Recuperating the Archive: Anecdotal Evidence and Questions of "Historical Realism"

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Abstract This essay argues that the critical practice of New Historicism is a mode of "literary" history whose "literariness" lies in bringing imaginative operations closer to the surface of nonliterary texts and briefly describes some of the practice's leading literary features and strategies. I further point out that the ostensible "arbitrary connectedness" (Cohen 1987) of New Historicist writing is in fact aesthetically coded and patterned, both stylistically and in terms of potential semantic correspondences between various representations of the past. I then move on to address the question of why anecdotal evidence features centrally and has come to play a key role in New Historicist writing. Here, I contend that, as components of narrative discourse, anecdotal materials are central in enabling New Historicists to make discernible on the surface of their discourse procedures of meaning production typically found in literary forms. In particular, anecdotal materials are the fragmented "stuff" of historical narratization: they facilitate the shaping of historical events into stories and more or less formalized "facts." This essay examines how the New Historicist anecdote remodels historical reality "as it might have been," reviving the way history is experienced and concretely reproduced by contemporary readers of literary history. Finally, the essay confirms how the textual reproduction of anecdotal evidence also enables the New Historicist mode of "literary" history to secure its links to literary artifacts, literary scholarship, and conventional historical discourse.

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> The anecdote has at once something of the literary and something that exceeds the literary, a narrative form and a pointed, referential access to what lies beyond or beneath that form. . . . The historical anecdote functions less as an explanatory illustration than as a disturbance, that which requires explanation, contextualization, interpretation. Anecdotes are the equivalents in the register of the real of what drew me to the study of literature: the encounter with something I could not stand not understanding, that I could not quite finish with or finish off, that I had to get out of my inner life where it had taken hold, that I could retell and contemplate and struggle with.
> —Stephen Greenblatt, 1990

> There are people who imagine in good faith that a document can be the expression of reality. . . . As if a document could express something different "from itself." . . . A document is a fact. The battle is another fact (an infinity of other facts). The two cannot make "one." . . . The man who acts is "a fact." And the man who narrates is "another fact." . . . Every piece of evidence provides testimony only of itself; of its proper moment, of its proper origin, of its proper end, and of nothing else. . . . All the critical judgments to which we subject history involve the concept of true history, of absolute reality. It is necessary to face up to the question of memory; not in so far as it is forgetfulness, but in so far as it is "memory." Existence of things in themselves.
> —Renato Serra cited by Carlo Ginzburg, 1993

1. The Materiality of New Historicist Writing

In this essay I address the practice of New Historicism as part of the broader disciplinary activity of literary studies, since its workings provide valuable insights into some of the more pressing concerns of contemporary practitioners of literary criticism and history. To my mind, the usefulness of the New Historicism to the dynamics of literary studies lies neither in its prescriptive abstractions nor in its historico-materialist descriptions but rather in the way it reinvigorates, materially and institutionally, what James A. Knapp and Jeffrey Pence have called "the category of the aesthetic" (see their introduction to this special issue in vol. 24, no. 4). I argue that New Historicist writings maintain a rigorous engagement with the category of the aesthetic in ways that are both historical and theoretical, confirming that practitioners of New Historicism still maintain a fascination with, and responsibility to, the literary artifacts and practices that lie at the heart of their field(s) of inquiry. In so doing, New Historicists indeed subscribe to the kind of *reflective turn* endorsed here by Knapp and Pence.

Broadly, the advent of New Historicism may be perceived as a response to the prevalent crisis of "representation" that followed the poststructuralist deprivileging, or demotion, of literature to but one discursive mode among many. In this respect, the practice comprises an institutional attempt

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by a group of authoritative Anglo-American literary critics to restore the explanatory force of literature and literary perceptions to the academic arena at large and to the human sciences in particular (for detailed and varied discussions of the crisis of "representation," see, for example, Thomas 1991: vii-xvii; Weimann 1988; Cohen 1987; and Wayne 1987; for a related yet different account of the emergence of theory and "the correlative decline of faith in the self-sufficient literary object," see Bruss 1982: 14–21; and for a comparable view of the "made-upness" and "made-realness" of cultural artifacts, see Scarry 1987 and 1994).

