Introduction: Beyond New Historicism?

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This special issue arose from questions of whether or not the New Historicist paradigm in early modern studies has been superseded by newer theoretical approaches and, if so, whether these have entirely broken with New Historicist tenets ("after") or are in constructive dialogue with them ("beyond"). This introduction and the following essays lay out a number of considerations that argue for the existence of newer approaches; at the same time, they demonstrate that questions dominant in New Historicist work, as well as New Historicist modes of writing, continue to inform recent research in early modern studies.

In the first chapter of his book *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton (2003: 1–2) asserts: "There can be no going back to an age when it was enough to pronounce Keats delectable or Milton a doughty spirit. It is not as though the whole project [i.e., theory] was a ghastly mistake on which some merciful soul has now blown the whistle, so that we can all return to whatever it was that we were doing before Ferdinand de Saussure heaved over the horizon." Eagleton's (ibid.: 2) insistence that we should not return to a pretheoretical literary impressionism notwithstanding, he is nostalgic about an "older generation" of theoreticians who followed in the wake of Saussure, or whose work has come into the public domain as a consequence of the reception of

Poetics Today 35:4 (Winter 2014) DOI 10.1215/03335372-2873485
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Saussure's linguistic insights, and whose achievement has "proved a hard act to follow (ibid.)." However, the shattering of traditional anglophone paradigms of literary practice with the onset of theory has, alongside the emergence of the postmodern, led to a plurality of approaches that can now be identified as a multiform "beyond." The preposition *beyond* is preferable to the adverb *after*. We are moving beyond theory rather than being on the brink of "after theory." The latter implies a temporal adjustment that appears to herald for the future a break with what has gone before. Such a concept therefore threatens to question, if not challenge, Eagleton's imperative that "there can be no going back."

No critic has been more assiduous than Eagleton both in embracing the benefits of theoretical enquiry and in challenging some of theory's cherished axioms. His book *William Shakespeare* (1986), written at the height of the influence of Francophile theory on the study of Renaissance texts during the early 1970s, could confidently claim about William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that "the witches are the heroines of the piece, however little the play itself recognizes the fact, and however much the critics may have set out to defame them" (ibid.: 2). More recently, he has readjusted this view to emphasize the threat the witches pose to order, to "any conceivable social order" (Eagleton 2010: 81), whereas in 1986 he was concerned to celebrate the freedom they represent from the point of view of a reading that goes "against the grain" of the text: "a realm of non-meaning and poetic play which hovers at the work's margins, one which has its own kind of truth" (Eagleton 1986: 2). Such shifts within particular theoretically informed critical paradigms are not surprising, given the rapidly changing contexts within which Eagleton operates. Eagleton was, and continues to be, concerned to advance the cause of a particular theoretically informed materialist critical practice that the turbulent upheavals of late capitalism have reinforced rather than challenged.

Eagleton's (2011: 2) theoretical framework was erected upon a particular kind of "historicism," one rooted in Marxism and, in his own terms, part of "a critique of capitalism—the most searching, rigorous, comprehensive critique of its kind ever to be launched." Marxist criticism has, of course, undergone a series of adjustments in response to the comparative unpredictability of some of the events that comprise history itself, as a practice of writing *and* as a method of critical evaluation. It is no accident that Eagleton's most recent books, *On Evil* (2010) and *Why Marx Was Right* (2011), have North American university publishers, a symptom, perhaps, of the intellectual hospitality afforded by a culture disillusioned by the predatory excesses of neoliberalism. Nor should it be surprising that a former Oxford University Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature should have expanded his portfolio into the

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domains of ethics, morality, and politics proper, although these concerns have always been in evidence in his earlier critical writings.

However, before we lament that one more radical commentator from the fold of a political and cultural configuration that is familiar to the British and European intellect has emigrated to the paradoxical freedoms of the United States, we should recall that, for the past thirty years or so, the dominant literary and cultural paradigm of this disarmingly welcoming host has arguably been a practice that goes by the name of New Historicism. Although there have in recent years been many pronouncements of its demise, the "death" of New Historicism has been greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of Stephen Greenblatt's critical career suggests that his Marxist and historicist credentials are less in evidence than one might have expected. Indeed, his espousal of the revision of Marxism in Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, volume 1 (1990 [1978]), points toward a recognizably post-structuralist trajectory, one that privileges a limited relativism but continues to emphasize the totalizing operations of power. It was not until some twenty years after the publication of Greenblatt's pathbreaking *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) that the progenitor of New Historicism turned his attention to explaining his "practice" in *Practicing New Historicism* (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000), written jointly with Catherine Gallagher. In a passage that adjusted the Foucauldian emphasis and that extolled the attention to fragmentary detail and the emphasis upon the "individual" evinced in Erich Auerbach's influential book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953 [1946]), Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000: 35) observe: "If there is a hint of a direction in the succession of these isolated representations [in *Mimesis*], it is toward dissolution, but this melancholy intimation of the end of the world as we know it only intensifies Auerbach's commitment to the existential claim of individual, autonomous literary visions."

