
5. *Anti-Vida, Anti-Razo*

What is questioned by postmodern poetics is the very notion of the “self” that began to be constructed and to emerge, in *narrative*, precisely when courtly lyric was at its zenith, during the late twelfth century. That is, the “renaissance” of the twelfth century is marked by the conjunction of two diametrically opposed literary models of subjectivity. The name of Chrétien de Troyes, who was both lyric poet and courtly novelist, is emblematic of this conjunction.¹ On the one hand, there is the disembodied lyric “I,” nothing other than a word, a generalized subjectivity, no one in particular, a fragmented, anonymous voice that can only speak another’s language, an inherited, conventional, or “found” language. On the other hand, there is the unique narrative self, the novelistic self of romance, an extraordinary, self-determining subject whose language is decidedly different. Narrative champions a hero who masters his destiny, who proves his special worth, whose quest is a frontal attack against discursive anonymity precisely insofar as it is a struggle to make a name for oneself or, more precisely, for one self. The self of story is historically, geographically, and genealogically localized. Most significantly, in narrative the triumphant hero’s return to courtly society is simultaneous with the creation of a new language: the hero is he who can tell or about whom are told marvels never previously told, he who can speak or about whom are spoken novelties, he whose trials are endured for the sake of the production of a previously unheard language.² That is, the subject of story is not determined by an inherited and conventional language but rather determines a new language. The hero of romance is an author, a creator, a unitary and originary source of novel discourse, the very sort of individual whose existence is routinely doubted by lyric.³

For instance, the hero and title character of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain* is, as Eugene Vance suggests, a figure for the romance writer, for the *scriptor* who would be *auctor*: Yvain’s victory is his ability to distinguish himself in language and to produce a discourse that courtly society recognizes as decidedly different from and better than the discourse of others (specifi-