INTRODUCTION

During the mid-1980s, Renaissance and early modern studies in North America underwent a major transformation. Inspired by the work of Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, and other “new historicists”, early modern scholars of English literature began to question the arbitrary manner in which they had construed the complex relationship between the literary text and its historical context.¹ Literary works were no longer deemed mimetic representations of an unchanging historical reality, nor repositories of received intellectual-historical ideas, but participants in the creation of a larger cultural framework. New historicists sought to efface the traditional boundary between literary foreground and historical background, to demonstrate the manner in which the literary work constructed history and the concomitant process by which history shaped the creation of the literary text. They strove for the dethronement of literature as the main topic of inquiry and granted the analysis of both textual and non-textual sources (e.g., rituals, customs) equal weight in their interpretations of early modern culture.

The English new historicists derived inspiration for the evolution of their concept of a “cultural poetics”² from many sources: North American cultural anthropology (Clifford Geertz); the idiosyncratic cultural-historical investigations of Michel Foucault into discourses

The most significant early collections of “new historicist” criticism are: Arthur F. Kinney & Dan S. Collins, eds.: *Renaissance Historicism. Selections from English Literary Renaissance*. Amherst, MA, 1987, and Stephen Greenblatt, ed.: *Representing the English Renaissance*. Berkeley, 1988. For an overview of critical writing on the new historicism, see H. Aram Veenser, ed.: *The New Historicism*. New York/London, 1989. The most recent investigation of new historicism in English early modern literature is: Richard Wilson & Richard Dutton, eds.: *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*. London/-New York, 1992. In German studies, new historicism has chiefly been applied to twentieth-century literature. See *Monatshefte* 84/2 (1992) for the essays presented at the April 1991 conference on new historicism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

² Stephen Greenblatt: *Towards a Poetics of Culture*. In: Veenser: *The New Historicism*, p. 2.

of power; the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu; English, French, and North American feminist scholarship; and, to a lesser extent, English, French, and North American cultural history (e.g., Lawrence Stone, Roger Chartier). The effects of this movement in English early modern studies on researchers in early modern German literature has only become apparent within the last few years, and chiefly in the work of North American scholars. Because of the ever-increasing interest in the “reading” of culture and in the literary work as a cultural text, it seemed appropriate to devote a special *Daphnis* issue to examples of current methods among North American Germanists who explore the interrelationship between the literary text, society, and history.

One of the virtues of the new historicism is that the deprivileging of literature as the primary target of investigation has resulted in a broader examination of the ways in which literary texts functioned within a particular cultural setting. Scholars are seeking no longer to uncover the grand design that predetermined the content and meaning of the literary work, but to explain the interplay between the several different cultural discourses that informed its composition. In the following essays, for example, legal and medical practices; political, social, and religious rituals; the economics of literary production; and gender-conditioned social customs are used to illuminate the complex and sometimes contradictory forces that appeared in, and were reshaped by, early modern literary texts.

The first essay explores the socio-political agenda that informed Herman Bote's portrayal of civil disorder in late medieval Brunswick. Using literary-critical methods to analyze a historical text, the *Schichtboik*, Priscilla Hayden-Roy connects Bote's representation of civil unrest to his satirical *Eulenspiegel* as she lays bare his paradoxical attempt to preserve the civic ideal of communal harmony by enforcing concord through force. Bote's call for voluntary, corporative civic unity is undermined by his simultaneous recognition of the need for a centralized authority to maintain a stable community. The nostalgic longing in the *Schichtboik* for a harmonious urban society is thus revealed as an arbitrary utopian desire whose realization is constantly threatened by historical realities.

Two other essays deal with equally complex problems in early sixteenth-century culture. Inspired by current theories of culture (Geertz), power (Foucault), and the nature of ideology, Stephanie

Pafenberg examines the concept and function of law in *Fortunatus*. Her analysis of the many references in this *Volksbuch* to the exercise of law — passages that have been overlooked by scholars eager to reconstruct the socio-economic message of the text — reveals its tripartite function: to protect rights, uphold the socio-political order, and to punish. Through an examination of the paradigmatic shift in the early sixteenth century from Germanic custom to Roman law, Pafenberg explains many of the startling, violent manifestations of legal authority in *Fortunatus* as the attempt of the author to legitimize monarchic authority. In the following essay, Joe Delap investigates various representations of poverty around 1500 and in the early Reformation period. Having revealed the historical imprecision with which previous Germanists have dealt with this central problem, Delap provides a typological survey of Catholic and Lutheran responses to economic deprivation, especially in the work of Paul Rebhun.

The next three essays deal with issues in seventeenth-century literature that challenge traditional views. David Halsted examines Lohenstein's dramatic writing within the context of the programmatic educational documents (*Schulordnungen*) of the Breslau gymnasium. Through an analysis of passages from *Agrippina*, Halsted argues for an inherently subversive quality in Lohenstein's work that is generated through his seductive representation of the immorality of imperial Rome and the abuse of rhetoric by evil men. Lohenstein's retention of the moralistic, humanist ethos espoused by the writers of the *Schulordnungen* alongside his representation of the decadence of Nero's court is shown to indicate a growing distance between humanist ideals and *Realpolitik*, and the imminent demise of the humanist educational program. Similarly, Lynne Tatlock charts changing ideals in seventeenth-century representations of war. Her investigation of Moscherosch's *Soldatenleben* and Happel's account of late seventeenth-century warfare within the economics of literary production (e.g., publication practices; the books' market appeal; the manipulation of readership expectations) demonstrates the various ways in which these writers made warfare more palatable to the public. Although Moscherosch shared Grimmelshausen's bleak vision of martial destruction, he creates the heroic ideal of the professional soldier whose praiseworthy prowess as a warrior distracts readers from the bloody nature of his busi-

ness. Happel continues to inure his readers to the actual human tragedies of warfare by presenting conflict as a historical documentary replete with statistics and charts that reduce war to an anonymous affair to be managed by expert military men. In this way, Tatlock shows that literary works not only were used as forums for the discussion of contemporary warfare, but also contributed to the institutionalization and dehumanization of conflict.

In the final essay, Linda Feldman provides several important insights into the autobiography of the Jewish woman, Glückel von Hameln, through a theoretical consideration of the relationship of contemporary feminist scholarship to early modern literature. Feldman takes issue with the Christocentricity of early modern women's social and literary history and discloses the particular cultural circumstances in which the Jewish female voice differed from its Christian counterpart. In contrast to the domestic enclosure of women by male/Christian institutions, Jewish women were ascribed a legitimate public role beyond the household. Having established the uniqueness of Glückel's position, Feldman argues for the transgressive nature of Glückel's personal memoirs within the confines of a specific Jewish cultural space.

All of the contributors to this special issue are members of the Society for German Renaissance and Baroque Literature (SGRABL). Three of the essays (Delap, Halsted, Tatlock) were first presented in shortened versions at the annual meeting of SGRABL at the 1991 Modern Language Association convention in San Francisco; the remaining three (Hayden-Roy, Pafenberg, Feldman) were written for this volume. As the 1991 SGRABL president I was charged with the selection of this topic and the editing of this special *Daphnis* issue. On behalf of SGRABL, I should like to thank the editors of *Daphnis* for allowing SGRABL to present this collection of recent North American research. I remain especially grateful to Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Roloff, Dr. Ulrich Seelbach, and Rodopi Press for their support of SGRABL scholarship and their help and advice about the publication of this special number.

James A. Parente, Jr.