Some ten years later, Greenblatt advanced the same claim in connection with Shakespeare, this time leaning gently on some of the more easily assimilable aspects of Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory. In the first of his Rice University Campbell Lectures, he set out an agenda that embraced the questions of "beauty," Shakespeare's "exploration of murderous hatred," "authority," and "autonomy—the status of artistic freedom in his work" (Greenblatt 2010: 4). What was "hinted at" in *Practicing New Historicism* has now developed into the axiom of the absolute autonomy of the poet: "The only power that does not seem limited in Shakespeare's work is the artist's own" (ibid.: 5). This characteristically seductive formulation obscures the belief in the centrality of representation, which the process of contextualization that had been part of the New Historicist project since its inception

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sought to uphold. In its original conception, New Historicism in fact relies on the overdetermination of the act of representation itself. Indeed, it was one of the aims of Frankfurt School theorists such as Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin to investigate the ways in which the social was embedded within the category of the aesthetic. What Greenblatt is in danger of succumbing to in *Shakespeare's Freedom* therefore is drifting away from the very overdetermining power of "history" that New Historicism originally claimed to be the cornerstone of its practice. And that "history" was crucially based on specific situations in the past and detailed analysis of them as they emerged in the anecdote.

The anecdote has, of course, been a central feature of New Historicist discourse, and Annabel Patterson (1997) has made the important point that any history attempting to get at people's lived experience necessarily relies on anecdotal evidence. (See also Fineman 1989: 49–57 for a similar argument.) At the same time, historical narratives depend on anecdotal parables for illustration, thus teaching historical lessons by recourse to selected elements that facilitate the supposed access to the real. The New Historicist reliance on the anecdote was inspired by the method of Geertzian thick description (Greenblatt 2000b); yet its narrative mechanics retain an echo of the discourse of early modern historiographers, and it thus manages to avoid an "imperialistic" kind of historical representation modeled on nineteenth-century notions of objectivity and uniformity: "Approached sideways, through the eccentric anecdote, 'history' would cease to be a way of stabilizing texts; it would instead become part of their enigmatic being" (Greenblatt 2000a: 51). The New Historicist "aim" is therefore "not to mystify or re-sacralize seemingly unnatural events, but rather to destabilize or defeat naturalistic explanations" (Helgerson 1997: 144–45). Yet despite this deconstructive move, the typical Greenblattian anecdote claims that its story is representative of a larger structure. Whereas the traditional historical anecdote illustrates, say, an action on the part of a ruler that highlights his or her general character and thus explains his or her rule, the New Historicist anecdote frequently chooses a moment of ambivalence that is then argued to be symbolically significant and a symptom of rifts and tensions in the culture at large, to be illustrated further in a specific literary text.[1] One could also argue that, for Greenblatt, the link between the anecdotal instance and the entire structure of the culture that it supposedly represents is axiomatic rather than dialectical; hence its neglect of the principle of "resistance."

1. A particularly good recent example is the anecdote that Andreas Höfele (2011: 42–44) tells of Thomas Cranmer losing a compromising book to the water when he is attacked by a bear after the capsizing of the boat in which he was traveling.

