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Twilight of the Idols: Poststructuralisms and the Renaissance in English Studies in the 1990s

Don't take it on board / Don't fall on your sword / Just
play another chord / If you feel you're getting bored / I
feel numb / I feel numb / Too much is not enough. (U2,
"Numb," *Zooropa*, 1993)

A re-evaluation of all values, this question mark, so black,
so tremendous that it casts a shadow upon the man who
puts it down—such a destiny of a task compels one to run
into the sun every moment to shake off a heavy all-to-
heavy seriousness. (Nietzsche 465)

In 1888, the last productive year of his life, Nietzsche elegantly challenges his age with the reinscription of a few letters, marking the twilight of an era with the transformation of Wagner's "Götter" into his own "Götzen." Invoking the last installment of Wagner's operatic German myth, filled with painful and culturally powerful history and a politics whose danger would only become fully apparent with time, Nietzsche presumes not only to epitomize his own radical stance on philosophy and psychology but also to undertake an encapsulation of his century's response to the assaults which he had uncompromisingly launched. Nietzsche's own more tentative title, *A Psychologist's Idleness*, was first appended with a provocative subtitle, "How One Philosophizes With a Hammer," and then with a final act of titular rhetoric that admits to the act of violence inherent in all attempts at summary:

This little essay is a great declaration of war; and regarding the sounding out of idols, which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork: there are altogether no older, no more convinced, no more puffed-up idols — and none more hollow. That does not prevent them from being those in which people have most faith; nor does one ever say "idol," especially not in the most distinguished instance. (466)

Of course, the act of self-effacement that initiates this process of summary, which is always involved in a certain evisceration or hollowing of its topic, is a lie. To write in summary, to presume to give an *état présent* of any field, particularly of a volatile and contested one whose purchase on contemporary ideology and aesthetics is great, is always an act of arrogance, whose hammering force can never be fully muffled, and an act of savagery against its object whose violence cannot, and should not, be obscured.

A summary of one's own great achievement in context is perhaps more easily pardoned at the end of a career at the onset of madness than it ever can be in a beginner's optimistic and hubristic attempts to situate herself within a complex and rapidly changing theoretical environment. And yet the necessity, and the seduction, of undertaking such a project, particularly at such a liminal moment as ours in contemporary Renaissance Studies that in many respects recreates Nietzsche's own 1880s and 1890s, cannot be resisted indefinitely. After the explosive outbreak of poststructuralist theoretical considerations of literature in the third quarter of the century there has been a second explosion as the proliferation extended beyond the initial borders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to devour the Renaissance as well. I write after these two initial engagements and take as my task the question of where in the late 1980s and early 1990s we may expect this influence to spread, be resisted, or transformed.

We stand, like Nietzsche, at the intersection of radical critiques of politics, epistemology, and psychology awaiting the next phase, whose first rumblings in many quarters are already being heard and whose echoes of the past seem to be laying the theoretical groundwork for future undertakings. What I propose to attempt is an account of this engagement with at least partial survey of the context in which it is occurring and of some of the most striking participants.

I began by taking Nietzsche to task for his title and for the manner in which it positions his work both with respect to his own past writings and with respect to those others whose work had provoked and intrigued him. His posture is one of engagement and amusement, taking very seriously and yet not lugubriously, the work of theorists whose heterogeneity belies the equal energy with which they continue to excite and challenge his own work. He also writes at the end of the first phase of a great debate looking forward to the next instalment. To write about the Renaissance in the context of poststructuralist approaches to literature in 1993, is perhaps, in the same way, to write after the fact. The thrill of the explosive arrival on the critical scene of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* in 1980 or of Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* in 1984, not to mention of numerous seminal collaborative collections of essays, whose very material construction attests to the dismantling of earlier aggressively monolithic notions of Renaissance scholars and scholarship, will perhaps not be repeated. The raw intensity of that critical moment in which traditional concerns