On the one hand, the crisis of "representation" seems to have driven professionals from a wide range of disciplines, including literary critics, to describe their vocabularies and practices as "made," "unreal," or even fraudulent, thereby distorting, demoting, and deauthenticating all resultant categories of created objects and beliefs (Scarry 1994: 214–24). However,

> at the very moment that critics question literature's representative status they have become increasingly fascinated with it as a representational activity, one that calls attention to the representational modes of other forms of discourse. (Thomas 1991: xv)

This suggests that the practice of New Historicism is best understood as an attempt to redefine the *differentia specifica* of literary studies as a whole, following the putative decrease in the discipline's autonomy and its alleged theoretical despair. It is fitting then that the leading New Historicist practitioner Stephen Greenblatt should be concerned with the "literariness" of historiography itself and its dependence on precision, rigor, and articulation through sheer hard work. As he notes,

> The order of things is never simply a given: it takes labor to produce, sustain, reproduce, and transmit the way things are, and this labor may be withheld or transformed. Structures may be broken in pieces, the pieces altered, inverted, rearranged. Everything can be different than it is; everything could have been different than what it was. But it will not do to imagine that this alteration is easy, automatic, without cost or obligation. (Greenblatt 1990: 166)

Appropriating the past and assimilating it to the present entails considerable training and rigorous effort. Greenblatt's acknowledgment of the labor involved in producing "literary" history is of particular interest, for it counters the insinuation of "anything goes" to poststructuralist "relativists" and of "arbitrary connectedness" to the practice of New Historicism (Cohen 1987). Further, by pointing out the sheer hard work involved, Greenblatt implies that the production of history in general, and literary history in particular, may finally not be very far removed from the creative production of literature itself.

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In what follows, I argue that the critical practice of New Historicism is a mode of "literary" history whose "literariness" lies in bringing imaginative operations closer to the surface of nonliterary texts, and I briefly describe some of the practice's leading literary features and strategies. I also try to show that the ostensible "arbitrary connectedness" of New Historicist writing is in fact aesthetically coded and patterned, both stylistically and in terms of potential semantic correspondences between various representations of the past. I then move on to address the question of why anecdotal evidence features centrally and has come to play a key role in New Historicist writing. Here, I contend that, as components of narrative discourse, anecdotal materials are central in enabling New Historicists to make discernible on the surface of their discourse procedures of meaning production typically found in literary forms. In particular, anecdotal materials are the fragmented "stuff" of historical narratization: they facilitate the shaping of historical events into stories and more or less formalized "facts." In New Historicist writing, anecdotes are indeed "broken in pieces, the pieces altered, inverted, rearranged," so that the historical events they refer to may diverge from received renditions of the same events. We will examine how the New Historicist anecdote remodels historical reality "as it might have been," reviving the ways history is experienced and concretely reproduced by contemporary readers of literary history. At the same time, it will emerge that the textual reproduction of anecdotal evidence enables the New Historicist mode of "literary" history to maintain its links (discoursal and institutional) to literary artifacts, literary scholarship, and conventional historical discourse.

2. "Literary" Historiography as Historical "Realism"

Toward the end of the 1970s, the practice of New Historicism rose to prominence, luring many critics, coaching the younger and retraining the older ones in its concepts and the written articulations thereof, by and large setting the tone for Anglo-American literary criticism for roughly two decades. Among other things, this is attested by the myriad accounts and critiques which over the years have pledged allegiance to or dissented from this critical praxis. New Historicism has typically been perceived as a highly "successful theoretical avant-garde" (Jameson 1991: xvi), even as, or perhaps precisely because, it was considered to have "radically disrupted business as usual in the study of literature" (Veeser 1994: 3). Strangely, though, critics have hitherto overlooked the calculated "artfulness" and rhetorical cunning with which what I call "poetic" New Historicist writing (see Laden 1996 and 1999) has transposed the literariness of its own objects of study to its

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own (meta)critical idiom, rendering it as compelling and exhilarating for its growing scholarly readership as literature itself has been for the general reading public. As Stephen Greenblatt (1990: 4) points out, "if there is any value to what has become known as 'new historicism,'" it must be "in an *intensified willingness to read* all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts" (emphasis added). Suggested here is the putative responsibility of an implied reader of New Historicist texts, one presumably experienced and scholarly. The creative faculty of this implied reader is likened to that of an artist: Greenblatt (1988b: vii) reminds us that works of criticism, like works of art ("poetry, drama and fiction"), are "marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals," though also "products of collective negotiation and exchange." Hence, one might say that, through their appropriation of Geertzian analytical tools, New Historicists effectively urge readers to extend "the kind of attention paid to canonical works of art to the ordinary and extraordinary behavior of the subjects of anthropology" (Greenblatt 2000a: 27) (although New Historicist texts seldom overtly refer to this move, with the exception of Greenblatt [ibid.: 31]). The broader heuristic value of New Historicism may well lie in its ability to enhance and extend our understanding of culture and history by inspiring us to reconceptualize the past, and its textual, often nonliterary representations, through "literary" perceptions.

Indeed, Greenblatt's mode of "poetic" New Historicism often operates very much like a literary text whose specific function, according to Wolfgang Iser, is to provoke the reader to cross boundaries of existing modes of constructing reality (see, for instance, Iser 1993: 1–21, 171–80; 1996; on Iser's notion of the reader's agency, see especially Gans 2000, Fluck 2000, and Armstrong 2000). According to Iser (1993: 13),

> reality . . . may be reproduced in the fictional text, but it is there in order to be outstripped. . . . The reality represented in the text is not meant to represent reality; it is a pointer to something which it is not although its function is to make that something conceivable.