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For some critics, Greenblatt's use of the anecdote has been problematic precisely on account of its presumed representativeness, its lack of demonstrated statistical reference, or indeed, the contradictions that it might embody. Conversely, it can also be criticized as paving the way for the resumption of a refurbished formalist New Criticism. What saves it from this latter practice is that the New Historicist anecdote derives its practice of close reading from a combination of anthropological and post-structuralist theoretical formulations whose political credentials remain carefully, and judiciously, understated. A second area of critical unease regarding New Historicism concerns its choice of texts. New Historicist work provides selective in-depth cultural analyses, and the resulting close readings are embedded in identifiable and sophisticated historical contexts, inflected, as we have already suggested, with a noticeably Foucauldian theory of power. Nevertheless, much New Historical writing continues to concentrate on the classics of the early modern literary canon. Perhaps the most surprising feature of New Historicism is its reluctant, and self-conscious, appeal to traditional humanist notions of subjectivity that reaffirm a familiar Burkhardtian account of the Renaissance, with the individual human protagonist as its focus of analysis. As suggested by the opening chapter of *Practicing New Historicism*, "The Touch of the Real," New Historicism claims to annex Auerbach's "opening gambit," namely:

> the isolation of a resonant textual fragment that is revealed, under the pressure of analysis, to represent the work from which it is drawn and the particular culture in which that work was produced and consumed. That culture in turn renders the fragment explicable, both as something that could only have been written in a moment characterized by a particular set of circumstances, structures, and assumptions and as something that conveys the life-world of that moment. The new historicist anecdote as many of us deployed it is an Auerbachian device. (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 35)

To some extent, this argument makes of Auerbach a Saussurian structuralist *avant la lettre*. But in the form outlined here, it risks transforming New Historicism into an essentialism while at the same time distorting Auerbach's thesis.

New Historicism is emphatically not a quasi-Aristotelian mimetic practice but relies instead upon an analysis of *representation*. Moreover, the claim that the "fragment" conveys "the life-world" fudges the role of the analyst in this complex process, as Greenblatt himself famously admitted. In the process of resurrecting the past, "if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property" (Greenblatt 1988a: 20). Brook Thomas (1991: 181) extends this

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statement, perhaps a little too enthusiastically, to argue in "Stephen Greenblatt and the Limits of Mimesis for Historical Criticism" that the "social energy" to which Greenblatt points is an energy for "change" that he claims is missing in Foucault:

> Given the adaptability of the aesthetic forms of social energy and their capacity to recirculate in various cultural situations, Greenblatt at times grants them an extremely important role in the production, or shall we say *poiesis* or making, of a culture. Indeed, the aesthetic has the potential to provide Greenblatt with precisely what was missing in Foucault: an engine of change. Or perhaps better, it can provide the energy for such an engine. And so, with his notion of a mimetic economy, Greenblatt caps his efforts to develop what he calls a "less passive conception of mimesis" [1988b: viii]. Ironically, however, when he grants aesthetic energy such productive power, Greenblatt marks the limits of mimesis for historical criticism.

Thomas's (ibid.: 191) misleading claims concerning Foucault's theory of social change notwithstanding, he focuses, interestingly, not on the anecdote but on what he calls Greenblatt's "chiasmatic, mimetic economy." Thus he uses a rhetorical figure to trace how he sees Greenblatt repeating in his own critical discourse the same structures that he observes in Shakespeare: "The doubleness generated by that description [i.e., 'the theater's role in the circulation of social energy'] corresponds to the doubleness he discovers in Shakespeare" (ibid.). For Thomas, the poetics operating in Greenblatt's own text confront us with the fact that "acts of world-making are not so much reconstructive as constructive" (ibid.: 209), that "Montrose and Greenblatt are tempted to claim that works of art simultaneously imitate and produce the contingent reality of history" (ibid.: 198). New Historicism therefore needs to be seen both as a methodology *and* as a kind of historicism. Inevitably, our own (the editors' and the contributors') engagement with New Historicism is not only critical but also historical.

This takes us to the central critical dilemma touching New Historicism: what precisely does the "historicism" in the label "New Historicism" mean? The contrast to soi-disant Old Historicism is often explained in terms of an inversion of the classical relationship between the literary text and its context. That is to say, Old (literary) Historicism treated nonliterary sources as materials that provided explanatory support for interpretations on the basis of facts about the cultural environment (Levin 1990); New Historicism, by contrast, takes the cultural discourses to be central and concentrates on how they are reflected in literature, which is thus demoted to a status of being merely one of the many cultural artifacts existing at a particular moment in time. Put more positively, as Louis Montrose (1992: 392) argues,

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New Historicism "problematize[s] the connections between literary and other discourses, the dialectic between the text and the world," thus "emphasiz[ing] their reciprocity and mutual constitution" (ibid.: 395).