with politics and history were reintroduced, but only after a poststructuralist loss of aesthetic and ideological naïveté, will not perhaps be repeated. I shall begin with the advent of New Historicism, since it has achieved the highest profile among several poststructuralisms in Renaissance Studies, particularly in English, and yet to leave other poststructuralisms, especially narratology, neo-formalism, and the new literary history, in abeyance now in no way betokens their exclusion.¹ New Historicism's first assaults on the way in which Renaissance scholarship is conducted have opened the field to a number of other approaches. There is a body of work that has emerged in the last five years that both responds to the challenge of the 1980s and offers suggestions for the future of poststructuralist approaches to the Renaissance, whose prominence as a period for scholarly study and innovation is again being reaffirmed in the 1990s.

There is a kind of "twilight" criticism emerging whose nostalgia and dim lighting stand in marked contrast to the explosion of the 1980s, although even that moment already marked this dimming with the rhetoric of the oxymoronic afterthought, of the "new/historical" of the "post-structured." Like Nietzsche, we are relying upon a terminology which betrays its ill-ease, which negatively articulates itself not as a something but as an after-something, or, as in the case of Nietzsche's title, as an afterthought to the already potentially hollow.

This new work can only be addressed, however, after the idols of the previous few years have been tapped, "as with a tuning fork," once again. Indeed, there are certain texts, one might even say certain names, whose invocation functions in the 1990s with almost the same coercive force as did the previous great generations of Renaissance scholars.² The energy of critical

1 An objection could be raised to the plural in both the title of this essay and in this sentence, and yet it seems as ill-advised to posit grammatically a monolithic singular identity for these multiple and varied approaches as it would be impossible theoretically to construct or describe it. Even a shared concern with the text in and as history does not secure a unanimous account of that history or of its relationship to the "literary" or dramatic.

2 It seems appropriate at this point to give a brief list of some of these extraordinarily influential and contested English-language texts to which I shall return (for bibliographical data cf. Works Cited). I have already mentioned Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More To Shakespeare* and Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, whose seminality from the two sides of the Atlantic is defensible if not exclusive. The greatest emphasis has notoriously been placed on Renaissance English drama. I shall attempt to address this disproportionate emphasis later but wish to mention it here. Even before giving the list, I would wish briefly to note both a national literature and a genre emphasis in the texts that have been most influential. A longer list, and one that brings us closer to the current date would need to include the following experiments in poststructuralist historicist criticism: J.C. Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought 1550-1750*; Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*; Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*; Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642*; Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance*

production that Eliot and Leavis initiated through mystification and categorical assumptions about literature's mimetic success early in this century, the vitality of textual engagement provoked in both New Critical and Historicist critics by the Bush-Brooks debate of the 1940s, has more than been equalled by the once again seminal work being done by scholars of the Renaissance in response not only to the first experiments in poststructuralist responses to the Renaissance but particularly by the extraordinarily rich and diverse work of the group of scholars

Drama; Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*; Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*; Roger Chartier, et al., eds., *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*; Natalie Zemon Davies, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*; Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*; John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*; Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy Vickers, eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*; Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*; Jonson, *Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries*; Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and Renaissance English Texts*; Elspeth Graham, et al., eds., *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen*; Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*; Terrence Hawkes, *That Shakespearean Rag: Essays on a Critical Process*; Thomas Healey and Jonathan Sawday, eds., *Literature and the English Civil War*; Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88*; Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History or Ideology*; Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England*; Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*; Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*; Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents*; Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England*; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*; A.D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality*; Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, eds., *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*; Patricia Parker and David Quint, eds., *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*; Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*; Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*; Kieman Ryan, *Shakespeare*; Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, eds., *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*; Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre*; Peter Sallysbrass and Alton White, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*; H. Aram Veeser, ed., *The New Historicism*; Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. I am grateful to Thomas Healey for his list of recommended readings, which confirms that these texts have achieved a particular importance in the current reception of poststructuralist approaches to the Renaissance. His study, *New Latitudes: Theory and Shakespearean Literature*, is especially important not only because it is so recent but also because he directs a very similar list to a broad readership. Each of the widely ranging essays in Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor's *Shakespeare Reproduced* also contains very impressive bibliographies, current until 1987, of theoretical approaches to the Renaissance. Walter Cohen's "Political Criticism of Shakespeare" in Howard and O'Connor's *Shakespeare Reproduced* is especially complete (cf. 39-46).

