulam, ut Cluuieno me comparent poete, creta et carbone uso, insipido et ydiote scriptori. Hic ego sum certe; sed dum michi de malicia carmen est carbone quidem et creta dignum, eciam ydiota sum: non adinuenio, non adolor: et insipidus: quia sal in fetore non proficit, ineptum me fateor et insulsum poetam.⁴³

[I see they have already framed me in detraction and gossip, that they compare me to the poet Cluuienus, a man of chalk and charcoal, an insipid and foolish writer. This I assuredly am; but while my song, worthy indeed of chalk and charcoal, concerns evil deeds, I am also an idiot: I do not invent, I do not flatter; and I am insipid: since salt does not do any good in a stink, I confess myself an inept and tasteless poet.]

As the narrator tells it, these Cistercians are quick off the mark in their own self-defense. It is unclear whether they pursue their "damage control" strategy in oral or in written form (since *fabulam* could mean either). In any event, a campaign of character assassination is certainly suggested by the phrase "they have already framed me in detraction and gossip." Most significantly, the narrator claims that the denunciations of these twelfth-century adversaries are weighted with classical echoes; the comparison to Cluuienus is certainly an obscure one. In this war of words, the point of reference is a classical one.

By confessing that he is an incompetent writer and that his prose lacks zing, Map's narrator ostensibly offers an example of the ubiquitous humility *topos*.⁴⁴ But since the *topos* is ordinarily used to flatter a noble patron, in this instance it is highly unconventional. Here the narrator uses it to take a final dig at his opponents. He implies that the Cistercians have earned the description he has given of them. While virtuous Christian exploits demand the talents of a truly great writer, any hack will do to preserve their

shameful acts for posterity. Besides, even if he possessed exceptional eloquence, it would be powerless in the face of criminality such as theirs, since salt cannot avail against a stench. Whether he is a hopeless incompetent or a literary luminary, either way, Map's narrator contrives to insult them.⁴⁵

Further, he suggests that the zestless character of his prose guarantees the truthfulness of his account. While fiction was associated with all manner of rhetorical embellishment, a plain style often assured the reliability of historical writing.⁴⁶ Map's narrator successfully converts the monks' supposed insult about his prose into a pledge of his own veracity. In addition, his status as a victim makes him an eye-witness and therefore an additionally unimpeachable recorder of events. As Isidore of Seville writes, "those things which are seen, cannot be conveyed by a lie" (*Quae enim videntur, sine mendacio proferuntur*).⁴⁷

If Juvenal dominates the narrator's squabble with the Cistercians, Virgil (even more improbably) is on the tongues of the narrator's household servants. As those familiar with Map's book will recall, *Dist.* 1. 10 offers readers the most extensive self-portrait of the narrator and his establishment in *De Nugis*. The narrator presents himself as a *modernus*, nominally presiding over a rambunctious twelfth-century household which includes both servants and nephews. His literary style and reputation are not at issue in these domestic verbal tiffs, but his competence as an authority figure is. Seemingly bereft of the debating skills which allowed him to triumph so dazzlingly elsewhere in *De Nugis*, he exposes himself as a curiously impotent lord in this chapter.⁴⁸

His servants' methods of argumentation outmaneuver him every time. They have the last word, for example, when he rebukes them for wasting his food, drink, and fuel on strangers whom they've invited off the street for a sumptuous meal: "When I accused them of drunkenness, they swore that they were jolly not soused, and that I was a hard man, who criticized the effort they had willingly made for my greater honor" (*Cum ebrietatis eos arguebam, letos se fuisse non ebrios iurabant, et me crudelem, qui quod honori meo gratanter impenderant reprehendebam*).⁴⁹ They, in turn, accuse him of unbecoming avarice, retorting: "Banish all stinginess! In short, pour forth everything, and cheerfully dare what you will; Fortune favors the brave. A pastry can be retained so long that a crumb will be of no value" (*Absit omnis parcitas! Effunde prorsus omnia, securus aude quod uis; audaces Fortuna iuuat. Tantum potest constringi crustum quod mica nil ualebit*).⁵⁰

As Brooke and Mynors note, their words, "Fortune favors the brave" echo the exhortation of Turnus to his men as they await the landing of Aeneas's fleet.⁵¹ The grand heroism of the classical text, however, when juxtaposed with the petty, mundane concerns of this raucous *familia* is particularly ludicrous. Also deliberately silly is the jumbling together of mortal danger (the splendid exhortation) and pastry crumbs (the cozy, domestic aphorism).