Yet the New Historicist attempt to speak with the dead also suggests an effort to recuperate the pastness of the past, as in the excavation of the importance of Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Greenblatt [1988a: 94–100]; or see, also, Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* [2001], or his most recent espousal of the importance of Lucretius in *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* [2011]); its historicism therefore centrally concerns the circumstances and the manner in which we resurrect and talk about the past. What New Historicism does not do, indeed carefully avoids doing, is a fully diachronic analysis. Unlike Old Historicism, which—owing to its essentializing attributions of qualities to particular periods or genres—was able to trace developments through the centuries, New Historicism remains caught in a synchronic analysis of the system of discourses at a specific moment.

As Richard Levin noted, New Historicists do not try to support their thesis of the rise of modern subjectivity in the Elizabethan period by contrasting medieval and sixteenth-century texts; they concentrate on illustrating the play of subjectivities, the strategies of self-fashioning in the work of sixteenth-century writers. (Levin focuses on Greenblatt and Catherine Belsey.) This lack of a diachronic perspective in New Historicism has a theoretical import: after all, one cannot write literary history (or indeed history as such) without positing determinate manifestations at two different points in time and then explaining how the change occurred. Both Foucault with his model of discontinuities—paradigm shifts that are localized and internal to the mobile power relations that are constitutive of specific discursive fields—and New Historicists, who seem to focus on one period without comparative analysis, privilege a synchronic rather than diachronic methodology (Reichardt 1991). They thus exemplify a post-structuralist rather than a cultural studies approach. (E. P. Thompson, by contrast, in his pathbreaking *Making of the English Working Class* [1963], or in his polemical *Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* [1978], was very much interested in the *history* of the English working class.) Returning to New Historicism's central deployment of the anecdote, one can thus observe, in Montrose's (1992: 411) words, a "shift" from the telling of "History" to the recounting of "histories."

What this special issue attempts to sketch is, however, not a history, nor even a criticism or appreciation, of New Historicism. Many of the contributors point out that New Historicism, especially the work of Greenblatt, has significantly inspired their own research. Implicitly or explicitly, the essays that follow seek to pose the question of whether, in its study of early

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modern English literature, New Historicism has been superseded by newer models and approaches or its paradigmatic forms continue to dominate current research. It is with this question in mind that the special issue "Theoretical Approaches to the Early Modern: Beyond New Historicism?" was assembled.

In other words, have there been other paradigm shifts succeeding the various reorientations from structuralism to post-structuralism, from deconstruction to postcolonialism and New Historicism, with the objective of proposing different modes of critical analysis? Do some of the dominant modes of current research in the field of early modern English literature still subscribe to the tenets of New Historicism, or are there alternative, complementary kinds of analysis? How do proponents of performance studies, ecological criticism, new textualism, or new philology situate themselves in relation to the dominant paradigm of New Historicism?[2] Do they contribute to it, extend it, or intend to secede from or to challenge its premises to revise early modern studies? Do newer approaches to the early modern period reiterate the strategy already familiar from the practices of deconstruction, that is, focusing explicitly on what the classic criticism of New Historicism has dealt with only in a piecemeal manner: fictional prose writing (the romance, the picaresque novel); poetic form; political and cultural resistance; actual theatrical performance; material culture; the visual? And do the forays into these lacunae in New Historicist writing extend the New Historicist model, resulting in a modification, or even in a radical and critical revision, of some of its premises?

Our question concerning the current relevance of New Historicism requires an initial consensus on what precisely we and our contributors understand by the term and by what they, and we, consider its basic tenets.[3] Yet such a definition that would allow one to trace systematic departures from such tenets is elusive. There are three major reasons for this difficulty. First, as we know, Greenblatt himself was reluctant to use the label "New

2. On ecological criticism, see Raber 2007. A recent volume whose focus differs from our own is Cefalu and Reynolds 2011. That collection of essays includes among its approaches systems theory, cultural studies (especially scientific, theological, and political discourses as they appear in literary texts), applications of Giorgio Agamben and psychotheology to early modern writing, and an essay on materialism (e.g., object studies). Examples of the last named approach have been particularly fruitful; see, e.g., Fumerton 1988, 1991 and the references in Julia Reinhard Lupton's contribution to this special issue. There has also been extensive work in animal studies that focus on the Renaissance (Boehrer 2002; Fudge 1999, 2006; Shannon 2013).
3. Besides Montrose 1989, 1992, we would like to note as particularly useful Felperin 1990; Howard 1987; Pieters (1999); Porter 1990; and Thomas 1991 as well as the introductions and essays in several more volumes collecting New Historicist essays: Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000; Greenblatt 1988b; Veeser 1989, 1994, to name just a few.