initially grouped under the rubric of "New Historicism" in the United States and "Cultural Materialism" in Great Britain.³ Just as Leavis provided the necessary negative context for New Historicism, so in turn New Historicism, particularly the work of the mid-1980s, has become the respected opponent of, as well as the source of inspiration for, much current work. Indeed, as Alan Liu has noted in his sophisticated exposition of the latent Formalism and postmodern philosophical conservatism of New Historicism, it is often even the same individuals, including Liu himself, who have become their own diachronically displaced opponents (cf. Liu 1989). The theoretical generations are being disrupted by an act of self-refashioning that rivals Nietzsche's own reconsideration of youthful exuberance, his "Critical Backward Glance" to *The Birth of Tragedy* and his ultimate attempt to go even beyond the twilight-zone with *The Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo*.

The New Historicism bravely bridges the Atlantic, or perhaps even more controversially the Channel, with its urgently complex re-evaluations of the relationship between literary production and historical material, insisting on the important and non-identical relationship between the two. This radical, and one might even say surprising, combination of a poststructuralist continental mistrust of the authenticity of all modes of representation with a careful and applied indigenous materialist inquiry into social history and ideology generated the very possibility of a title such as my own which explicitly allies poststructuralist theory with the Renaissance critical project. This bold alliance has also opened a space within which other critical discourses, like those of feminism or those concerned with "non-literary" cultural texts which have often been relegated to the margins by dominant schools of both Historicist and, for example, Deconstructionist criticism, can operate.

The double attempt both to locate the literary text within the modes of material production and reproduction and to view those interrelations with an appropriately poststructuralist resistance to essentialism and facile assumptions about the nature of representation has both expanded the field not only of appropriate objects of inquiry but also of viable modes of interrogation. This entropic tendency has created the exciting critical tensions that characterize not only collections of essays but even texts by single authors.⁴ Howard and O'Connor specifically cite this energetically polyphonic textuality, the

3 This nomenclature seems to be resisted increasingly as scholars seek to distance themselves from some of the first enthusiasms of the 1980s.

4 One detects a foregrounded desire for a representation of the field of poststructuralist Renaissance studies as varied and even conflicted not only in collections like those compiled by Parker and Hartman, Parker and Quint, Ferguson, Quilligan and Vickers, and Howard and O'Connor but even in texts with a single author. Perhaps the most explicit presentation of this quality in New Historicism appears in Walter Cohen's "Political Criticism of Shakespeare" (Howard and O'Connor 18-46).

assemblage of "bizarre things occasionally said by nearly everybody ... in what turned out to be a strenuous intellectual encounter," as crucial to the generation of engaged historical and ideological criticism (1). Without this dilation of a constricted definition of both the field of appropriate texts and the range of acceptable approaches, such theoretical heterogeneity would have remained excluded. The enterprising summarist of current poststructuralisms owes much to the New Historicist debate for explicitly addressing the viability of the poststructuralist enterprise at all given the current concerns of political and ideological criticism. Even as conferences like the International Shakespeare Congress in Berlin in April of 1986 questioned the possibility of "merging Marxism with tenets and practices of poststructuralism" the attempts to displace what had become the dominant mode of criticism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century textuality and an influential force in Renaissance Studies, served, in fact, more thoroughly to implicate and disseminate poststructuralist strategies and suspicions in Renaissance Studies (Howard and O'Connor 1). The project of New Historicism even as it sought to reintroduce political, historical, and ideological criticism, did so with a poststructuralist wryness and sophistication that made the work of theorists like Foucault, Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida important to scholars of the Renaissance in ways not attempted by earlier critics.⁵

