



# Class, Boundary and Social Discourse in the Renaissance

Edited by Alexander C. Y. Huang, I-chun Wang, and Mary Theis

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With a broader focus on the issues of class, boundary, and social discourse, this book is the fruit of further international collaboration beyond that conference. It is the editors' hope that this collection will inspire more diverse voices in Renaissance studies beyond the Anglophone world.

The editors have enjoyed working with all the contributors to this volume and the two editorial assistants, Lin-Chin Huang and Skypie Chou, who have been tremendously supportive, as well as Professor Francis So and President Chang of National Sun Yat-sen University for their generous encouragement and support. Last but not least, the editors thank Stephen Greenblatt and Routledge for permission to reprint chapter 6 of *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990).

## INTRODUCTION

The past two decades of theoretical ferment have witnessed tremendous changes in Renaissance studies in terms of scope and methodology, framed by the rise of Foucaultian-inflected social theories and Marxist literary criticism. The concept of boundary in our book title names two things: that which separates different gender, class, and geo-cultural identities, and that from which these identities are derived. The boundary is a faultline that divides, frames, and unites contending images of the self and the collective. Class (a designation associated with race and gender) and patterns of belonging, betrayal, and exclusion are all central to the debate about the fashioning of Renaissance literary identities and the formation of postmodern theoretical positions.

It is equally important to recognize that, as these boundaries are being reconstituted by new critical approaches, the boundary between the text and the critic also needs to be reevaluated. If literary history has lost its innocence through the intervention of various approaches associated with new historicism such as cultural poetics, one needs no reminding, at this juncture, that the questions of class and social discourse of the Renaissance are also our own. Articulated differently under differing historical circumstances, these questions that beleaguered the men and women of Renaissance Europe continue to speak to us with unflinching urgency.

*Class, Boundary and Social Discourse in the Renaissance* is a collection of eight essays that focus on different aspects of the Renaissance social discourse and how it is fashioned by ideological and scholarly maneuvers, by the complex negotiations between resonating cultural forces and texts. The essays, addressing topics ranging from Shakespeare to Milton, invite us to see anew the familiarly known and to hear the unknown dissident or alternative voices drowned by historical tides. On one hand, as Stephen Greenblatt urges, we need to "mak[e] strange what has become familiar" in order to see that "what seems an untroubling and untroubled part of ourselves (for example, Shakespeare) is actually part of something else, something different."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand,

unfamiliar and even foreign voices have existed alongside the institutionalized sober ones in a wider spectrum of social discourse and text. During this period, the dialectic between differentiation and assimilation gives rise to the tension between the self and the Other. Displacement, subversion and the role of the disciplining system constituted by various boundaries -- physical and metaphorical -- are connected to both the established and silenced voices of individuals.

Some of the boundaries these essays address are linguistic, others social and topographical, and still others textually constructed. In "Murdering Peasants," Stephen Greenblatt examines how, from Albrecht Dürer to Sidney to Shakespeare, the heroic conventions -- some of the elaborately constructed and policed boundaries -- are shifted and reconfigured by Renaissance writers, and by a continued need to represent history in public monuments, in response to unconventional historical circumstances. The essay demonstrates the pleasure of reading "the reversal of meaning" and of "the sense of strangeness ... that arises from [it]" (8). Greenblatt's essay provides a useful theoretical framework for other essays in this volume that reinterpret the shifting boundaries in the Renaissance social discourse

Ton Hoenselaars and Timothy Billings concentrate on the physical, corporeal boundary (as in geographical borders) and forms of demarcation (as in the initiation into manhood through learning Latin and adopting breeches) between different cultural and gender identities. In "The Topography of Fear," Honeselaars examines prevailing Renaissance images of the Dutch, associated with sexual and bladder incontinence, and how the formation of this corporeal and national image is produced by its "immediate international political and religious contexts." He argues that the stereotypes of the Low Countries are constructed as a reverse of an "inalienable feature of the monarchic English self-image during the period, namely the ideal image of an enclosed nation, of an impenetrable fortress surrounded by the sea ... ruled by the virgin Queen Elizabeth I" (41). The problem of transgression is certainly not limited to the English imagination of cultural Others. In "Masculine in Case," Billings discusses a similar process of demarcation in the gendered Latin education of the

period, through which the putative masculinity of classical Latin is safeguarded against "the inevitably corrupting influence of 'baby talk' in the feminine, vernacular sphere of childrearing" (63). His essay argues that the Latin lesson in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is based on "a logic of exclusion that would have affected audience members who had not been 'initiated' into the male community of grammar school," and that the anonymous pamphlets *Hic Mulier* and *Hæc-Vir* view transgressions of gender as "ungrammatical threats to an established male linguistic order" (66).

Mariangela Tempera's essay, "Taming the Go-betweens," engages a different strain of cross-cultural and cross-generic transformations. In her analysis of the shared but differently appropriated source, Luigi Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele*, of two Elizabethan comedies by Anthony Munday and Abraham Fraunce, Tempera argues that, simultaneously "attracted and repulsed by the unruly world picture presented by Italian comedies," Munday and Fraunce go to great length to tame the go-betweens in Pasqualigo's text in order to "re-establish ... the social and moral boundaries that Pasqualigo's characters ... ignore so effortlessly" (88). The autobiographical impulse and self-referential tendency can be found not only in the pedagogues' and pamphleteers' texts or the cultural go-betweens' work, but also in dramatic and poetic works of the period. In "Authorial In(ter)ventions," Alexander Huang examines the tensions between an author's private self and public identity framed by his works, the tensions found not in a defined boundary between the self and the Other but rather in an entire zone of in-between. Huang argues that Christopher Marlowe's and John Donne's peculiar imaginaries of authorial and "autobiographical" death in their works are products of their invention of a literary persona and the intervention of their authorial presence.