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Historicism," which he is said to have introduced in 1982, preferring the formulation "Poetics of Culture" (1989). He and some of the scholars usually identified as New Historicists did not, in fact, regard themselves as part of a school or movement, though this resistance, certainly after the publication of H. Aram Veeser's anthologies *The New Historicism* (1989) and *The New Historicism Reader* (1994) and Gallagher and Greenblatt's *Practicing New Historicism* (2000), has obviously weakened over time. The second problem, one articulated early on by Heather Dubrow (1996) in her fine review of Greenblatt and Giles B. Gunn's *Redrawing the Boundaries* (1992) and in other recent work on early modern literature (Mallin 1995; Warley 2009), concerns the inordinate emphasis on Greenblatt's writings in appraisals of New Historicism to the detriment of other practicing New Historicists. Indeed, in this very introduction we ourselves are in danger of falling into the same trap. It is extremely tempting to concentrate on Greenblatt because of his prominence in the discipline, his many authoritative pronouncements, the obvious excellence and sophistication of his criticism, and the fact that he has proposed a number of provocative theses (such as the containment thesis in his essay "Invisible Bullets" [Greenblatt 1988a: 21–65] that has drawn considerable attention). Yet his thinking is subject to constant adjustment, and such are the nuances that can be tracked across a wide range of publications that it is not all that easy to mount a critical assault upon an extensive series of connected, but ever-shifting, theoretical versions of New Historicist theorizing. This elusiveness of the Greenblattian oeuvre also has a serious impact upon the range of criticism that is being produced by New Historicists, as members of a discipline in which no two critics are in complete agreement. (See, for instance, Montrose's [1992: 404–8] critical remarks on Greenblatt's containment thesis.)

The variety of approaches within the group of "original" New Historicists focusing on early modern literature (Greenblatt, Montrose, Joel Fineman, Stephen Orgel, Leonard Tennenhouse, and Nancy Armstrong)[4] becomes even more difficult to handle once one posits several "generations" of New Historicists. In her already mentioned review, Dubrow distinguishes between a first and a second generation of New Historicists, the second including critics like Richard Helgerson, Michael Neill, and Patricia Fumerton. Since the review appeared in the 1990s, one might well expect there to be a third or even a fourth generation of New Historicists in early modern studies, each with its own variations on, or modifications of, the "original" paradigm. This

4. Gallagher, though she has copublished with Greenblatt, is actually a nineteenth-century specialist. Michael Rogin and many other people involved with the journal *Representations* have produced excellent New Historicist work but are not Renaissance scholars either.

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mushrooming of New Historic*isms* (note the plural in the title of Montrose 1992) has also led to a dilution of the Greenblattian model and to its partial amalgamation with other broadly historicist and cultural anthropological approaches. It therefore becomes almost impossible in practice either to define *the* New Historicism or to distinguish it from neighboring, competing, and even oppositional critical approaches. If Greenblatt serves as a convenient target for detractors of New Historicist modes of writing, it is because his theoretical assumptions and proposals have been absorbed into the discourses of younger scholars and because his work initiated a recognizable style of academic writing which—even outside New Historicism—has proved to be fruitful and popular.

The difficulty with distinguishing New Historicist from non–New Historicist criticism comes down to the fact that those tenets that are shared by most of the first-generation New Historicists have now become general features of the wider early modern critical landscape. They are part of what Montrose (1992: 395) calls the shift "from the aesthetic analysis of verbal *artifacts* to the ideological analysis of discursive *practices*" (original emphasis). Among these features are the theses (a) that texts within and outside the boundaries of the literary canon share the same ideological assumptions; (b) that literary texts disclose the symptoms of the complex circulation of power and cannot claim to inhabit a separate sphere outside politics; (c) that power is not an essence but a *relation* and that it is embedded in all social interactions; (d) that power resides not only in top-down processes but in the social relations of the agents at all levels of the historical process at large; (e) that literary criticism is therefore (or should be) centrally concerned with the relation of text and context: this particular quasi-Foucauldian inflection of the Derridean *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* makes discourse an object of struggle that has social and material effects right across the society in which it is embedded.