As the opening gestures of New Historicist critics sought to move beyond the limits of what was largely the antihistoricist and ideologically unselfaware stance of the first wave of poststructuralist critics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they added to the list of important theorists rather than engaging in a process of substitution. The introduction of anthropological, historical, and political theory into the field of Renaissance Studies, not to mention the expansion of the very field of appropriate Renaissance texts, was initiated only after, or perhaps together with, a careful meditation on the challenges to confidently logocentric, and particularly dialectical, analytic methodology and an attempt to account for the poststructuralist critiques of language and representation. Even as Clifford Geertz, Raymond Williams, and Antonio Gramsci became necessary points of reference for critics concerned with Renaissance Studies, which were expanding

5 There are a group of studies of the Renaissance, of which Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo* is perhaps the boldest example that do not orient themselves as explicitly with a political or ideological critique of the Renaissance. Goldberg, for example, is concerned with telephonic technology and its suggestiveness as a governing metaphor for postmodernism and the Renaissance, in ways that are closer perhaps to Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* than to other New Historicist experiments. The unapologetically diachronic leap, which is not couched in the now recognized gesture of the personal anecdote, marks this text as both more outrageous and as more explicit about what is undertaken by the critic who takes a poststructuralist approach to pre-Kantian literary and artistic objects.

far beyond traditional notions of "the literary" or even of "the artistic," they were introduced through, and by, a return to the theories of cognition, language, and representation suggested by Foucault's *Order of Things*, Derrida's *Dissemination* and Barthes' *S/Z*. What is striking about these theorists, who do in fact share the project of demystifying structuralist accounts from the first half of the century of the nature of various representational codes, codes as varied as incest taboos, psychoanalysis, philosophical dialectic, and nineteenth-century Realism, is that they disagree. They do not form a unified "poststructuralism," any more than their interanimation with political and ideological critics forms a natural or easy alliance. The result has been a vital, if sometimes dizzying array of possible poststructuralisms which often make their appearance in essays that claim to be about history, culture, and politics. Poststructuralisms have become more of a latent given, a haunting presence in the shadows, than an official topic of contemporary Renaissance Studies in English, and yet much current work suggests more than a nostalgia for the apolitical difficulty of early poststructuralist efforts and a vigorous implementation of current concerns with politics and ideology. This double, and conflicted, invocation is producing a new cluster of poststructuralisms in practice, even if it does not announce itself as explicitly as an abstract or monolithic theoretical project.

With Liu's warning in mind, that New Historicist Renaissance Studies are nervously formalist at heart,⁶ I shall opt for Nietzsche's metaformalist strategy, the numbered collection of aphorisms which both numerically designates its extreme formalism and numerically resists closure through numbers that simply run out without ending. I have selected, although such enumerations are always disputable and problematic, three rubrics for the study of the Renaissance into which poststructuralist approaches have entered in a particularly important way. I would like to suggest some of the poststructuralist work being done in various formalist interdisciplinary, rhetorical, and narratological approaches to the Renaissance and then to allow myself a diffident fourth suggestion for further work.

For the first category I am indebted to Alan Liu's article for suggesting this repressed passion for literature and history that manifests itself as formalism. Liu describes quite intricately and compellingly, in mathematical terms, the ways in which New Historicist critics have had recourse to formalist paradigms in order bridge the gap between then and now in their Romanticizing of postmodern Renaissance (1989, 752). And yet this formalism, for which Liu proposes the triple cure of self-scrutiny, a metaparadigm, and a new rhetoric (1989, 752 ff.), needs to be distinguished from its precursors in the structuralist mode. Liu traces multiple direct dictional and conceptual borrowing from the

6 See pp. 722-23 especially for a brief statement of his view, although this argument is the thesis of his whole provocative article.

