

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## Triangulating Rome: Du Bellay, Spenser, and the Fantasy of Perspective

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For Renaissance writers and thinkers, to be a humanist and devout Christian demanded a particular strategy for contemplating the past, present, and future. The triad of the Roman pagan past, the current state of Christian Europe, and the eschatological future of one's soul all had to be negotiated. Petrarch, the first major Christian humanist, performs this negotiation as he describes an encounter with Rome in the *Canzoniere*.<sup>1</sup> The poem shifts between the past, the Christian destiny of the soul, and the temptations of the present:

L'aspetto sacro de la terra vostra  
Mi fa del mal passato tragger guai  
Gridando : 'Sta'su, misero, che fai?'  
Et la via de salir al ciel mi mostra.

[The holy sight of your city makes me bewail my evil past, crying: 'Get up, wretch! What are you doing?' and shows me the way to mount to Heaven.']  
(*Canzoniere* 68, 1-4)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Petrarch serves a unique role in the history of Renaissance philosophies of time and the past. As Peter Burke argues, 'He reveres the ancients—as men, not as magicians; and is acutely aware of the difference between their age and his own. He would have liked to have lived in Augustan Rome', *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1969), p. 21. Petrarch's *Familiars* reveal a man eager to have personal conversations with Cicero, Horace, and others (see *Fam.* XXIV, 10) and who is aware that he is in a different age and time than that of classical antiquity. His literary work attempts to bridge this gap by producing virtual encounters with the past while keeping in mind his obligations as a Christian, and his role as a man in his own age.

<sup>2</sup> All Italian texts and translations from the *Canzoniere* are from Robert Durling (Trans.), *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976).

The 'terra vostra', Rome, exists in three separate, layered entities. It is, as always for Petrarch, the conceptual and philological site of Roman literature and the Roman past. It is also a city to visit as a tourist; a city that Petrarch had been warned might not live up to the expectations created by his extensive reading.<sup>3</sup> The city, finally, is the true site of the Papacy, which has the ability to show him the way to eternal life.<sup>4</sup> For the reader, Petrarch's encounter with Rome produces a triangulated poetic experience. Petrarch faces the image of the city of Rome in the present. The act of doing so plunges his thoughts into the past ('del mal passato'), while this act of looking back in time and returning to the present brings Petrarch, finally, to consider the divine and the eternal as he is shown 'la via de salir al ciel' ('the way to climb to heaven'). Rome as a city, Rome as ruins, and Rome as a spiritual homeland all merge in Petrarch's imagination.

This essay will explore this particular compositional and perspectival strategy on display in Petrarch's work and later imitated by two major poetic innovators: Joachim du Bellay in France and Edmund Spenser in England. Though the poets' most active years occurred decades apart, Spenser began his career confronting du Bellay's poetry. Spenser's earliest published work was a translation of du Bellay included in Jan van der Noot's *A Theatre for Worldlings*. Taking on larger questions of how triangular composition and perspective, so important to the study of Renaissance art history since the work of Panofsky and Wölfflin (and recently revived by Rebecca Zorach), can be applied productively to the development of the Renaissance lyric, this essay will pursue the influence of a triangulated imagination on the work of representing the Roman world and Roman ruined spaces. The imitative strategies of du Bellay and Spenser (and van der Noot) can be productively interpreted as sharing a similar philological and historical energy, drawing up the past into the present only to shift focus upwards to the divine and eternal. Using triangulation as a spiritually-charged representative strategy, the anti-worldly poems of these poets offer an empowered awareness of human life caught between the dead past, the living present, and the divine and infinite future beyond this world. The poems invite us to read melancholy images of the world's decay

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<sup>3</sup> Petrarch writes to Colonna: 'As I recall, you used to dissuade me from coming for a particular reason, which was that if the ruins of the city did not correspond to its fame and to the impressions I had received from books, my love for it would diminish. I, too, although burning with desire, willingly used to postpone my visit, fearing that what I had imagined in my my mind, my eyes would belittle at the moment of reality which is always injurious to a reputation. Such reality I am happy to say diminished nothing and instead increased everything.' *Familiars* II, 14, *Rerum familiarium libri I-VIII*, Trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Though for Petrarch's life past childhood the Pope would always reside near him in Avignon, a fact he often bemoaned.

as enlightening, energizing, and imaginatively rich, eschewing sectarian statements for poetic experiences.

Before turning to the poems themselves, some discussion of the philosophical and aesthetic resonance of triangles and triangulation will provide important background to Petrarch and his imitators' poetic strategies. Triangulation, as Zorach has argued, worked on a theoretical and philosophical level that linked both triangular composition (the triangular arrangement of figures in an image) and triangulated perspective (the geometric technique giving images a perceived planar depth).<sup>5</sup> Triangles, since Plato's *Timaeus*, were associated with the building blocks of the divine. They are the most basic form and a shape with important metaphysical and theological consequences: an access point to the creation and organization of the universe by God. The Christian Trinity would obviously have only intensified the spiritual resonance of triangulated spiritual philosophy, and help cement Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy's reputation as a thought system close to Christian theology.<sup>6</sup>

To argue for a philosophical and theological presence of triangulation in literary texts, as this essay strives to do, is to resist the narrative of triangular perspective represented by the work of Ernst Cassirer, Erwin Panofsky, and Hubert Damisch, whose works revived the twentieth-century question of perspective 'as a symbolic form.'<sup>7</sup> Though this particular thread of twentieth-century Art History has been a fruitful exploration of

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<sup>5</sup> In asserting the link between triangular composition and perspective, Zorach is going against the predominant traditions of contemporary art history. She writes 'In a sense they are incommensurable echoes of one another, and the fact that they are rarely discussed together reflects a divide within the twentieth-century study and criticism of art, a divide between the flatness of the surface--prized by modernism--and perspective's illusionistic space projected beyond the picture plane.' *The Passionate Triangle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Simona Cohen notes that 'Neoplatonic definitions of time were important links between the concepts of the pagan philosophers and their Christian successors.' Cohen also underscores the connection in Neoplatonic philosophy between time in the world and eternity: 'Time as related to the phenomenal world and human experience was conceived as a reflection of Eternity; thus its image had to express the underlying regularity, uniformity, and continuity of its parts, as manifested by the planets and the zodiac,' *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 11-12. Marsilio Ficino's *Platonic Theology* is a clear primary source of Neoplatonic thought in the century after Petrarch and, closer to the scientific culture of northern Europe, John Dee opens his preface to Henry Billingsley's translation of Euclid's *Geometry* by invoking the name of "Divine Plato." See Euclid *Elements of Geometrie*, trans. by Sir Henry Billingsley (London, 1570) STC 10560.

<sup>7</sup> The works in question here are Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Vols 1-4, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. by Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1997), and Hubert Damisch's *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. by John Goodman (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994).

the major innovation of Renaissance picture making, Zorach rightly notes how expansive triangulation and meditations on the triangle were in the period across disciplines:

Once one enters into the theoretical world of the Renaissance triangle, things get complicated quickly. For philosophers the triangle is a topic, an example, even a primal site of origin; for theologians it is a conscious and overt trinitarian symbol; for perspectivalists it is the basis of vision; for artists it is a convention for organizing a picture plane. For many of those who thought about it, it was a way of mapping relationships.<sup>8</sup>

With uses, as well, in geographic and mathematical discourse, the triangle seems to be everywhere, but what of the literary arts and the making of poetry? Is there any way to track a triangulation in the development of Renaissance poetry?