All of these tenets are, of course, routine for cultural studies, cultural materialism, and much postcolonial criticism. When one looks for elements that are specifically New Historicist, the structure and style of the work produced by Greenblatt, Montrose, or Fineman stand out as identifying features. New Historicism's use of the anecdote is not only a typical opening gambit in writing essays but could be argued to be *the* defining feature of the approach. In Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology, the anecdote is a symptom of the structure of the wider cultural formation of which it is a part and is indebted to a structuralist model. As we have seen, New Historicist writing, while retaining this conceptual model, extends the interpretative activity of the observer to permit making a comparison between the anecdote and the literary text; in this way, the literary text can provide evidence for the "his-

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torical reality" of which the anecdote is an integral part. Moreover, the modes of writing employed by New Historicists display a great attractiveness as models of composition per se, to the extent that they can be employed by practitioners grounded in completely different theoretical assumptions. Another key quality of New Historicist criticism therefore is its rhetorical persuasiveness, which gives these texts a recognizable identity.

A third prominent New Historicist property might be the willingness of its practitioners to accept the existence of a degree of common ground between their literary concerns and the preoccupations of cultural anthropology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. New Historicism owes its novelty to a conflation of the practices of the social anthropology of Geertz with Foucauldian discourse theory as it matured in the United States during the early years of Ronald Reagan's presidency. Initially, and in its Geertzian guise, "interpretation" as a procedure was a question of access and in particular access to other cultures. For Geertz (1973: 18), "[a] good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that which it is the interpretation." The curiously disarming relativism implied in this practice emerges in the statement that "ethnographic findings are not privileged, just particular: another country heard from" (ibid.: 23). The past, in other words, is a different country, although it is accessible. This assumes that, particularity notwithstanding, there is a neutral position from which to evaluate otherness. Greenblatt, of course, knew better, and it was a feature of New Historicism that it sought a dialogue with the past while at the same time recognizing that its own discursive structures might inhibit the path to objectivity. In short, an appeal to "historicism," or more precisely, to a reliable historiography, risked being undermined by an anthropological assumption that otherness was accessible while at the same time claiming that in some commonsense way the empirical evidence from another culture simply *presented* itself.

What Greenblatt extracted from Foucault was one-half of a complex proposition in which discourse and power were intertwined. The dilution of the Foucauldian thesis of the symbiotic and dialectical relationship between power and resistance, however, arguably ends up weakening the political emphasis that is carefully articulated in Foucault's "Rule of the tactical polyvalence of Discourses" in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. There Foucault (1990 [1978]: 101) insists that "we must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy": "There is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances that are

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possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations" (ibid.: 95–96).

The appeal to an historicism stripped of its imperative to totalize in favor of privileging the fragment, the anecdote, while at the same time acknowledging its position within some cultural langue effectively seems to relieve the observer of an impulse to activism. New Historicism paid far less attention to "resistances" than it did to the instrumental aspects of power, influenced, possibly, by the claims from cultural commentators such as Francis Fukuyama that free market capitalism was the terminus ad quem of history. This would certainly account for the emphasis placed upon "containment" rather than "subversion," although it must be said that Greenblatt was much more fully aware than some of his acolytes of the full complexity of Foucault's formulations. Despite that, what sticks in the craw of New Historicism is a residual, all but unavoidable dependency on dialectical and historical materialism and the challenges that they might pose if they were to make any serious headway outside the academy. It is this dilution of Foucauldian ideas that allows for a turning away from politics into the realm of aesthetics, as in Greenblatt's most recent work. There, as we noted above, he has moved slowly toward the writings of Auerbach, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, and Frankfurt School critical theory in an attempt to effect a rapprochement between a more traditional post-Kantian aesthetics and the antirealist cultural relativism of some of the literary theory of the past three decades.

To summarize, it is easier to profile one's own position in relation to Greenblatt's critical practice than to set it against New Historicism in a more general sense, since the vocabulary and some of the tenets they share have for some time been absorbed into mainstream critical discourse. Hence the persistence of an anti-Greenblatt bias, on the one hand, but also an equally persistent deployment of the terms of New Historicism, on the other. In fact, it is this imbrication of the exponentially expanding vocabulary of New Historicism in other revisionist critical discourses that is in some measure responsible for the persistent attention accorded to Greenblatt's work.