This Virgilian echo points to a crucial reversal of roles orchestrated by both the servants and the nephews. This verbal echo is a clear instance of simple irony because it inverts the power structure of the prior text. In the *Aeneid*, Turnus urges on his troops; in *De Nugis*, the servants urge on their "master."⁵² Map's narrator fares no better when he encounters his acquisitive relatives. In fact, his diction suggests that as a figure of authority, he has capitulated to these young ingrates entirely:

Inter hanc familiam nepotes habeo, qui dominantur in rebus meis, nec est qui possit eis contradicere. Hii forcius contra me militant; hii quicquid eis impendo debitum dicunt, nec inde grates habent aut sicut michi; . . . tanquam non michi sed eis natus sim, et quasi domini sint et ego seruus, qui nil michi sed eis omnia adquisierim.⁵³

[I have nephews in this household, who tyrannize my affairs, nor is there anyone who can speak against them. They war against me more resolutely; whatever I spend on them they say is owed, nor for this reason do they ever feel or show gratitude to me . . . as if I was born, not for myself, but for them, as if they were the masters and I the servant, who had acquired everything, not for myself, but for them.]

In this contest of wills, his nephews triumph; they "lord it over" (*dominari*) his household. No one's verbal skills (including his own) can prevail against them. His authority eviscerated, his arguments nullified, only the act of narrating is left to him.

Aware that he is unable to prevent either his servants or nephews from entering the power vacuum which he himself has foolishly created, Map's narrator explicitly compares himself to the embattled father in Terence's *Phormio*: "The father in Terence, who has similar saviors of his property, says 'of my goods I own only myself'; although not every single father can say this, many can" (*Paterfamilias in Terentio, qui similes habebat rerum suarum*

*saluatores, ait 'Solut meorum sum eus; hoc etsi non singuli, multi patres dicere possunt).*⁵⁴ With this self-conscious literary gesture, he signals that he may be inept, but he is literate. This *modernus* is self-aware but impotent. And despite his fulminations about being a modern elsewhere in *De Nugis*, the man he most resembles (by his own confession), is the fictional creation of a Roman playwright.

Map's narrator wryly acknowledges his abdication of authority at home. Concerning his domestic affairs, he is curiously feckless. Yet he puts up more of a fight about his authority *as a writer*, and about his literary reputation elsewhere in *De Nugis*. Indeed, the portrait of an artist offered by *Dist.* 1. 10 mischievously dramatizes, in a domestic setting, the paradoxical loss of control challenging twelfth-century writers mentioned earlier: "they snatch violently from it both its elegance and its author."⁵⁵ And, in the conclusion to his *Dissuasio Valerii*, he addresses most directly his unhappy recognition that the creation of his reputation is at best a partnership. Map's narrator concedes ungraciously that it is largely the public which creates an author's reputation. This passage and others vent the resentment and antagonism this realization brings:

Scio quid fiet post me. Cum enim puterim, tum primo sal accipiet, totusque sibi supplebitur decessu meo defectus, et in remotissima posteritate michi faciet auctoritatem antiquitas, quia tunc ut nunc uetustum cuprum preferetur auro nouello. Simiarum tempus erit, ut nunc, non hominum, quia presenciam sibi deridebunt, non habentes ad bonos paciencia. Omnibus seculis sua displicuit modernitas, et queuis etas a prima preteritam sibi pretulit; unde, quia non potuerunt epistolam meam, mea spreuerunt tempora.⁵⁶

[I know what will happen after I am gone. For when I am dust, then for the first time the salt will take, and its defect will be wholly made good by my demise, and in the most distant future, antiquity will fashion authority for me, since then as now ancient copper will be preferred to new gold. It will be an age of apes, as it is now, not of men, since they will deride their own present, not having patience for good men. Its own modernity displeased every age, and whatever age you like from the first preferred its own past; for which reason, since they could not spurn my letter, they spurned my times.]