By considering the temporal fantasies embedded into perspectival representation, we can begin to see the presence of triangulation in Renaissance lyric poetry. Past and present are similarly collated in the perspectival experiments of Renaissance painting with the ruins revived as they became cast in modern bodies and settings. Each Renaissance painting that engages in recreating visual perspective signals infinity, as Panofsky has noted.<sup>9</sup> According to Panofsky, when any two parallel lines are drawn into

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<sup>8</sup> Zorach, p. 12. Marcia Hall criticizes Zorach for offering a reading that ‘treats the work of art as if it were visual philosophy’ where ‘meaning resides in the text that lies behind the work and is not created by the painter with the tools of his trade, wood and pigment’. *Renaissance Quarterly* 65.3 (2012), 881-2 (p. 882). Though Hall ultimately remains skeptical that Zorach accurately captures the level of philosophical erudition possessed by Renaissance artists, Caspar Pearson finds Zorach’s work to be ‘a triumph of scholarship and erudition that ranges across a wide array of material,’ ultimately concluding that ‘insofar as Zorach causes us to rethink a central aspect of Renaissance art, the book must be considered a real achievement’, *Oxford Art Journal* 35.3 (2012), 457-476 (p. 460). This disparity is telling and highlights the level of comfort one must have for speculative and cultural readings of technical processes of creation to be convinced by the full scope of Zorach’s arguments. In a literary context, philosophical goals exist hand in hand with technical execution and so Zorach’s arguments provide useful philosophical, theological, and aesthetic context.

<sup>9</sup> Panofsky writes: ‘Infinity is implied—or, rather, visually symbolized—by the fact that any set of objectively parallel lines, regardless of the location and direction, converges towards one single “vanishing point” which thus represents, quite literally, a point where parallels meet, that is to say, a point located in infinity; what is loosely referred to as “the vanishing point” of a picture is privileged only in so far as it directly faces the eye and thus forms the focus of only such parallels as are objectively perpendicular to the picture plane, and Alberti himself explicitly states that the convergence of these “orthogonals” indicates the succession and alteration of quantities “quasi persino in infinito.”’ *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1972) p. 126.

an image, the parallel lines must appear to converge in the distance in order to give the image verisimilitude. This gives most Renaissance pictures—even those of *trecento* painting—a representation of infinite space. Similarly, certain Renaissance poems, which attempt to place the past and the present on the verisimilitudinous stage of poetic vision, referring to each other while at the same time marking the temporal distances they try to bridge (for instance, in Petrarch's poem on Rome above), must always appear to converge in the infinite background extending to the sky. In certain applications, poets could use this to contrast, and even ultimately combine and fold, the mutable earthly space in the foreground with the infinite background space of the heavens.

In treatments of Rome, especially, this representative strategy becomes apparent. Rome was a layered city with imperial, philological, eschatological, and cosmopolitan identities all existing concurrently under one name, one spatial concept. To adequately represent Rome, a representation strategy that was at once oneiric, representational, and philosophically rich was needed.<sup>10</sup> Triangulation as an organizing practice in visual art was used to reach out and make connections: to map out, as Zorach writes, 'affinity, dependence, and desire.'<sup>11</sup> Plato in the *Timaeus*, his celebrated cosmology of the forms, asserted the importance of the triangle in understanding the construction of the universe. Plato offered, in a text popular throughout the middle ages and the Renaissance, an argument for the essential and primordial nature of the triangle in understanding the makeup of the entire cosmos.<sup>12</sup> The philosophical, representational, and spiritual importance of the triangle allowed a conceptual triangular aesthetic to become an animating and even guiding force in the temporal and visionary energies of these poets' works.

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<sup>10</sup> For A.E.B. Coldiron's treatment of the oneiric mode in Du Bellay and Spenser see 'How Spenser Excavates Du Bellay's "Antiquitez"; Or, The Role of the Poet, Lyric Historiography, and the English Sonnet.' *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 101.1 (2002), 41-67.

<sup>11</sup> Zorach, p. 5. The full quote is: 'The fact that geometries can be traced on a picture does not mean that they were part of the work's conception; in fact it might be better to consider these geometries as works of art in and of themselves, inspired by the original works they purport to diagram. But the plotting of a real or symbolic geometry of the picture plane is not an impossibly strange idea, since astronomers constructed constellations connecting points in the sky, surveyors imagined diagonals when making measurements, and navigators plotted points on maps. Artists did plot the geometries of bodies and buildings, dividing them into shapes. Geometric order was imposed on images to depict conceptual relationships and invisible lines were made visible in diagrammatic drawings and in paintings that use lines of force to map affinity, dependence, and desire.'

<sup>12</sup> See especially Plato, *Timaeus* 53B-54B.

Triangulation highlights the link between spiritual and spatial thinking. To think spiritually is often to depend on spatial metaphors and systems of conceptual organization, as Cassirer notes: ‘the essential role of spatial representation is most clearly shown in the universal terms which language has devised for the designation of spiritual processes.’<sup>13</sup> Spiritual vocabularies, sensual (or poetic) experiences, and spatial representation become themselves a triad in these poets’ works.<sup>14</sup> As du Bellay and Spenser carry on Petrarch’s tradition of the visionary poetic persona facing Rome and the mortal world’s decay, their practice of representing space is a spiritual process, one rooted in exposing the spiritual consequences of a particular space: the space of Rome. Powerful, ancient, formed out of layers of decay and corrupt rebuilding, Rome was the centre of the European spiritual and political world. Rome was also, according to Gilbert Gadoffre, the one Western European city in the sixteenth century that could truly be called international and cosmopolitan.<sup>15</sup> It contained concurrently the ghosts of its past, the powerful draw of its present, and the pull of eternal destiny rooted in its role as the spiritual centre of the Catholic world. Even when, as in the case of Spenser’s work, these techniques are transposed to an English Protestant setting, a similar triangular strategy is used.

Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* 323 is the origin point of du Bellay and Spenser’s visionary poetry. Petrarch’s visionary mode highlights his role as a viewer of projected visions in space: ‘Standomi un giorno solo a la fenestra / onde cose vedea tante et sì nove / ch’era sol di mirar quasi già stanco’ (323.1-3) [Being one day alone at the window, where I saw so many and such strange things that from the mere seeing I was already almost tired]. Petrarch observes the destruction of earthly life, viewing it with a detached and exhausted contempt of the world. Image after image in *Canzoniere* 323 presents a scene of past beauty, present destruction, and the emotional aftermath on the viewer. The first image is of a wild animal hunted and destroyed by two dogs:

Una fera m’apparve da man destra  
con fronte umana da far arder Giove,

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<sup>13</sup> Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume One: Language*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 199.

<sup>14</sup> Cassirer writes ‘It is the intuition of *space* which most fully reveals this interpenetration of sensuous and spiritual expression in language,’ p. 198-9. On the question of triads, Derrida saw groupings of three as reflecting a ‘speculative dialectic’ and sought, in Allan McGill’s words, a ‘four-thinking that is explicitly directed against the three-thinking of Hegel’ *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 273-4. For the purposes of this essay, I am interested in emphasizing the speculative philosophical roots of ‘three-thinking’ as they emerge in the triadic temporal and spatial thinking of triangulated poetic vision.

<sup>15</sup> See Gadoffre *Du Bellay et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 45.

cacciata de duo veltri, un nero, un bianco,  
che l'un et l'altro fianco  
de la fera gentil mordean sì forte  
che 'n poco tempo la menaro al passo  
ove chiusa in un sasso  
vinse molta bellezza acerba morte,  
et mi fe' sospirar sua dura sorte. (323.4-12)

[A wild creature appeared to me on the right hand, with a human face such as to enamor Jove, pursued by two hounds, one black, one white, who at both sides of the noble creature were tearing so fiercely that in a short time they brought it to the pass where, closed in a stone, much beauty was vanquished by untimely death and made me sigh for its harsh fate.]