Among the contributors to this special issue, it will be noted that some place an emphasis on the Foucauldian tenets of New Historicism, that is, the "reciprocity and mutual constitution" of the "discursive and social domains" (Montrose 1992: 395). Other contributors (e.g., Ingo Berensmeyer, Julia Reinhard Lupton) are more interested simply in the integration of nonliterary texts into literary studies, thus to some extent dissolving the boundary between literary and nonliterary texts and permitting the sub-

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sumption of New Historicism within the broader aegis of cultural studies; others aim at extending New Historicist analysis to areas that its practice has hitherto marginalized. This latter emphasis is true of the contributions by Jean-Jacques Chardin, Jennifer A. Low, Lauren Shohet, and Monika Fludernik. Yet other contributors are mostly concerned with the extent of the "historicist" content in New Historicism and less with the text-context relationship. This involves paying more attention to Greenblatt's talking with the dead as a figure for our understanding of the past than to the actual method of recuperating the past. For this reason, the essays (Berensmeyer, Jerzy Limon) that focus on presentism as an alternative to New Historicism are perhaps closest to a position that is definitely "beyond" rather than complementary or contiguous to New Historicism.

Several of the contributors attempt to set complementary types of analysis alongside New Historicist work. Foremost among such approaches is New Textualism, a development from New Philology, as outlined by Jürgen Meyer in his essay. Although, originally, editing seems to have little substantial connection with New Historicism, editorial decisions emerge as a consequence of struggling with the same issues of determining the past as evidenced in New Historicism's Geertzian interpretative practice. Indeed, this is evidenced in Greenblatt's role as the editor of *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997), although the text is taken over from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (1989). Some of the problems confronting New Textualism are also similar to those of performance studies, whether from the architectural or the dramatic point of view. Indeed, in all these areas, the threat of a modern imperialist appropriation of the past is brought into tension with the impossibility of the actual retrieval of past experience, text, performance, or belief.

The essays by Shohet and Fludernik, on the other hand, present their approaches (poetic formalism, narratology) as complementary to New Historicism. In both cases, however, the close analysis in these essays gestures toward the historical and demonstrates that poetic form or narrative strategy need to be aligned with the cultural and theoretical issues that resonate with New Historical preoccupations. Shohet's contribution, in particular, explicitly claims for itself a place "beyond" as part of what she calls a "wild" post–New Historicism. Similarly, Lupton, by linking object studies to affordance theory and engaging in a creative redeployment of the deconstructionist paradoxes of hospitality, firmly positions her essay within a broad posthistoricist critical framework and pursues a critical dialogue with New Historicism.

The essays, moreover, return to two major points of criticism of New Historicism that are almost as old as New Historicism itself. One is the attempt to speak to the dead and to provide a more adequate access to the

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past through the indirect route of the historical anecdote; the second bears on the alleged marginalization of resistance in Greenblatt's containment thesis. The first issue is clearly a problem for the presentist camp. In the work of the late Terence Hawkes (1986, 1992), for example, no access to the past is possible *except* from the position of the present; indeed, it is the concerns of the present that stimulate an engagement with the past. Hawkes is important because he challenges absolutely the *processes* that scholars use to assemble "facts" and to construct them into narratives. Berensmeyer in his contribution tries to eschew the Scylla of presentism and the Charybdis of historicism by proposing media ecology as an approach closely linked to issues of cultural performance. This is not the place to consider how New Historicism contrasts with the British school of cultural materialism (see, for instance, Belsey 2007, 2010; Felperin 1990), yet the differences can clearly be observed when comparing the concerted link established by critics like Hugh Grady (2002, 2009; Grady and Hawkes 2007) between texts, whether in the present or the past, and real people's lives.

As regards the question of containment, Fludernik illustrates in her essay how Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* (1580) achieves a balance between ideological conformity with ruling-class denigration of the lower classes and a potentially subversive focus on the viewpoints and aspirations expressed by the populace. Containment in the discourse may be compromised, but the raw force of arms certainly puts down the rebellions in Arcadia. A similarly complicated situation is discussed in Shohet's essay on Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651). Here, too, form seems to win out over historical context and yet allows for a subliminal criticism of the political status quo. And yet in both cases, the containment thesis is too crude to account for the very subtle negotiations between history and literary history combined with the manipulations of temporal scales (in the case of Marvell) or the deployment of irony and viewpoint (in the case of Sidney). Chardin's essay extends the scope of New Historicism to consider the emblem book, particularly Geffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586) and Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* (1612). Chardin associates the submission of the (human) subject to "moral and political authority" with the fashioning and authorizing of the human subject; in reading the mixed generic modes of the emblem itself, he also detects an important tension between public role and private self.