New Criticism and Deconstruction in particular. And yet the question remains whether these dusky repetitions are just that, exact repetitions, or rather "replayings," in the Gadamerian sense of play which is both historicized and highly unstable, of these words and concepts (Gadamer 91-99). It seems to me that they are often complex and conflicted replays and that the rules of these new formalist games are oxymoronically poststructuralist. What I am ultimately suggesting, in the case of the multiple articles and books that take up once again formalist approaches to Renaissance textuality, is that these texts must be accorded a double designation; they are both returns to formalisms and yet this return is in the form of a Viconian cyclical return where there is not only return but also displacement.

To return to Clifford Geertz, or even to take up his essays on structuralist anthropology in the late 1980s and the early 1990s can never be to return in an unproblematic way to a formalist methodology.⁷ Don Wayne appropriately notes, however, the implications behind this shift from "ideas to figures of power," and explicitly suggests "the risk of aestheticizing power in a new formalism" (61).⁸ Clearly, there is a whole group of critics who are very concerned with reinvoking past formalisms, or past poststructuralisms with arguably formalist tendencies, and clearly there is also a second group of critics concerned to alert us to the implications of this theoretical shift. There is, however, an alarming binariness about this way of phrasing the problematic. Critics like Wayne return explicitly to basic binary categories of synchrony / diachrony, consistency / inconsistency, aesthetics / ideology, etc. and presume a certain oppositional logic between these pairs and a need to 'avoid running the risk' of choosing the wrong member of the dyad which will not promote a

7 Not only Alan Liu but also Carolyn Porter and Joseph Litvak have assessed this reintroduction of formalist vocabularies in contemporary poststructuralist and especially historicist studies. Porter's essay, "Are We Being Historical Yet?," explores the appropriation of formalist historicist and materialist paradigms and Litvak's essay offers an undertaking in nineteenth-century studies which parallels Liu's more Renaissance concerns, "Back to the Future: A Review-Article on the New Historicism, Deconstruction, and Nineteenth Century Fiction." Litvak's essay extends beyond a consideration of historicist formalisms to include comments on sociological and anthropological approaches as well, adding to his list of prior formalisms not only Althusser, but also Foucault and Geertz. For a recent assessment of New Historicism and cultural materialism — particularly the philosophical and narrative implications of the anecdote and analogy — with an extensive bibliography cf. Hart (1992).

8 Wayne adds Bourdieu, Derrida, and Lacan to the more expected names of Althusser and Foucault (60) in his account of this move to formalist figuration — because they, according to Wayne, maintain the fundamentally formalist privileging of consistency even as they foreground metadiscursive self-reflexivity. The most explicit articulation of a dialectical approach to the study of Renaissance literature and culture is perhaps Susan Wells' *Dialectics of Representation*.

"revisionary if not radical critique of traditional Renaissance scholarship" (61). Two options only seem to be suggested for Renaissance Studies, an appropriately self-aware binary logic or a naïve collapsing of that opposition into a single term whose figural representation of the relationship between discourse and politics and ideology will be mistaken for the "actual" relationship either in the past or in the present.

Another group of critics of the Renaissance have sought to redress this difficulty in fusing a politically engaged inquiry with a poststructuralist skepticism through a preoccupation with the question of language which reintroduces rhetoric as the place of entry into the texts of the Renaissance which was so preoccupied with that discipline. Rather than seeking a metaparadigm of Renaissance textuality in relationship to its political and ideological contexts, these critics focus on what in German has been called "Rezeption," that is to say a historicized study of readership/spectatorship, and in rhetorical studies has been termed "the audience" (cf. e.g., Rosengren). Beginning with studies like Annabel Patterson's important work on censorship, there has been a wealth of scholarship that centers not so much upon questions of authorship and its relationship to authority but on reception and the nature of the Renaissance audience and of subsequent audiences of Renaissance textuality.⁹ Startlingly, perhaps, many feminist critiques of Renaissance literature fall within this fundamentally rhetorical, although historicized and politicized, approach (cf. Woodbridge; Novy). Interestingly, in seeking to carve out a second group of poststructuralisms, I find myself in the position of Liu, Wayne, and other critics concerned with the matter of formalism's reappearance. Rather than listing here the many explicitly technical rhetorical studies of the Renaissance, I have selected a group of studies that share a preoccupation with a fundamentally rhetorical question but whose theoretical invocations tend to include Lacan, Derrida, Foucault or Althusser, rather than Cicero, Ramus, Richards, or Booth. Again the compulsion to, and impossibility of, classification returns; should these studies be classed as poststructuralist or as rhetorical? Which will be privileged as the theoretical orientation and which will be