Just as the presence of the author, cultural Others, and oppositional gender roles have initiated the construction and policing of various boundaries, so too did artistic creation and social commentary within and beyond the walls of theatre actively participated in the cultural processes of empowerment. In "A Living Libel," Elyssa Cheng examines the social forces at work in the creation of Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's*

*Holiday*, a drama of social protest. Cheng argues that Dekker -- aggravated by his contemporary Mayor John Spencer's unreasonable market monopolies and his anti-theatrical discourse -- uses *The Shoemaker's Holiday* as a living libel to sarcastically contrast Spencer with the medieval shoemaker and city mayor, Simon Eyre. Hsiao-chen Chiang and I-chun Wang address related questions in court masques and comedies about such border-crossing figures as vagabonds. Hsiao-chen Chiang examines Richard Brome's (c.1590-1652) *The Jovial Crew* (1641), a play published just before theatres were closed by order of Parliament in 1642 and portrayed the beggar's life in London of Brome's time. Chiang reads the comedy in the framework of Bakhtin's understanding of the Greek tradition of Menippean satire which among other elements combines utopian aspiration, carnival fantasy, crude reality, and topicality. She opines that while escapism is a major theme, Brome remains intimately connected with the vulgarity of life. The Menippean satire's quest for another, fantastical world initiates a re-examination of our own.

Concluding the collection, I-chun Wang's "Place, Borderland Politics and Dissidence Control" addresses broader theoretical issues of English and nomadic identities in two court masques, Milton's *Comus* and Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*. As Wang cogently points out, with the Gypsies contained and *Comus* subdued, the two court masques exemplify the vision and anxiety of an empire. The two masques not only dramatize the strangeness of the Other but also constitute imaginary boundaries. As the British Empire expanded and more geo-cultural boundaries were eagerly crossed in the seventeenth century, court masques were summoned to play the role of ritual enactment of the subordination and containment of borderland figures.

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#### Notes:

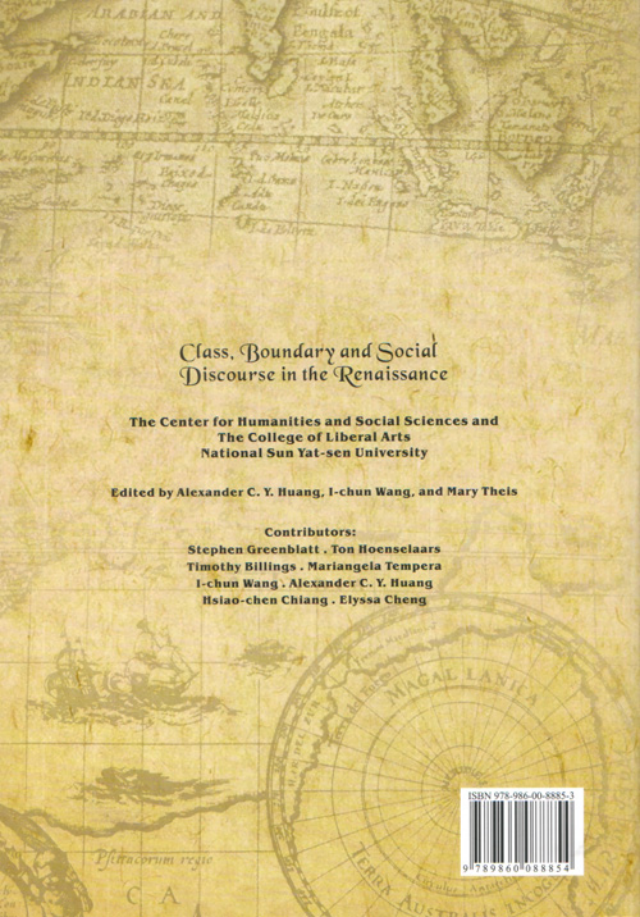
<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

## MURDERING PEASANTS: STATUS, GENRE, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF REBELLION

*Stephen Greenblatt*

In 1525, determined to set his country's art on a rational footing by instructing its youth in the skills of applied geometry and perspective, Albrecht Dürer published his *Painter's Manual*, "A Manual of Measurement of Lines, Areas, and Solids by Means of Compass and Ruler." Among the detailed instructions—for the determination of the center of a circle, the construction of spirals and egg-shaped lines, the design of tile patterns, the building of a sundial, and so forth—I would like to dwell upon Dürer's plans for several civic monuments, for, as I hope to show, these plans provide a suggestive introduction to the problematic relation in the Renaissance between genre and historical experience.

Dürer's first proposal is the most straightforward and familiar: a monument to commemorate a victory. "It happens frequently," he writes, "that after a victorious battle a memorial or a column is erected at the place where the enemy was vanquished in order to commemorate the event and to inform posterity about what the enemy was like."<sup>1</sup> If the enemy was rich and powerful, Dürer notes, "some of the booty might be used for the construction of the column," as the Romans had done many centuries before. Insofar as this conception seems classical, it partakes of a cultural dream—the dream of a return to ancient dignity and glory—that extends beyond commemorative architecture. Monuments of this type not only record the achievements of the victors and remind the vanquished of their defeat but provide a proper setting for the noble actions of those who live in their shadows. As such these columns have a special appropriateness to literary tragedy, the genre that concerns itself with the actions and the destiny of rulers. Hence when imagining a stage fit for the performance of classical tragedies, Sebastiano Serlio draws a cityscape dominated by high triumphal columns.<sup>2</sup>



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