This image of a wild animal being brought down by two dogs is the first of a series of six visions. After seeing the deer fall, Petrarch sees a ship brought down after striking a rock during a tempest, a laurel tree suddenly destroyed by lightening, a fountain eaten up by a chasm, a phoenix killing itself out of sadness for the mutability and destruction present in the world, and, finally, a lady 'umile in sé, ma 'ncontra amor superba' [humble in herself, but proud against love] (64) who is killed by a small snake. The visions' unifying thread is beauty spoiled by the sudden and pitiless cruelty of the world, leading Petrarch to cry out 'ahi nulla altro che pianto al mondo dura' [ah, nothing but weeping endures in the world] (72). Petrarch responds to each terrible vision with a renewed feeling of anti-worldly zeal.

It is important to note, however, that Petrarch's spatial imagination does not present a clear ladder upward from the pain of the world to the joy of heaven, nor is the goal of his poetry to mirror the transcendent beauties of the universe in worldly form. Rather, the poems perform a constant traveling *between* heaven and earth, between the present and the past.<sup>16</sup> What the reader receives in reading the *Canzoniere*, is a spiritual and spatial journey, not an idealized progression. Consider the first stanza of *Canzoniere* 333:

Ite, rime dolenti, al duro sasso  
che 'l mio caro tesoro in terra asconde,

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<sup>16</sup> Simona Cohen, writing on illustrations of Petrarch's *Trionfo del Tempo*, notes in the early stage of illustrations that the linear progression of time 'was represented spatially by the left to right progression of the chariot' p. 133. This suggests that early readers of Petrarch's poetic treatment of time saw different temporal moments represented in one progressive movement through the poem. As shown below, the illustrations accompanying translations of this poem in *A Theatre for Worldlings* preserve a similar visual practice, representing the passage of time within a single visual artwork.

ivi chiamate chi dal Ciel risponde  
ben ch 'l mortal sia in loco oscuro et basso. (333.1-4)

[Go, sad rhymes, to the hard stone that hides in earth my dear treasure, there call  
for her who answers from Heaven although her mortal part is in a place dark and  
low.]

Once again, Petrarch turns to a triangulation between the past as buried in the ground (the ruined past of buried bones and fallen buildings), the present moment of his poetry, and the infinite divine beyond (where Laura's voice still exists). Though Petrarch applies this technique on a sparse visionary plane outside of Rome, Joachim du Bellay would do the same in his Roman poetry.

Though du Bellay and Petrarch lived on opposite sides of the revolution in linear perspective in the early-fifteenth century, the belief that perspective could have spiritual and philosophical consequences began in the thirteenth-century and would have been well known by Petrarch at the time he was composing the *Canzoniere*. In Petrarch's time, thanks to the work of optical theorists such as Roger Bacon in England and the Silesian scholar Witelo, contemplating and reproducing ways of seeing was understood as a spiritual act in itself.<sup>17</sup> Geometric thinking, the basis of triangulation, then, was a major spiritual activity that was being conceived on and off the painter's canvas, making footholds in theology and, as Petrarch's poetry shows, in literary discourse itself. Despite the technical changes in painting and optics between the two poets' eras, du Bellay would have seen the space of Petrarch's poetry as a spiritually and aesthetically rich model for producing his own Roman poetry.

Joachim du Bellay's poems about Rome are obsessed with the distance between his native Anjou and Rome, as well as the difference between the glories of ancient Rome and the dilapidated state of present Rome. Du Bellay's lyric voice travels across spaces to offer a model of the French Petrarchan sonnet that is not focused on love for a woman or even for one's poetic destiny, but on digging deep into archeological and philological terrain. Du Bellay had gone to Rome in the service of Jean Du Bellay, a prominent cardinal and cousin to Joachim Du Bellay's father. His trip, consequent on Jean Du Bellay's recent appointment as *Protecteur des affaires royales en cour de Rome*, reflected France's ambition to take its seat as the next great empire, an era that,

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Edgerton describes the link between *perspectiva* and theology in Italy: 'By the end of the thirteenth century Christian theologians everywhere in Western Europe began to believe that the new geometric science of *perspectiva* not only provided the key to how God spreads his divine grace to mankind, but how he conceived the universe itself in his divine mind's eye at Genesis.' *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) p. 29.



the French hoped, would renew the imperial presence of France in a way that had not been seen since the days of Charlemagne. For Du Bellay though, his voyage to Rome was a meditative journey to the literary past of Roman antiquity, an extended imaginative engagement with the distant ghosts of Roman literature still present in the ruins.<sup>18</sup>

Rome becomes a meditative place where Du Bellay contemplates time, space, and eternity. The poet finds himself disappointed with the state of the remnants of a Rome that, as Gilbert Gadoffre notes, was not at all well preserved.<sup>19</sup> There was simply not much to see except ‘some columns, some crumbling walls’ which ‘did not suffice to evoke the capital of the ancient world. It required an effort of the mind.’<sup>20</sup> In the absence of a Rome worthy of itself, only a filtering through the poetic imagination can make any sense of what should be a momentous location. As Rome was, in Du Bellay’s time, ‘the only city one could call international’, Du Bellay would have been connected to a transnational community as he wrote in the transnational form of the Petrarchan lyric.<sup>21</sup> Yet his preoccupation in terms of what he lacks is not a beloved lady, but a beloved land and a beloved past, both separated from him by terrain and time.<sup>22</sup> The horizontal terrain that separates him from France and the vertical terrain that buries the true Rome conspire in Du Bellay’s work to form a productive, and thoroughly Petrarchan melancholia.<sup>23</sup> As he debates these various distances that came to define his time in Rome, his interest in the spiritual consequences of the passage of time comes to

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<sup>18</sup> Eric MacPhail’s *The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature* (Saratoga: Anna Libri, 1990) offers an overview of du Bellay’s time in Rome.

<sup>19</sup> Gadoffre notes: ‘the Roman city that we can see today, after four centuries of digs, excavations, of restorations, is still underground [in du Bellay’s time]. We must completely forget about the city we know to imagine that which was du Bellay’s Rome.’ The original French is: ‘La cité romaine que nous pouvons voir aujourd’hui, après quatre siècles de fouilles, d’excavations, de restaurations, est encore sous terre. Il faut l’oublier complètement pour imaginer ce qu’était la Rome de du Bellay’ *Du Bellay et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Wayne Rebhorn highlights some of the linkages between the traditional Petrarchan sonnet sequence and Du Bellay’s Roman poetry: ‘Du Bellay, like the Petrarchist love poet, responds to Rome by producing a series of blazons celebrating her grandeur and uniqueness and elevating her into a goddess. Also, like a Petrarchist poet, he turns Rome into a sacred being, a saint...’ See ‘Du Bellay’s Imperial Mistress: Les Antiquitez de Rome as Petrarchist Sonnet Sequence.’ *Renaissance Quarterly* 33.4 (1980), 609-22 (pp. 612-13).

<sup>23</sup> Du Bellay’s longer exilic sequence *Les Regrets* is meant to invoke Ovid’s *Tristia* in their meditation on exile from a beloved homeland. For more see Stephen Hinds’s essay ‘Black-Sea Latin, Du Bellay, and the Barbarian Turn’ in *Two Thousand Years of Solitude: Exile after Ovid*. ed. by Jennifer Ingleheart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 59-83.

shape his transnational and trans-temporal meditations. *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, published alongside *Les Regrets* and the collection of Latin elegies, the *Poemata*, deals with this triangulation of the buried past of Rome, Du Bellay's exile away from France in the Roman present, and the Christian hope for eternal life.