9 Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* is an important contribution to this way of escaping the almost inextinguishable dialectical logic of the focus on representation from an authorial perspective. Some other studies in this field would include Michael Bristol's study, *Greenblatt's Negotiations*, Steven Mullaney's *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*, Walter Cohen's *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain*, Patricia Fumerton's "Exchanging Gifts: The Elizabethan Currency of Children and Poetry," and several of the essays in *Rewriting the Renaissance* and the many studies of the reception of Shakespeare abroad, especially in the former British Empire (see Marion O'Connor's "Theatre of the Empire: 'Shakespeare's England' at Earl's Court, 1912" in *Shakespeare Reproduced*, and the increasing interest in Shakespeare's presence in pre- and post-colonial India that is appearing in *Subaltern Studies*).

relegated to the status of mere methodology? To undertake a study of rhetoric, particularly of that most slippery and yet most liberating term, the audience function, today can only be dared in a poststructuralist manner. Moreover, the choice of audience constitutes an especially sophisticated way in which this potentially formalist approach can evade some of the binariness "risked" by other dialectical approaches.

The third configuration of poststructuralisms while sharing a formalist tendency with the first two constellations perhaps constitutes the most theoretically rigorous and certainly the most comparative of the approaches to Renaissance texts. Until this point, like many critics, I have been speaking of English Renaissance Studies, or more particularly even of Shakespearean studies, as though they were in some way synonymous with "Renaissance" studies quite generally. This is, of course, a distortion and yet not an uncommon one. The quantity and prominence of English studies, and of Shakespearean studies in particular, reinforces a privileging that will even recur among narratological scholars, although this approach has been very much undertaken outside English departments and regarding non-English texts.¹⁰

I choose this third grouping as the last for three reasons: its current vitality and diversity, its international presence, and its status as that approach which perhaps most legitimately stands for this piece's title. With its inclusion of provocations from primary poststructuralist theorists as varied as Derrida, Barthes, Genette, Bal, Irigaray, Iser, Kristeva, Doležel, Todorov, Riffaterre, and Said, to name only a few, and its exploration of texts throughout the European Renaissance, narratology has created for itself a distinctively Continental feel in Renaissance Studies. Although many studies return to England and to the monolithic presence of Shakespeare, at least as much interest is more democratically distributed to Cervantes, Rabelais, Montaigne, Petrarch, and Ariosto.¹¹

By contrast, perhaps, with its often highly formalist origins in the work of Baxtin and the work of the Russian Formalists, this preoccupation with the question of narrative structure and mode has produced one of the most diverse and theoretically rigorous groups of poststructuralisms. The work of critics like Keir Elam, Thomas Pavel, and R. Rawdon Wilson brings together a Formalist definition of object of inquiry and a skeptically sophisticated poststructuralist

concern with interrogating and historicizing discursive practices.¹² It is perhaps in the explicitness of its admission to Formalist tendencies that narratology's escape lies. By not insisting for the need to generate and defend a metaparadigm, which will be both all-inclusive and anti-formalist, the work of many narratologists successfully distinguishes between a series of parametric and heuristic assumptions and the actual complexity of textuality and history. Any one of the narratological models presented, Kristeva's and Todorov's parallel but distinct approaches to "intertextuality," Barthes' semiotics, Genette's notion of "récit," Bal's "focalization," both constrain the field of inquiry, "narrative," and constrain the nature of their conclusions. With the sort of understated care, for example, of Barthes' remarks about theatricality in Baudelaire and Brecht in mind, narratological approaches seek to avoid any collapsing of historical, political, or textual specifics into the adopted narratological paradigm precisely by foregrounding their formalism (Barthes 1972).