Map's narrator places himself in a chronological continuum of writers and concludes that the temporal distance between the time of a work's composition and the audience's engagement with it renders it valuable. The passage of time will create his authority as an author: "and in the most distant future, antiquity will fashion authority for me" (*et in remotissima posteritate michi faciet auctoritatem antiquitas*). Both he and his text will gain a reputation in the end, but for the wrong reasons. In expressing this opinion, however, Map's narrator employs the rhetoric of earlier, self-styled "moderni," the Augustan poets.⁵⁷ In one of his *Epistles*, for example, Horace asks exactly how much time must elapse before a text's chronological remoteness moves its audience to veneration:

Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
 scire velim, chartis pretium quotus arroget annus.
 scriptor abhinc annos centum qui decidit, inter
 perfectos veteresque referri debet an inter
 vilis atque novos?⁵⁸

[I would like to know if, like wine, a day renders a better poem, what year confers value on a piece. Ought the writer who died a hundred years ago, be considered among the ancient and the perfect or among the novel and the worthless?]

Neither Map's narrator nor Horace's speaker is shy about condemning his audience's literary tastes. Map's narrator bluntly conveys his contempt for their values through his use of the metaphor of the ape, a popular twelfth-century image. As Curtius notes "*Simia* can be applied not only to persons but also to abstractions and artifacts which assume the appearance of being something they are not."⁵⁹ Burdened with these misguided preconceptions, his readers, both present and future, are mere imitators of real men, posing as a literate, discriminating public. Similarly, Horace's speaker has an equally poor opinion of his public's judgement: "Occasionally the public sees correctly, and sometimes it's mistaken; if it marvels at and praises the ancient poets so much that it prefers nothing to them and it compares nothing to them, it errs."⁶⁰ (*Interdum volgus rectum videt, est ubi peccat; / si veteres ita miratur laudatque poetas, / ut nihil anteferat, nihil illis comparet, errat*).

There is a certain irony inherent in Map's narrator's account of himself as one of the "good men" who produce "new gold." For example, he celebrates his own modernity in the preface to his English history (*Dist.* 5. 1) and asserts that he knows many present day heroes and many noble deeds worthy of recording. Indeed, as Curtius himself observed long ago, when praising these "presentes Caesares" (modern Caesars) in his Preface, Map sounds much like the speaker of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.⁶¹ After all, it is this very texture of contemporary life which attracts Ovid's speaker who cheerfully relinquishes to others the task of praising (and appreciating) the glories of former days: "let old fashioned things please others, I rejoice that I was born just now: this age is suited to my nature" (*prisca iuuent alios, ego me nunc denique natum / gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis*)⁶².

As Map's narrator positions himself as a *modernus*, a new author, he adopts nevertheless the posture and the rhetoric of those venerable Roman authorities against whom he defines himself. Ironically, he announces his own unique modernity in the language of the Augustan poets and uses it to construct the authority of his own text. Whether the narrator identifies himself with a literary gladiator, or with Juvenal's tasteless Cluuienus, or with Terence's hapless *paterfamilias*, he pursues a classicizing strategy throughout *De Nugis*.