The *Antiquitez* reach into the spaces of the dead and the Roman past. As Thomas Greene notes, Du Bellay's work is in line with the humanist culture of his day, one possessing 'this instinct to reach out into chaos, oblivion, mystery, the alien, the subterranean, the dead, even the demonic, to reach out and in the act of reaching already to be revising and restoring.'<sup>24</sup> Du Bellay depended on his poetic imagination to fill out the Roman landscape. Though the ruins are real, their accessibility, as Gadoffre notes, was not yet realized in a Renaissance Roman culture that had little respect for conservation and built and demolished freely on the sacred antique ground. Confronted with this disappointing landscape, Du Bellay works to reconstruct the culture of the space itself, providing a sort of ethnography of the Roman ruins—which are themselves largely not visible to the eye, though they can be accessed through imaginative poetic construction and reading. The fifth sonnet of the *Antiquitez* reveals how little there may be to learn with the untrained eye in Rome:

Qui voudra voir tout ce qu'ont peu nature,  
L'art, et le ciel, Rome, te vienne voir:  
J'entens s'il peult ta grandeur concevoir  
Par ce qui n'est que ta morte peinture.  
Rome n'est plus, et si l'architecture  
Quelque ombre encor de Rome fait revoir,  
C'est comme un corps par magique sçavoir  
Tiré de nuict hors de sa sepulture. (1-8)

[Who wants to see all that nature, art, and heaven have, Rome, should come see you. I mean, if he can conceive of your grandeur only by your dead portrait. Rome is no more and if architecture reveals still some shadow of Rome, it's like a corpse by magical knowledge pulled at night from its sepulchre.]<sup>25</sup>

Du Bellay imagines the trained mind as able to descend vertically through the layers of earth heaped up by time. The 'dead portrait' of Rome is not adequate and the visual plane is not enough. Yet, Du Bellay makes clear that Rome can be activated by a

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> All passages of Du Bellay's French are from 'The Regrets,' with 'The Antiquities of Rome,' 'Three Latin Elegies, and 'The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language', trans. by Richard Helgerson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Translations are my own.

triangulated interpretation in which Rome's past, preserved in the written archive, illuminates the present remnants of Rome and underscores the anti-worldly spectacle of the ruins. Du Bellay is offering archaeology of the mind: a poetic method for processing layered spaces.

Hassan Melehy has written convincingly on Du Bellay's understanding of the space of Rome. He sees Du Bellay's work on the Roman ruins as a 'contribution to the inauguration of modernity'. He notes that 'the translation or transfer that takes place in imitation involves a multilingual dialogue with the past that at once affirms the impossibility of resurrecting it and allows it to persist in the different creations to which its elements will contribute in the present.'<sup>26</sup> Melehy believes that in the absence of the ruins themselves, a modern poetics of literary transfer continually re-enacted the Roman past, bringing the Roman ruins into the vernacular present.<sup>27</sup> He also emphasizes the transnational importance of Rome as a city where all European cultures were brought together and argues quite compellingly that Du Bellay sees time as a sort of river that 'is indeed a flow, one in which each configuration may refer to an antecedent one in producing its own meaning, but may not reproduce or depend on it in order to be firmly fixed.'<sup>28</sup>

Melehy sees Du Bellay's treatment of Rome as remaining a nationalistic and modernizing project.<sup>29</sup> Du Bellay remains fascinated by the distance between France and Italy, and the distance between the past and his own age, yet the virtual poetic movement through this distance, rather than the innovative potential of the present,

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<sup>26</sup> *The Poetics of Literary Transfer in Early Modern France and England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013) p. 28

<sup>27</sup> Melehy argues 'rather than reproducing or copying the original, imitation repeats it, repeats it as a simulacrum so as to insist on the difference between itself and what is being imitated, to affirm itself as in and part of the context of the present, to inform and form the present' (p. 29). I am building on Melehy's assertions to argue that this constant presentism results in a collective anti-worldly movement in Western Europe.

<sup>28</sup> For a description of Rome as a cosmopolitan city see p. 41. Melehy continues to argue that 'In this succession of different configurations of Rome that the poem discovers, the ruins or antiquities of Rome don't function as the historic Rome or even as a clear representation of that city from which the poet may derive inspiration...' (p. 44).

<sup>29</sup> Melehy writes: 'The interpretation of the ruins of Rome is of value to Du Bellay because it enables the notion of poetry as actually productive of a simulacrum, so that an image of glory for France may be created by the same token that such an image of Rome has been. That Rome's uniqueness consists in its having been able to produce an image of this sort makes it possible for such production to be repeated as a simulacrum' (p. 47). Melehy continues: 'Du Bellay must be regarded as a thoroughly modern poet: his work seeks a continuity with a venerated past in order to effect a break with it, such that movement in time toward the future is recognized and engaged' (p. 50).

becomes the animating force of his sequence. George Tucker emphasizes the importance of traversing distances for Du Bellay when he notes ‘the impression of spatial and temporal progression through a geographic, spiritual, and literary odyssey, largely undistorted by later rewriting, is the very hallmark of Du Bellay’s poetic *persona*.’<sup>30</sup> Tucker’s assertion that Du Bellay entered into a kind of Ovidian exile in Rome is useful. Like Ovid, Du Bellay was forced to carve out a poetics far away from his homeland and, like Ovid, Du Bellay was able to enrich the literature of his nation while having a vexed and distant relationship with it.<sup>31</sup> Yet Du Bellay’s vision, unlike Ovid’s, couples its horizontal axis of perceived exile with a vertical axis addressing time and eternity within a Christian context. Du Bellay’s poetic voice is caught between ages, between landscapes, and between the mutable and the eternal. Du Bellay was not the only poet in the France of his day producing poetry that saw different temporalities blending together in a grand imaginative vision. Du Bellay’s contemporary, Nostradamus, also engaged in a prophetic visionary mode where ‘all tenses are simultaneous in the great time warp of the *Prophecies*.’<sup>32</sup> For both these poets, past, present, and future all blend in poetic vision.

In the ‘Au Roy’ dedication at the beginning of the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay offers an *ars poetica* of his Roman poetry:

Ne vous pouvant donner ces ouvrages antiques  
Pour votre Saint-Germain, ou pour Fontainebleau,  
Je les vous donne, Sire, en ce petit tableau  
Peint, le mieux que j’ay peu, de couleurs poëtiques. (1-4)

[Unable to give you these ancient works for Saint-Germain or Fontainebleau, I give them to you, Sire, in this little painting, painted the best that I could in poetic colors.]

Poetry becomes an adequate visual substitute for an inaccessible and unmoving space. It becomes a moveable space operating in a similar fashion to that of a painted image. The

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<sup>30</sup> Tucker *The Poet’s Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Ovid and Du Bellay, see Hinds (n.23).

<sup>32</sup> Sieburth signals the link between the two poets: ‘Having grown up near the impressive Roman ruins of Glanum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Nostradamus was fascinated by the ghostly persistence of the past: his *Prophecies* are the direct contemporaries of the sonnets of Du Bellay’s *Les Antiquitez de Rome*... The quatrains of his great serial poem are filled with archaeological allusions to buried treasure or to the chance and ominous resurgence antiquities from beneath the ground... Characteristically, the eruption of the archaic into the present, or of myth into the real, is registered as taking place in the future’. *Nostradamus: The Prophecies*, trans. by Richard Sieburth (New York: Penguin, 2012), pp.xxxiv-v.

imperial vision in the *Antiquitez* is caught up in the challenge of representing and studying space in art. By producing a body of work that renders the Roman legacy portable, Du Bellay's poems see the ruins as a meditation on the spiritual practice of meditating on space, as becomes clear in Sonnet 26 of the sequence:

Qui voudroit figurer la Romaine grandeur  
En ses dimensions, il ne luy faudroit querre  
A la ligne, et au plomb, au compas, à l'equerre  
Sa longueur et largeur, hautesse et profondeur. (1-4)

[Who would like to represent the grandeur of Rome in its own dimensions, it would not be necessary for him to use the line, the lead, or the compass, to square its length and width, height and depth.]