If the admission of formalism by narratological approaches to the Renaissance serves as a kind of warning label to the reader, indicating a poststructuralist awareness of the epistemological and ideological risk that any attempt at analytic systematization necessarily runs, there would be, it seems, a further option, based upon as yet largely unapplied poststructuralisms which would redefine the nature of a systemic approach in such a way as to do beyond a warning and, perhaps, to take a further leap into the dark.¹³ With the suggestions of Derrida about the nature of language and its inextricable relationship to the construction of meaning and Lacan's dismantling of any pre-linguistic or extralinguistic notions of subjectivity and self-consciousness, a space has been opened for critical and theoretical discourse that is at least aware of, if not free from, the violence of all representation and interpretation. Renaissance Studies of misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, and classism in particular have benefited from these vocabularies for decoding and demystifying certain transcendental notions of identity, and their very real political, social, economic, and legal implications.

For these important and potentially radical approaches, not only for their revisions of notions of selfhood in the Renaissance but also for the provocations

12 A very satisfactory sense of this field can be acquired through consulting Keir Elam's *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language Games in the Comedies*, Thomas Pavel's *Fictional Worlds*, and R. Rawdon Wilson's *In Palamedes Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory*.

13 I am grateful to Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek for pointing out to me the extent to which systemic approaches, including those implicit in the latest works of Deleuze and Guattari, to the study of literature have proliferated on the international scene. His substantial article in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* (1992) gives a full sense of the state of the field and offers an invaluable selected bibliography.

10 A great deal of work has been done in this field internationally and I do not have space to rehearse here all those studies undertaken in the field. Such a rehearsal does occur in my own "Annotated Bibliography of Narrative Theory and Renaissance Drama."

11 My bibliography in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* contains forty entries for Shakespeare, but there are seven for Cervantes, six for Rabelais, four for Montaigne, four for Petrarch, and three for Ariosto.

they offer contemporary ideological debates, the Nietzschean title is partially apt. And yet there is a haunting presence, represented in the suppressed or forgotten subtitle, that I have yet to invoke; if I have spoken so far of the hammer and the idols, the role of a radical new psychology has not yet been addressed. There are two names, one single and one double, whose invocation opened the decade and must serve as closure for this essay, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.¹⁴ Both suggest options beyond the negative definitions of the limits of theory and literary criticism which, if not fully satisfying are at least provocative. Deleuze and Guattari even speak to the question of Shakespeare explicitly.

Baudrillard, in his highly fashionable and witty text on contemporary American culture, suggests a strategy not only for decoding and demystifying the dizzying miasma of images that he sees as characteristic of modern American mass culture but also for going beyond this condition of the "hyperreal." Beginning with Borges' image of the destroyed ancient map of "Tlön," although perhaps one wishes he had begun with Pierre Ménard's exact repetition of *Don Quixote*, Baudrillard suggests that: "Abstraction today is no longer that of a map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2). While already suggestive for the study of a period as preoccupied with representation as the Renaissance, Baudrillard here has gone little farther than Derrida's and Lacan's account of the loss of origins as the precondition for linguistic and representational free play. Baudrillard will, however, push his point further and, after an account of the nature of the hyperreal, which is monstratively playful and opaque, offers a next stage, suggesting a schizophrenic or polyphonic disruption of discourse and art as a kind of new "euphoria" which, if not fully pleasurable, finally through objectifying the unreal as the hyperreal evades all old dialecticism (148). In short, with varying degrees of rigorosity, Baudrillard not only dismantles what is no longer the case but offers a viable, if vertiginous, account, his theory of the hyperreal and simulation, for what he claims is now the case. The reliance upon prior formalisms, radicalized in a Derridean manner, leads not to violence, for that too has become obsolete, but to a place where all closed systems can no longer protect themselves.