What permeates the conclusion of the *Dissuasio Valerii* and other passages in *De Nugis* is the frustrated recognition that, whatever rhetoric he may employ, Map's narrator cannot fashion and control his own authority as a writer, nor his text's, and that both inevitably pass beyond the influence of his words. Ossified classical norms (as he sees them) will continue to govern the reception of his work and the course of his own literary reputation. It is the spectre of this loss of control and the anxiety it excites which the pages of *De Nugis* foreground consistently. His refunctioning of popular *topoi* (the *antiqui-moderni* and humility *topoi*) evokes this dark prospect of loss rather than reflecting the ambivalence towards change which Clanchy identifies in others of Henry's court circle. If Walter of Châtillon is an innovator in Clanchy's sense of "bring[ing] about a change in [his] contemporaries," then Map's narrator certainly is—he calls for the adoption of "modern" literary standards, or, at the very least, a modification of an unreflective allegiance to classical ones.

Further, in adopting a classicizing rhetoric, Map's narrator distinguishes himself from figures such as Peter of Blois, who,

according to Southern, "is a man of this new world pretending to belong to the old." Map's rhetoric in *De Nugis*, then, seems less an expression of ambivalence, of the kinds identified by Clanchy, than of frustration. (How *does* one get through to these people?) One possible answer is to adopt the only rhetoric acceptable to his readers to articulate the problem. His strategy of co-opting the language and imagery of the authoritative corpus of classical literature while establishing a new rival authority outside it is an uneasy balancing act for one self-conscious author of the late twelfth century. It is uneasy in the sense that his choice of rhetoric produces a kind of counter-current: it establishes a creative tension between the contemporary, modern man and the conservative, classical terms in which he is described. This classicizing rhetoric, functioning as a counter current, undercuts his position as a *modernus* to some degree. Indeed, many would identify a creative tension of this sort as ironic. The peculiar stance achieved by Map's narrator in *De Nugis* is a sophisticated and complex version of "the modern game," as Clanchy calls it, in which others associated with Henry II's court were engaged.

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Notes

- 1 "I was found wanting in this alone, that I am living." Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) 310. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from the Latin are my own.
- 2 Map served as king's justice for Henry II, and later became archdeacon of Oxford. He composed his *De Nugis Curialium* in the early 1180's. He subsequently revised it, a process apparently left unfinished at the time of his death.
- 3 "The contrast between the "modern" present and the Pagan-Christian Antiquity was felt by no century so strongly as by the twelfth [W]e do find a clear consciousness of the turn of an era." E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 255.
- 4 Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 517.
- 5 "Modernitas," *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, ed. R. E. Latham (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965). In philosophical parlance, *Moderni* often referred to the Nominalists.
- 6 Stock 517.
- 7 Curtius 254.
- 8 Stock 518. In literary texts, the tension between the ancients and moderns corresponds to the popular theme of the conflict between youth and old age. Curtius observes that Joseph of Exeter has "youth speak forcefully against age" in his epic *De bello troiano*. He cites John of Hauville's assertion that he is a *modernus*, and the youth who "think themselves older than Nestor, more eloquent than Cicero" in Nigel of Canterbury's *Mirror of Fools* (98).
- 9 M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968) 318.
- 10 Chenu 320.

- 11 See his editors' discussion (xxxvii - xxxviii).
- 12 Map 122-24.
- 13 This translation is by Chenu. (See page 320 n. 24).
- 14 See Chenu's discussion 320.
- 15 Map 312.
- 16 Chenu 320.
- 17 See Curtius 251-55, Chenu 310-30, and Elisabeth Gössman in *Antiqui und Moderni im Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann Institutes 23 (Munich 1974) 35-39, 67.
- 18 M. T. Clanchy, "Moderni in Medieval Education and Government in England," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 675.
- 19 Written after 1155 and dedicated to Beckett, John of Salisbury's *Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum* is his sole poetic work. See Rigg's analysis of John of Salisbury in his *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature 1066-1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 74.
- 20 Rigg's translation 74.
- 21 Rigg 74. By contrast, with the exception of the examples in his anti-matrimonial tract, the *Dissuasio Valerii*, all of Map's stories are either modern or drawn from folklore. His materials, in other words, are stubbornly non-classical, although his treatment often employs a classicizing rhetoric.
- 22 Rigg 74. See lines 167-1290.
- 23 Chenu 319. See also Curtius 254 note 21. Both cite Karl Strecker, ed., *Moralischsatirische Gedichte Walters von Chatillon* (Heidelberg, 1929) 97.
- 24 Stock 518.
- 25 Chenu 319.