The true measure of Rome cannot be made with traditional methods of measurement. Surveying tools will not work. Yet Du Bellay, in rejecting the tools of surveying, still declares the sort of figuring done by surveying to be his main goal. There is a cartographic and pictorial drive to his work that wants to process the ruins through representation, but, because of the spiritual import of the land and its burial under piles of dust, a new form of surveying will have to be invented to encompass Rome's immense cultural importance. Du Bellay's solution is to engage in the sort of triangulated perspective that we saw in Petrarch, one that is created in moving between his position as observer, in digging down into the ruins, and in expanding outwards towards distant places:

Il luy faudroit cerner d'une egale rondeur  
Tout ce que l'Ocean de ses longs bras enserre,  
Soit où l'Astre annuel eschauffe plus la terre,  
Soit où souffle Aquilon sa plus grande froideur.  
Rome fut tout le monde, et tout le monde est Rome.  
Et si par mesmes noms mesmes choses on nomme,  
Comme du nom Rome on se pourroit passer,  
La nommant par le nom de la terre et de l'onde:  
Ainsi le monde on peult sur Rome compasser,  
Puis que le plan de Rome est la carte du monde. (5-14)

[He must encircle with an equal roundness everything that the Ocean encloses with its long arms, whether it be where the yearly star warms the earth the most, whether it be where the north wind blows its greatest chill. Rome was the entire world and the entire world is Rome. And if we call the same things by the same names, we could likewise dispense with the name 'Rome', naming her by the

name of the earth of the sea: thus one can encompass the world with Rome, since the map of Rome is the map of the world.]

Rome and the world are put in a reflexive relationship, folding into each other in the lines of the poem. One can only represent the world through representing Rome. To accurately map Rome, one must go out to the world. This may seem hyperbolic or overly conventional in a poem of praise, but the fate of Rome and the fate of the world would have seemed immensely linked to Du Bellay finding himself in the cosmopolitan city. When Du Bellay arrived there in 1553, his work there was cast against a legacy of war and competition between his native France and Italy, England, Spain, and the Netherlands. Rome, with its classical legacy, was a dynamic place to look for methods of processing the past, reforming the present, and understanding the theological stakes of the nationalism and imperialism of Western Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Du Bellay's poems combine the humanist work of remembering and reviving the glorious Roman past with the transnational Petrarchan project of creating a lyric discourse that can address personal uncertainty. Du Bellay was not faced with an inspiring Rome. Rather, Rome deeply shook up his life and presented to Du Bellay a vision of 'the somber future of a divided Europe where the theocrats of Rome and of Geneva were equally horrifying to this Frenchman, a Europe where the Counter-Reformation was not yet clearly defined and where the oracles of the street announced a grand renewal, or the end of world.'<sup>34</sup> In this sense, the *Antiquitez* that had dealt with the collation of past and present, with the ruins of Rome, reflected the fact that the ruins were being excavated in order to build new edifices.<sup>35</sup> The spatial vision of the *Antiquitez* involved a constant plunging downward, upward, and outward: down into the ruins of Rome, up to the present and out to sixteenth-century Europe. The poems move upward in a spiritual sense: infinity, time, and salvation—the ability for the soul to outlast earthly decay in a spiritual survival—is never far from the poetic imagination of the *Antiquitez*.

The *Songe*, which has been considered one of the most obscure poetic sequences in French poetry, expands the spatial meditation on the past found in the *Antiquitez*: the interplay between the hidden spaces of Roman antiquity, the less impressive current

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the intensity of Rome's effect on Du Bellay's political view of Europe, see Gadoffre, pp. 45-84.

<sup>34</sup> Gadoffre, pp. 83-84.

<sup>35</sup> Du Bellay addresses this in sonnet 27 of the *Antiquitez*: 'Regarde apres, comme de jour en jour/ Rome fouillant son antique sejour,/ Se rebatist de tant d'oeuvre divines' [See next, how day by day Rome digging through its old dwelling, rebuilds itself in so many divine works.] (9-11).

Rome, and the space between France and Italy.<sup>36</sup> The *Songe* closes the *Antiquitez* by pushing the visionary forces in the previous poems into a prophetic mode that explicitly and prophetically mediates between heaven and earth, past and present, and mutable and infinite. Like Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 323, the *Songe* emerges as a melancholic and anti-worldly series of visions. Critics have long recognized the *Songe*'s roots in the *canzone* and have seen this as an important moment in Du Bellay's humanism.<sup>37</sup> As Petrarch presents a series of visions, putting the reader in the role of virtual viewer, Du Bellay in the *Songe* continues to blend the spiritual and the visual. This inter-textual moment contains within it an important continuation of the Petrarchan vision in a way that was able to speak to a Europe in religious crisis.

In the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay was constantly looking downward and outward. In the *Songe*, he is ordered, as his readers are, to look at the vanishing point of his poetic project, out to the infinite:

Quand un Demon apparut à mes yeux  
 dessus le bord du grande fleuve de Rome,  
 qui m'appelant de nom dont je me nomme,  
 me commanda regarder vers les cieux. (*Songe* l. 5-8)

[When a spirit appeared to my eyes on the bank of the great river of Rome, who, calling me by the name with which I name myself, ordered me to look toward the heavens.]

Confronted in his dream by a spirit, Du Bellay observes the Tiber only to be ordered to look beyond, towards the heavens. The scene of this poem is one familiar to Renaissance paintings such as Raphael's *The Marriage of the Virgin* (1502) or *Il Spasimo* (1517): a scene in a classical landscape with two figures recast in contemporary dress. The poem presents a reminder of eternity, the vanishing point, and the image draws the observer's eye through the collation of past and present towards the infinite. Though the *Songe* is a series of anti-worldly visions, the major vision is something always beyond what is in the foreground; it is the invisible eternity that is

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<sup>36</sup> Gadoffre notes that 'Avec la *Délie* de Scève et la "Prose pour des Esseintes" de Mallarmé, la séquence du *Songe*...est un des textes poétiques les plus obscurs du répertoire français' [With the *Délie* of Scève and the "Prose pour des Esseintes" of Mallarmé, the *Songe* sequence is one of the most obscure poetic texts of the French canon] (p. 151).

<sup>37</sup> See Leonard Barkan 'Ruins and Visions: Spenser, Pictures Rome' in *Edmund Spenser: Essays on Culture and Allegory*, ed. by Jennifer Klein Morrison and Matthew Greenfield (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000) pp. 9-36 (pp. 27-34).

always behind the displays of ‘mondaine inconstance’—worldly inconstancy—towards which the poem reaches.

In the visual world of the *Songe*, what is off in the distance, what comes from the vanishing point, is often the most destructive. In Sonnet 12 of the sequence, a beautiful fountain is surrounded by a hundred nymphs in a place where ‘sembloit que nature et l’art eussent pris peine / D’assembler en un lieu tous les plaisirs de l’oeil’ [it seemed that nature and art had taken care to assemble in one place all the pleasures of the eye] (5-6). Du Bellay is offering us a painterly composition in a thoroughly classical setting of nymphs and shiny ivory benches (‘Les sièges...luissaient d’ivoire blanc’ [9]). When from the distant hills, a group of Fauns assembles on the scene with loud cries (‘Quand des monts plus prochains de Faunes une suyte / En effroyables criz sur lieu s’assembla’ [11-12]); the resulting destruction (the nymphs are all chased away and the beautiful streams muddied by the fauns’ villainous feet) is a reminder of worldly inconstancy. Yet it advances the spatial interventions that are at the heart of Du Bellay’s project: to resuscitate classical imagery in such a way as to include the conditions of its destruction. By creating poetic visions that juxtapose creation and destruction, classical beauty and the tragedy of the decay of Roman antiquity, Du Bellay is able to make poetic gestures towards the infinite and the divine, enriching his sequence with a spiritual progression similar to that of Petrarch in the *Canzoniere*.