A further striking focus in the contributions to this special issue relates to the notion of performance. Besides Berensmeyer's media ecology, an emphasis on performance is crucial to Limon's disquisitions on theater reconstruction. Moreover, in Low's analysis of cross-dressing in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Love's Cure* (1647), the performance of gender plays a central role. Both of these essays are necessarily concerned with audiences—

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again a factor mostly ignored by classic New Historicist work. Lupton's contribution adds a phenomenological perspective to performance by considering Perdita's gifts of flowers and language in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (1611): it thus complements Low's focus on gender, which itself forms another subtext in Lupton's essay. Both media and performance, moreover, play a key role in Chardin's innovative analysis of the emblem as an early modern genre.

All of the articles collected in this special issue (with the exception of Limon's piece on theater architecture) are also very much concerned with language and style. They tread a cautious line between an analysis of language as a marker of aesthetic quality and a close reading geared toward the historical contexts of the discourses they analyze; between a textual analysis that threatens to approach New Critical formalism and an ideologically informed discussion of language's self-subversive tendencies. Most clearly instanced in Lupton's, Chardin's, and Shohet's essays is how the critical discourse itself is a key concern.

We noted above the rhetorical and performative quality of much New Historicist writing. Indeed, David Norbrook (1994: 141) has gone so far as to suggest that the stalemate into which some New Historicist work has maneuvered itself, in relation to a problematic stance toward the resistance to ideology, results from its post-structuralist emphasis upon representation, and in particular from its emphasis on rhetoric:

> Recent accounts of rhetoric and ideology . . . have tended to see rhetoric in post-structuralist terms as an ineluctable counter to linear rationality. On that model, rhetoric is a subversive force which reveals the arbitrariness of all structures of meaning. It is thus intrinsically opposed to ideology, whose role is to naturalise such structures. . . . Paradoxically, the more rhetoric is seen as subverting ideology, the more ideology comes to be seen as a unified essence, and it becomes necessary to reinvent a static world picture in order to demonstrate subversion. And the more rhetoric is defined in terms of pure subversion, the harder it becomes to imagine how it could ever remain stable enough to occupy a place in society from which opposition could be organised: subversion tends in much recent analysis of early modern culture to collapse into containment.

Norbrook is concerned here to oppose "linear rationality," an Enlightenment category, to post-structuralist "rhetoric," but he links two tendencies together that have a much more complicated history than his formulation suggests. Much depends upon how "ideology" is defined, and many of the essays in this collection presuppose that ideology operates *beneath* the surface and is only recognized at particular historical moments of disjunction. The early modern period is just such a moment, and it is one that an emphasis upon "contain-

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ment," as proposed by New Historicism and recognized by Norbrook, does much to oversimplify. This introduction would not be the appropriate place to tease out the complications that Norbrook identifies, although we consider it necessary to note them in passing.

Let us return to the main line of our argument, having identified some major lines of development observable in the contributions to this special issue. As will have become apparent, there are no easy answers to the question of what lies "beyond" New Historicism. This question is difficult to resolve, not least because, as we have seen, there is no clear agreement on what exactly New Historicism is or on what differentiates the various New Historicisms from cultural studies in general. It should be emphasized that, in its inception, New Historicism was never, in itself, a rigorous coherent theoretical endeavor. While it tacitly aligned itself with the politics of the Left in Britain and Europe, it remained distinct from the politics of cultural materialism in its British guise, and it was reluctant to cut all of its ties with traditional critical practice. Hence the more recent emphases of New Historicism on the formal features of literary texts, alongside attempts to revisit some of the less rebarbative elements of Frankfurt School cultural commentary. The reading of texts from the past, whether literary or otherwise, cannot but engage with "history," and it is this rather obvious realization that has given New Historicism an unusually long academic shelf life that is set to continue. However, we have now arrived at a particular conjuncture where it is possible to envision a "beyond" while at the same time acknowledging what New Historicism has given to the study of the humanities. In some cases, this will involve the refinement of axioms and the interrogation of long-cherished assumptions as well as the challenging of particular shibboleths, all of which are familiar elements in the process of professional reevaluation. And all this while the patient on the operating table still shows signs of rude health and promises further interesting mutations.

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