- 26 Clanchy 675. In addition, see Clanchy's analysis of remarks made by Richard FitzNeil and Gerald of Wales, 678-79. Richard FitzNeil's *Dialogue of the Exchequer* (c. 1179) establishes a similar tension. And in his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, Gerald of Wales dramatises these polarities through a dialogue in which "the Man of Letters (Literator)" interrogates "Smart Alec (Superficialis)" about the value of this subtlety." (Clanchy's translation.)
- 27 Clanchy 677.
- 28 Clanchy's translation. Clanchy 677-78.
- 29 Stock 518.
- 30 Stock 519. See his discussion.
- 31 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. Thomas D. Hardy, vol. 2 (London, 1840) 470.
- 32 Map 404.
- 33 Clanchy 678.
- 34 Brooke and Mynors xliv.
- 35 Robert Levine, "How to Read Walter Map," *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch* 23 (1988): 95.
- 36 A. G. Rigg makes this observation in his discussion of Map. See his *History* 92.
- 37 Map 404. Compare this phrase, for example, with William of Malmesbury's *nostris temporis doctos* (the learned men of our time) discussed above.
- 38 Map 210. The verb "misisti" (you have sent), may refer to Map's patron, the Geoffrey mentioned in *Dist.* 1.10, who the narrator claims urged upon him the impossible task of writing.
- 39 Map 108 and 106.
- 40 The Cistercians had many victims, a number of whom they

deprived of their lands through creative frauds, what we would today call "land grabs" (Map 104). See Brooke and Mynor's speculation about the possibility that the historical Walter Map himself had a dispute with the Cistercians over their failure to pay tithes (xliv, n. 1).

⁴¹ Map 110. M. R. James suggests that this chapter was composed as an "independent pamphlet" (Map 84, n. 1). It may have been composed with such an intention but never reached an audience. Even if James is correct, it is simply unclear whether the chapter was read by anyone other than the author.

⁴² Map 110.

⁴³ Map 112. As Map's editors note "Cluuienus was the unknown bad poet referred to by Juvenal, *Sat.* i. 80" (Map 112, n. 1). They also cite the words *sani an creta et carbone notati (=insani)* from Horace, *Sat.* ii. 3. 246.

⁴⁴ Robert Levine touches on Map's use of this *topos*, although not on this particular example, in his article "How to Read Walter Map" 93.

⁴⁵ Robert Levine comments on the "rhetorical elaborateness" of *De Nugis*, and finds it a mark "not necessarily of high seriousness, but certainly [one which] indicates a high degree of rhetorical self-consciousness." "How to Read Walter Map" 93.

⁴⁶ "It had been the property of classical poetry to embellish—fiction was its product. It was the property of medieval prose to state facts simply—truth would be its product." Jeanette M. A. Beer, *Narrative Conventions of Truth in the Middle Ages*, (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1983)14.

⁴⁷ Beer 23.

⁴⁸ See for example Map 80, 124-28, and 494-96.

⁴⁹ Map 22.

⁵⁰ Map 22.

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- 51 Map 22 note 2; Virgil, *Aen.* x, 284.
- 52 Map 22.
- 53 Map 22.
- 54 Map 22.
- 55 Map 312.
- 56 Map 312.
- 57 Curtius 98.
- 58 *Epistles*, II. i. 34ff. Horace goes on to propose an arbitrary limit of one hundred years, but then muses that critics will have difficulty in judging the literary merits of those who die a month or two on either side of the mark. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1936) 398.
- 59 Curtius 539.
- 60 *Epistles*, II. i. 63-5.
- 61 See Map 404ff.
- 62 *Ars Amatoria*, III, 121. Cited by Curtius 98.