The visions presented in the *Songe* offer a transcendent spirituality rooted in the shift from past glory to present destruction. Critical of Roman excess and yet not fully engaged in the process of reform, they offer a set of visions and poetic spaces where the past can be seen through the needs of the present. Just as in many quattrocento and cinquecento paintings in which the Holy Family is surrounded by classical ruins and foregrounded by a dramatic vanishing point situated between the infinite horizon and heavens, Du Bellay’s poetry, free from the trappings of pictorial representation, uses poetic vision as a way of imagining access to the infinite without taking a clear doctrinal position. The ending of the *Songe*, where Rome in the role of the Whore of Babylon is struck down, conveys a critique of the Church in Rome and yet offers a vision of retribution with no clear replacement:

Cent Roys vaincuz gémissoient à ses piedz,  
Les bras aux doz honteusement liez:  
Lors effroyé de voir telle merveille,  
Le ciel encore je lui voy guerroyer,  
Puis tout à coup je la voy fouldroyer,  
Et du grand bruit en sursault je m’esveille (*Songe* 15.9-14)



[A hundred defeated kings lay at her feet, their arms shamefully bound to their backs: When, frightened to see such a marvel, I saw her again wage war against heaven, then suddenly I saw her struck down and with that great noise I woke up with a start.]

Du Bellay stages in this poem a vision of Rome's defeat cast through references to Revelations 17.<sup>38</sup> Rome is the symbol of past glory, of current corruption and decay, and of the futility of warring against the heavens. The usual collation of past and present is there in a dramatic assemblage, the defeated kings represent the imperial glory of Rome, coming packaged implicitly with the literary and cultural exceptionalism of Imperial Rome, and yet the pride of Rome is also at the forefront finally being punished by the heavens. The verb 'fouldroyer', coming from 'foudre' that means lightning, emphasizes the divine providence that strikes prideful Rome down. The vanishing point, the distant symbol of infinity, comes to the foreground in this closing poem of the sequence. Yet what remains to take its place is denied us; we see an allegorical destruction that is free from any clear sectarian statement. Though the narrative of destruction may lead the reader to conclude that Du Bellay is envisioning the destruction of the papacy or the potential destruction of French poetry and nationhood, as Melehy argues, the end of the *Songe* is no less an origin point of writing.<sup>39</sup> Anti-worldliness, though exploited for the ends of Protestant reform, predates it in Petrarch's own writing and the particular apocalyptic vision is an essentially Christian one, one that embraces the poet's role in relationship to the world, the past, and the eschatological future. Though Protestants exploited this imagery, starting perhaps with Marot's translation of 'les visions de Pétrarque', the source is in the triad of visionary elegy, apocalyptic Christianity, and Roman philology found throughout Petrarch's work.<sup>40</sup> Thus perhaps if not quite an 'ill omen,' as Melehy suggestively argues, the

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<sup>38</sup> See Helgerson's note for this poem p.295.

<sup>39</sup> Melehy argues that '[Du Bellay's] wish-fulfillment may also involve an opposition to contemporary Rome, to the Roman Catholic Church, which Du Bellay was hardly in a position to state explicitly. He may be suggesting a sympathy for the Protestant wish for the destruction of contemporary Rome, at least of its imperial domination. However, in this imitation of Roman poetry, of necessity a simulacrum, a vanity that can't reach immortality, the affirmation is also at least implicit that the same fate may well befall France, the French language, and French poetry—hence the *Songe* constitutes, in its multiple significations, an ill omen' (p. 71).

<sup>40</sup> Malcolm Smith convincingly argues that Du Bellay was eager to reform the Church but not to break away from it: 'In his advocacy of edifying literature and of reform in the church, Du Bellay shared the view of the Reformers. But his desire, like that of Ronsard, was for a reform that stopped short of schism' *Joachim du Bellay's Veiled Victim* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1974), p. 48. It is worth noting that Jan van der Noot, who would translate Du Bellay's verse for Protestant purposes and introduce Edmund Spenser

*Songe* is a celebration of the temporal and visionary power of the *Canzoniere* beyond the amatory imitations so popular throughout the sixteenth century.

Edmund Spenser's translations of Jan van der Noot's *Theatre for Worldlings* (1569) were produced quite early in his career and most likely introduced the young English poet to Du Bellay for the first time in detail. His work here dates the earliest of any of his known printed works. A young Spenser would have seen in the *Theatre* a work dedicated to underscoring the visual aspects of the poetry. Each poem in the volume was coupled with a trans-temporal image showing the moments before and after a key act of destruction. Strong vanishing points in some of the images highlight the presence of the infinite. Thus, Spenser's juvenilia was a training in Petrarchan visionary poetics, apocalyptic Christianity (van der Noot's contributions were verse paraphrases of *Revelations*), and lush visual effects in a volume that would become the first emblem book printed in English. Yet, the significance of Spenser's translations, far from being solely tied to their status as juvenilia, lingered on in Spenser's career, nowhere more deeply than in his 1591 volume, *Complaints*. This volume, coming out a year after the first installment of *The Faerie Queene*, is presented as a hodgepodge of 'such smale Poemes' that 'were disperst abroad in sundrie hands, and not easie to bee come by, by himselfe; some of them having bene diverslie imbeziled and purloyned from him, since his departure over Sea.' The poems are united by what the printer sees as their 'meditations of the worlds vanitie; verie grave and profitable.'<sup>41</sup> The *Complaints* bear witness to Spenser's continued interest in the sort of anti-worldly, visionary Petrarchism that he had most likely first observed as van der Noot's translator. Consequently, his poems in this volume are frequently in dialogue with antiquity, the decay of the present, and eternity. Spenser's translation of *Canzoniere* 323, published in van der Noot's volume as 'Epigrams,' is reprinted in *Complaints* as 'The Visions of Petrarch, formerly translated,' signaling Spenser's past role in van der Noot's volume.<sup>42</sup> Contributing his own visionary sequence, the *Complaints* features Spenser's own 'Visions of the Worlds Vanitie,' a sonnet sequence in the manner of Du Bellay's *Songe* that shares its moralizing, archaeological visionary penetration into the Roman past. Yet Spenser focuses on the ability of the small and weak to defeat the large and powerful. He

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to the poems discussed in this essay, converted to Catholicism shortly after meeting Ronsard, highlighting the fluidity of sectarian identity among the visionary poets of this period.

<sup>41</sup> *Complaints* p. 165. All passages from the *Complaints* volume are from Richard McCabe's edition of Edmund Spenser's *Shorter Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Though the versions are rather similar, in *Complaints*, the spelling is often altered and some of the 'Epigrams,' 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, have been extended into full sonnets in *Complaints*. The 'Sonets' of van der Noot's *Theatre*, a translation of selected sonnets from Du Bellay's *Songe*, appear as 'The Visions of Bellay.'

recounts in sonnet 11 of the sequence how a goose saved the Romans from a surprise attack by the Gauls:

So when all shrouded were in silent night,  
The *Galles* were, by corrupting of a mayde,  
Possest nigh of the Capitol through slight,  
Had not a Goose the treachery bewrayde. (145-8)

The victory of the small over the large, a central theme to the sequence, has been read as a political statement of imperial potential, as Frank Ardolino has noted.<sup>43</sup> The description in the poems of a small and humble force managing, quite unexpectedly, to triumph over a powerful enemy would remind Spenser's audience of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Still, a too strict political reading can risk blurring and undervaluing the inter-textual and transnational Petrarchan poetics at work. Spenser's poem is strongly attached to a lyric landscape that is allegorical in a more abstract manner than, for instance, Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser, in these lyrics, purposefully eschews contemporary politics in favour of a treatment of time and space that places imperial power in the context of the vastness of God and the divine.