With far greater rigor and difficulty, in the same year, Deleuze and Guattari undertook the same project, which for them constituted not the account of the destruction of closed systems and formalisms as a *fait accompli* but rather a series of suggestions about how to provoke their downfall for which Hamlet

became crucial. Rather than creating a conventional confrontation between Freud as bourgeois protector of subjectivity and Marx as economic revolutionary, they set up an opposition between "Marx the revolutionary and Nietzsche the madman" which excludes even Freudian and Lacanian notions of a unitary and patriarchally positioned subjectivity (Seem xviii). In the place of Freudian, and to some extent Lacanian psychoanalysis as well, they put forth a new "argument," schizoanalysis: "desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement — desiring machines. The order of desire is the order of production; all production is at once desiring — production and social production" (Deleuze and Guattari 296). With this bold new configuration, for their schizoanalytic argument is more than a negation (322), Deleuze and Guattari initiate a discussion of the ways in which the model of the theater has been used psychoanalytically as the pasteboard of the unconscious and as the model of production (306). Hamlet will be their most emphasized example of both past interpretive distortions, and their social, political and economic implications, and of future prospects; while going beyond the Oedipus structure, by virtue of an almost post-Lacanian self-awareness, Hamlet remains locked in a representational, self-conscious, or "theatrical" configuration of the individual subject that they wish to displace (298). The potentials are great for Renaissance Studies with such a radical new view of desiring machines seen from a schizoanalytic perspective where the coercive fictions of both the unitary subject and the self-contained object have been dismantled leaving a more complex network of connections, of open systems, rather than a vacuum. Deleuze and Guattari suggest a "positive" poststructuralism that has yet to be juxtaposed in a thorough manner with Renaissance textualities other than *Hamlet*.

Deleuze and Guattari may seem a strange point of exit for this essay, apart from their function of closing the Nietzschean circle with which I began, and yet as the clear map of Europe disappears in favor of an intricately complex series of nation-machines and trade and cultural exchanges perhaps, like U2, they bring us most aptly to 1993. The work of "hammering" the idols may be complete in the early 1990s, but the dimly lit work of creating a new positive poststructuralism for Renaissance Studies amongst the dizzying videomontage of ZOO TV has yet to begin.

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14 Although these authors have produced a great deal more than the two texts I wish to emphasize, it is Baudrillard's *Simulations* and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that I wish to address particularly.

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Strategies of Negotiation in English Renaissance Literature and Criticism

In the last ten years, English-language Renaissance studies have been transformed by the influence of a variety of methodologies which have qualified the totemic role of the autonomous, humanist subject whose birth is associated with the early modern era. Such approaches as new historicism and cultural materialism have attempted to reimmerse Renaissance literature in the complex and heterogeneous domain of social and historical practices, ideologies, reception and shared textuality which it self-consciously negotiates. The freely self-styling subject of the Renaissance is dispersed or divided in a wider context of cultural meanings, pressures and interactions, anxiously negotiating his or her relation to political and cultural authority. This vision has paralleled that of feminist critics, for whom the individualism and the literary autonomy of humanist and romantic critical assumptions cannot account for the socio-historical construction of gender and writing. Moreover, the new historicists' and cultural materialists' Foucauldian emphasis on the subversive movements and possibilities within Renaissance discourses of power is informed by some feminists' emphasis, to use Ann Rosalind Jones' phrase, on "certain potentially productive contradictions" (1) within early modern gender ideologies and their literary manifestations. The most important question confronting critics of early modern literature is that of ideological subversion and containment. In particular, the representation of women in the Renaissance is fraught with ambiguities as to how much freedom, if any at all, it was possible for women to possess in this time of transition.

Concerns with subversion, containment and cultural authority unite Ann Rosalind Jones's *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (1990) and Pamela Joseph Benson's *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (1992). In the former, female writers of love lyric and in the latter, male composers of defenses of woman are, to greater and lesser degrees, in conflict with the codes of their genres. Subversion and contradiction are created by the force of cultural meanings which conflict with the formal and ideological demands of the literary modes, as well as with the needs of the