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Introduction

The practice of studying Renaissance texts has, in the last few years, entered a new phase in its history, one which no longer requires a catchy moniker, but can simply describe itself as Renaissance studies. Scholars of the period no longer describe themselves as New Historicist or Cultural Materialist critics, or indeed, as anti-historicist or anti-materialist, but rather, in their work, demonstrate their immersion in historical research and/or critical theory. The enormous influence wielded by a number of scholars who aligned themselves to one or other of these "schools" of criticism has waned over time, and those interested in the Renaissance period are now able to conduct their research free from the anxiety that their work will not be given its due consideration because of its perceived ideological trajectory. This is, surely, a positive development.

The healthy state in which Renaissance studies currently finds itself is due to a number of complex reasons; the shedding of a constrictive moniker, and the discarding of the need for a "post" appellation are among the most important. It seems that not only has the designation "New Historicism" been put to bed, but so has its immediate heir, "post-(new) historicism." We therefore do not find ourselves in a position of having to find a way out of the confining parameters set by historicism and

materialism, but can merely get on with the practice of trying to understand and explain our given area of interest to the best of our ability. As such, we are in a position to say "this is what I do," rather than "this is where I stand."

This is, of course, not to dismiss the important methodological strategies that both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism provided and refined. Renaissance studies as a whole has taken good practice from these approaches and uses them as a basis for current analysis. The necessity for close and thorough historical contextualisation—based on clear and focused research—is the foundation of the best of contemporary work, as is a more modest approach to the potential effects and importance of any text in its moment of production. One very rarely sees the kinds of conclusions reached in the moment of "high-historicism," where all sorts of extraordinary claims were made regarding the cultural significance of particular texts and/or authors. The emphasis now, it is clear, is on not on proclamation but on recovery and understanding.

Related to this development is the turn to previously marginal early modern

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length study on the Tudor Interlude. He looks at this particular interlude in respect of the challenge Roman Comedy conventions present to notions of authority and class. Grantley notes that the subversive agenda of the play goes beyond that of Roman comedy itself, there being no mitigation of the trenchant attacks on the opp4.2048 0 Tsrsiva48 0 Tsrn

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Both religion and the writing of Thomas Lodge are central concerns for Robert Maslen, whose essay links Lodge's poem *Glaucus and Scilla* (1589) with the poet's lifelong interest in satire. According to Maslen, this interest stemmed from Lodge's sense of alienation from the English establishment, an alienation marked by his conversion to Catholicism, as well as by the suppression of his first published work.

connection between the play and the painting shows artists in different fields treating common subject matter and using corresponding techniques.

Lloyd Davis's essay on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* similarly prioritises gender issues, showing how the play is preoccupied with notions of masculinity and male identity. Davis examines how the play stages the destructive conflicts between various male figures and their discursive struggle to define gender and political ideals. Rather than considering the play merely in its moment of cultural production, the essay then turns to contemplate how critical debates in the Restoration and eighteenth century over the quality of Shakespeare's representation of male figures reveal the importance of the play's depiction of gender for notions of history and cultural politics. Ultimately Shakespeare's play and its critical tradition are seen to be unable to conceive of a society not grounded on ideal masculinity, even though that ideal is celebrated largely through violence and death. In this light, Davis argues, *Julius Caesar* stages the potent capacity of culturally dominant masculinity to recreate and perpetuate itself.

Davis's spotlight on the ways in which literary representations are transmitted through time is also Alan Stewart's subject. "The Birth of a National Biography" provides new insights into the role of biography in complex formations of cultural identity. Stewart's focus is on an article written by S. L. Lee, entitled "The Original of Shylock," published in February 1880 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. In this article, Lee claimed that Shakespeare had based his character Shylock to some degree on the real-life Portuguese Jewish physician Dr Lopez, who was tried and executed in 1594 for conspiring to poison Queen Elizabeth. Lee used the article to forward a more general claim that there had been a Jewish presence in England in the sixteenth century, a claim that ran counter to standard historiography of the day. At the same

time as he identified this Jewish past, however, he disguised his own Jewish identity by changing his name from Solomon Lazarus Levi to "S. L. Lee." In later life, Sidney Lee became a major man of letters, whose achievements included succeeding Leslie Stephen as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Historians have seen his life as assimilationist, and argued that he did not pursue Jewish concerns and themes in his work. However, Stewart argues that as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Lee's vision of 'national biography' was importantly an inclusive one that

epigrammatists do not spurn print and the print marketplace, but they are anxious about the commercial transaction between bookseller and buyer, and do try to ward off the wrong kind of readers, along with the "vile arts" of publicity. The five collections of epigrams share an interest in animal personae and animal metaphors fore-grounded in their title pages and prefatory material. Like the tensions between the elite and the popular manifested in printed collections of epigrams in general, animal references at this date oscillate between associations with the sophisticated and politically daring satire of Spenser's *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and popular entertainment and instruction. In some instances, the author is clearly the source of the animal references; in others, it seems that they have been foisted upon him by the printer or stationer. By foregrounding animals, these epigrammatists add to the risks inherent in their tightrope walk between literary aspiration in a commercial environment, and endorsement by the social elite to which they believe they belong.

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism encouraged scholars to reflect upon their own critical practice and the implications of that practice. The final essay in this collection pushes this reflexive process even further forward, into what is in effect a theorisation of the practical problems of editorship. In "Modernising Scottish Witchcraft Texts," Lawrence Normand uses his experience to reflect upon the editorial quandaries residing in texts produced during and following the North Berwick witch-hunt of 1590-91, when a group of witches supposedly conspired treasonable witchcraft against King James VI and his newly-wed Danish princess Anne. The process of turning sixteenth-century texts into twenty-first-century printed books that can be readily understood by present-day readers is, according to Normand, one that is fraught with the possibilities of error, distortion and falsification. While an editor's aim is ideally to present early modern texts in an

authentic way, the editing process shows the impossibility of achieving that. The postmodern idea that literary editors now readily embrace is that an edition of, say, a Renaissance play is one more instance of the play's reproduction in history which has several forms: theatrical production, critical discussion, canonical location, reproduction in film or television. But that idea is not one that is embraced by historians when they seek to edit historical documents for the modern reader. Historical documents are deemed to be significant and useful to the modern reader in trying to understand the past inasmuch as they still carry upon them the signs of their initial production and context. Literary texts, on the other hand, are usually reproduced in new editions with blithe disregard for their original material form.

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research and write in an atmosphere of intellectual interest rather than dogmatic positioning.

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April 2003