Rome, for Spenser, was a loaded symbol, a visual field with complicated moral and poetic potential. Rome was a seductress, a model for literary and political greatness, and also a perpetual and ruined symbol of the futility of human endeavour and the need to turn to the divine. As Burckhardt notes, 'the ruins within and outside Rome awakened not only archeological zeal and patriotic enthusiasm, but an elegiac or sentimental melancholy.'<sup>44</sup> This melancholy is an important presence in the *Complaints* volume and seriously undercuts any nationalistic ambitions one may read into the work.<sup>45</sup> Spenser's translation of the *Antiquitez*, 'Ruines of Rome: by Bellay', presents the most extended engagement in the *Complaints* with the matter of the Roman ruins and with Du Bellay. Though there are some suggestive, if not quite new, observations to be made comparing Spenser's English rendering of the poems with Du Bellay's French originals, Spenser's

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<sup>43</sup> Ardolino writes: 'By using imagery and language depicting the fall of the mighty at the hands of the small, Spenser symbolically alludes to the victory over the Catholic Babylon, Spain, which is associated in the poems with imperial Rome as Empires that fell. Although, of course, the defeat of the Armada did not constitute the end of Spain or Spanish power, Spenser is presenting a literary sense of its decline and fall after the defeat of Philip's enterprise.' 'The Effect of the Defeat of the Spanish Armada on Spenser's *Complaints*' *Spenser Studies* 16 (2002), 55-75 (p. 55).

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Burckhardt *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Penguin, 1990) p. 129.

<sup>45</sup> See Anne Janowitz *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p. 24 and Ardolino, 55 for readings of the nationalism of the *Complaints* volume.

major interpretation of Du Bellay comes in the ‘L’envoy’ at the end of the sequence.<sup>46</sup> The poem, fascinated with digging into the Roman past while sprawling out across the continental Europe of the sixteenth-century, places Du Bellay in an important poetic progression towards divinity. Du Bellay is the ‘first garland of free Poësie’ (449) that is ‘worthie... of immortalitie, / That long hast traveld by thy learned wits’ (451-2). Spenser highlights Du Bellay’s archeological work:

Olde *Rome* out of her ashes to revive,  
And give a second life to dead decayes:  
Needes must he all eternitie survive,  
That can to other give eternall dayes. (453-6)

Spenser frames Du Bellay as a source of the eternal because of his ability to revive the Roman ruins. Du Bellay’s vernacular French project is then folded into Spenser’s own English recasting, propelling both works forward to eternity. Spenser is casting Du Bellay as the conduit of the Roman ruins, revivifying them in a corpus of Roman poetry. Spenser’s reworking of that poetry further pushes it towards divinity by placing it as the precedent to a new kind of theologically rich antiquarian poetry, that of Du Bartas, a French Protestant poet whose *L’Uranie* (1574) and *La Septmaine* (1578) would provide a model for what a Protestant poetics could be. *L’Uranie* would argue for the ongoing divinity of poetry while *La Septmaine* would document the creation of the world.<sup>47</sup> Spenser writes, ‘And after thee, gins *Bartas* hie to rayse / His heavenly Muse, th’Almightie to adore’ (459-60). Du Bellay is represented as the intermediary between the Roman ruins and the divine, between the seeking of immortality and the right and true adoration of God. Poetry is seen, as we have seen time and time again, as an intermediary between heaven and earth. By placing their dialogue with the ruins of Rome within the larger prophetic context of the end of time and the Christian apocalypse, they trade historical displacement for universal theological truth. Classical Rome is distant, buried, and in ruins, and yet when understood as just one part of an ongoing march towards the end of time and salvation, it seems remarkably accessible by the prophetic and visionary practice of these poets.

The *Complaints* volume even beyond the visionary lyrics plays extensively with the modes of poetic triangulation I have been describing. For instance in the ‘Ruines of Time,’ Spenser begins with a visionary encounter with the spirit of the Roman city

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<sup>46</sup> For an extensive comparison of these two works see Malcolm C. Smith *Joachim Du Bellay: Antiquitez de Rome: translated by Edmund Spenser as Ruins of Rome* (Binghamton: MRTS, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> See Alan Sinfield ‘Du Bartas and Sidney’, *Comparative Literature* 27.1 (1975), 8-20 (p. 9).

Verolanium, ‘Verlame,’ represented by a woman ‘sorrowfullie wailing’ (9).<sup>48</sup> Verlame then engages in precisely the sort of anti-worldly meditations seen in Du Bellay’s Roman poetry: ‘Wasted it is, as if it never were, / And all the rest that me so honord made, / And of the world admired ev’rie where, / Is turnd to smoake, that doth to nothing fade’ (120-3). The present vision of destruction and the empty glories of the past culminate in the movement upward at the end of the poem where the ‘Arke’ containing the ashes of a great prince are brought up to heaven, offering a concluding image where the ashes of the past, the poet’s present vision, and the eternity of the divine are all at once in focus.

Yet outside of the *Complaints* and outside of Spenser’s explicitly Roman poetry, ‘Daphnaïda’ (1591), in its confrontation with the past, with loss, and with the eternal, contains references to an even more technical lexicon of triangulation, reflecting perhaps Spenser’s own interest in spatial science and representation. Perspective, where geometry meets optics and through which the human hand can reproduce the spatial plotting of the divine, becomes, for Spenser, a part of this goal emerging, perhaps, from John Dee’s Preface to Euclid (1570). Dee saw geometry as the most spiritually rich and important science: ‘Among these Artes by good reason, Perspective, ought to be had, ere of Astronomically apperences, perfect knowledge can be atteyned. And bycause of the prerogative of light, beyng the first of Gods creatures: and the eye, the light of our body, and his Sense most mighty and his organ most Artificiall and Geometricall.’<sup>49</sup> Vision and visionary experience, then, is directly linked to God and the way to understand, represent, and recreate vision is through geometric means. Dee was directly involved in the expansion of triangulation and perspective, as he came into direct contact with the newest astronomical technology, a fact he made all too clear in his recollections on his fiftieth year:

After I was Batchelor of Arts, I went beyond the seas (Anno 1547 in May) to speak and confer with some learned men, and chiefly Mathematicians, as Gemma Frisius, Gerardus Mercator, Gospar à Mirica, Antonius Gogava, &c. And, after some months so spent about the low countries, I returned home, and brought with me the first Astronomers staff in brass, that was made of Gemma Frisius’ devising, tho two great Globes of Gerardus Mercator’s making, and the Astronomers ring of brass, as Gemma Frisius had newly framed it, and they were afterwards by me left to the use of those Fellows and Scholars of Trinity

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<sup>48</sup> For more on the spatial concerns of ‘The Ruines of Time’ see Timothy Duffy, “‘The light of simple veritie’: Mapping out Spenser’s Cosmography in “The Ruines of Time””, *Studies in Philology* 111.4 (Fall 2014), 738-756.

<sup>49</sup> Euclid *The elements of geometrie* (London, 1570) STC 10560

College: some proof how of may appear by the letters of Mr. John Christopherson, who afterwards was Bishop of Chichester, elect.<sup>50</sup>

The Astronomer's Staff in question is particularly interesting for Spenser, as Alcyon in the 'Daphnaïda' is carrying one:

So as I muzed on the miserie  
In which men live, and I of many most,  
Most miserable man; I did espie  
Where towards me a sory wight did cost,  
Clad all in black, that mourning did bewray:  
And *Jaakob* staffe in hand devoutlie crost,  
Like to some Pilgrim come from farre away' (36-42).

The Jacob's Staff signals not only the man's pilgrim status but also a link to the science of triangulation.

A Jacob's staff according to W.F.J Morzer Bruyns works in this way: 'In order to shoot, the eye-end of the staff was placed near the observer's eye and the other end was directed at a point in the sky approximately half way between the horizon and the celestial body. The vertically placed vane was then slid along the staff until its upper edge touched the celestial body. At the same instant the vane's lower edge had to touch the horizon. The vane was then clamped to the staff and the altitude read from the scale.'<sup>51</sup> Scholars and editors of Spenser have been content to follow Renwick's lead in asserting that 'The Jaakob-Staffe was a navigating instrument but Spenser here means simply a pilgrim-staff.'<sup>52</sup> I find this reading almost completely without evidence and the result has been a gap in an understanding of the spiritual work the spatial sciences are allowed to perform in 'Daphnaïda'.

In reading 'Daphnaïda,' scholars overwhelmingly focus on the elegiac qualities of the poem. Donald Cheney notes that the poem is 'at once a criticism and an endorsement of Alcyon's relentless grieving'<sup>53</sup> and Ellen Martin argues that the poem can 'reeducate us

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<sup>50</sup> MS Smith 96 Bodleian Library, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> *The Cross-Staff: History and Development of a Navigational Instrument* (Amsterdam: Walburg Pers, 1994) p.25

<sup>52</sup> W.R. Renwick *Daphnaïda and Other Poems* (London: Scholartis, 1929) p. 176.

<sup>53</sup> 'Grief and Creativity in Spenser's Daphnaïda' in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, ed. by Jennifer C. Vaught, Lynne Dickson Bruckner, and David Lee Miller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp. 123-31.

about the contribution loss makes to life.’<sup>54</sup> Critics often see the poem as a somewhat failed, if redeemable, imitation of Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.<sup>55</sup> I want to offer an interpretation of the poem that does not focus on a competitive inter-textual duel with Chaucer. Nor do I want to label the poem as a sincere elegy. Though the poem is emotional and about loss, the abstract landscape, full of uncertainty and a sprawling landscape, seems to invite a reading of the poem as what Tom Conley refers to as cartographic literature. ‘These works,’ he writes, ‘are worlds that can be explored and that can be plotted, but that are also, at the same time, determined by visible coordinates that enclose, frame, and even quantify the sum of all their parts.’<sup>56</sup>

In ‘*Daphnaïda*’, the visible coordinates are set as the sky, the earth, and the horizontal sprawling axis of travel. The focus of the poem, like the work of the Jacob’s Staff, rolls from heaven to earth in an act of defining and representing the spatial relationship between the poet, Alcyon, and Daphne. The poem’s focus shifts consistently between global, the local and the infinite, triangulating these three ontological sites as a way of not only creating the space of the poem in cartographic terms but, more profoundly, to help define the relationship between heaven and earth. ‘What ever man he be, whose heavie minde / With grieve of mournfull great mishap opprest, / Fit matter for his cares increase would finde / Let reade the rufull plaint herein exprest’ (1-4). I would argue that these lines, which begin with the universality of ‘whatever man’—an outward expansion, mean to oscillate between the global and the local to mark out a particular sense of intermediate space. Even Spenser’s framing of Alcyon’s entrance seems to triangulate between the site of viewing, the viewed Alcyon, and the sky above:

In gloomie evening, when the wearie Sun  
After his dayes long labour drew to rest,  
And sweatie steeds now having over run  
The compast skie, gan water in the west,  
I walkt abroad to breath the freshing ayre  
In open fields, whose flowring pride opprest

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Spenser, Chaucer, and the Rhetoric of Elegy’, *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17.1 (1987), 83-109 (p. 107).

<sup>55</sup> Glen Steinberg, for instance, argues that ‘Spenser sacrifices the facile beauty of art, now identified as idolatrous, for the vivid iconoclastic truth of mutability, and, in the process, creates a new beauty and a new aesthetic—a dark and disturbing vision potentially as compelling as Chaucer’s lovely, graceful one.’ ‘Idolatrous Idylls: Protestant Iconoclasm, Spenser’s “*Daphnaïda*,” and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*’ in *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance*, ed. by Theresa M. Krier (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998) pp. 128-43 (p. 133).

<sup>56</sup> *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) pp. 4-5.

With early frosts, had lost their beautie faire.  
 There came unto my minde a troublous thought,  
 Which dayly dooth my weaker wit possesse,  
 Ne lets it rest, until it forth have brought  
 Her long borne Infant, fruit of heavynesse,  
 Which she conceived hath through meditation  
 Of this worlds vainnesse and lifes wretchednesse,  
 That yet my soule it deeply doth empassion  
 So as I muzed on the miserie,  
 In which men live, and I of many most,  
 Most miserable man; I did espie... (22-38)

Spenser in his open wandering under the '*compast*' sky seems almost to manifest Alcyon through his own grief—the sort of Petrarchan grief that begins the *Canzoniere* ('che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno'). In fact, it seems in many ways as if Spenser has summoned the Petrarch of the later *Canzoniere*, after Laura's death, to emerge as a kind of spatially savvy pilgrim. The horizontal axis of the known world, sprawling outward, full of pilgrims and grieving poets becomes the site of an expanding triangulation with the firmament and the distance between heaven and earth as seen in these lines:

Out of the world thus was she reft awaie,  
 Out of the world, unworthy such a spoyle;  
 And borne to heaven, for heaven a fitter pray:  
 Much fitter than the Lyon, which with toyle  
 Alcides slew, and fixt in firmament;  
 Her now I seek throughout this earthlie soyle,  
 And seeking misse, and missing doe lament. (162-8)

Alcyon has admitted that Daphne has been carried out of this world and placed in heaven. Yet, there is a persistent desire to seek her 'throughout this earthlie soyle' This cognitive disconnect, this not quite fully understanding what it is to physically remain on earth and also be in heaven pushes the question of this triangulation, for as his focus remains on a sort of dual mission, to know she is in heaven and to believe she is on earth is to mimic the triangular field of vision that sprawls outward from the viewer to land at both heaven and earth. Indeed, as our pilgrim navigates his way using his Jacob Staff he would be constantly unifying in his mind the horizon as the extension of the horizontal world and the celestial spheres of the heavens.



Alcyon seems to go through a similar process of cursing the heavens, the earth, and the building blocks of the universe as his gaze moves from one loathed item to another:

I hate the heaven, because it doth withhold  
Me from my love, and eke my love from me;  
I hate the earth, because it is the mold  
Of fleshly slime and fraile mortalitie;  
I hate the fire, because to nought it flyes,  
I hate the Ayre, because sighes of it be,  
I hate the Sea, because it teares supplyes. (400-6)

In this cartographically-rich passage, the very boundaries of human existence—in other words, everything humans can see—become embroiled in a representational hatred that moves from the material to the immaterial, the accessible to the inaccessible while once again focusing on the grueling negotiation of the space between heaven and earth, the past and the present.

Rome, for Petrarch, Du Bellay, and Spenser, could never just be the fallen city of the greatest European empire the continent had yet seen, nor just the centre of the Roman Catholic Church, embroiled in various controversies while maintaining, for Petrarch and Du Bellay at least, its spiritual power. Rome is, for these poets, the city where the past, the expansive, cosmopolitan present, and the hopes and fears of time and eternity come together in the imagination. Rome, too, as we have seen, could be a poetic training ground for addressing wider concerns about time, space, and eternity. This temporal triangulation suggests to us, I believe, that both the reconstruction of the Roman past and the work of triangular composition and perspective—all containing rigorous technical standards and critical histories—also captured, in looser, more theoretical and philosophical terms, the fantasy of these poets whose imaginary and virtual movements through space helped preserve and embolden the spatial dynamics and visionary heft of Petrarchism. These poems capture, even if refracted through various national and linguistic alterations, the fascination with Rome that haunted, inspired, and disturbed the philological, spiritual, and historical imagination of European Renaissance poets.