By analogy, then, the practice of New Historicism urges us to cross boundaries and enables us to conceptualize other versions of reality, or ways of experiencing the world, as literary history. Brook Thomas maintains a distinction between Greenblatt's model of literary representation and Iser's as "mimetic" and "poetic," respectively. But I would venture that Greenblatt knowingly deploys a poetic form of mimesis, whereby he does not simply imitate reality but probes "our sense of fundamental possibility—what we take to be or wish to be or can . . . imagine to be" (Bruss 1982:

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89), seeking to authorize subjective, imaginary experience as valid data for historical research in the human sciences.

"Poetic" New Historicist texts are more "literary" than traditional works of literary criticism, theory, or history are typically presumed to be, in the sense that they themselves are far more dense and demanding and motivated as much by a heightened awareness of aesthetic concerns and "literary" norms as they are by critical, theoretical, and historical issues. Deploying a mode of historical argumentation that manifests an "artful" intermingling of interpretive and logical approaches to matters, New Historicist texts frequently appear to operate more like "primary" literature than like the secondary discursive forms known as literary theory and/or criticism. In so doing, they confirm that literary theory is no longer "ancillary to the real business of literature" (see Bruss 1982: 78–79) and can be as inspiring and uplifting for its growing scholarly readership.

Specifically, the critical discourse or "conceptual machinery" (ibid.: 93) of "poetic" New Historicist writing is modeled on literary discourse: it relies not on accumulated evidence, a clear-cut logic of argumentation and justification, or overt explanatory power but rather on energies that seek to illustrate, persuade, and illuminate by way of rhetorical force. In the hope of inducing a more active critical engagement with its readers than do other modes of literary theory and history, New Historicist writing openly deploys, even as it modifies, "literary" means of persuasion or representation (e.g., principles of selection and composition) mediated by a narratorial/critical persona. While theoretical discourse typically strives for anonymity, rendering "the proposer . . . less important than the proposal itself" (ibid.: 55), New Historicist writing is designed to present its author-practitioners as subjective validators of "truth," who resort to the conventions of fiction writers to make their claims plausible. Seeking to justify this move, Greenblatt has recently pointed out that

> literary criticism is on the whole almost unbearable to read, because it lacks much in the way of personal stakes and commitment. The only way to get those qualities is to actually put yourself on line as somebody. (Cited in Blume 2001: 3)

New Historicism thus seeks to enliven literary theory by granting new critical weight and acceptability to its author-practitioners and their logical inconsistencies, freeing them, as it were, of the need to "prove," "of the responsibility to supply evidence or arguments for what is said" (Bruss 1982: 54), committing them instead to "a reasonable—but not the only reasonable—account" of various states of affairs (ibid: 99). For example, throughout his seminal study *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt (1980b)

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sets up analogical correspondences among a range of interpretations and analyses/explanations, narrative accounts, emblematic patterns, and historical figures (including himself), both aligning himself with, and distancing himself from, his readers. Fully aware of how his own critical position is subjectively implicated in the metaphorical status of this book as a "historical drama," he reminds us that we all "need such a drama in part because compulsive readers of literature tend to see the world through literary models, and in part because our own lives—quite apart from professional deformation—are saturated with experience artfully shaped" (ibid.: 6). At the same time, New Historicist writing tries to obscure the construction of this "authorial" disposition by resorting to "disinterested" traditional historiographical conventions, on the one hand, and "very high-tech contemporary theoretical writing" (Greenblatt 1994: 124), on the other hand.

It is in this sense that "poetic" New Historicism—as chartered by practitioners such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, and Joel Fineman—is more an aesthetic style of writing than a theoretical mode of sound and rigorously argued criticism (for details, see Laden 1999). Deliberately playful and ludic, energized by discursive strategies which are more literary and/or tropological and hence more potent than both traditional historical discourse and nonpoetic New Historicism, this is a stylized practice of historical representation.

No less significantly, the practice of New Historicism is also authorized by the archive, or the library, as a more or less official repository of records: at once a site for storing a variety of material artifacts and documents and, as Ann Stoler (2002: 88–89) points out, a metaphorical site of "how people imagine what they know and what institutions validate that knowledge." As such, the archive and/or library *constitute* as much as they record the realities they ostensibly only describe (ibid.: 95). Following Hayden White's (1999: 63) comments on New Historicism's predilection for "the emergent, episodic, anecdotal, contingent, exotic, abjected, or simply uncanny aspects of the historical record," the archive or library can be said to enable, and legitimize, the integration of "historical sequences" conducive "to the breaking, revision, or weakening of the dominant codes into historical discourse and the practice of historiography" (ibid.). It is in this mediatory capacity that the function of anecdotal evidence in New Historicist writing is best understood: New Historicists draw heavily on anecdotal material located in official archives in order to suggest new ways of transforming past historical events into new "facts" and to sanction how these "facts" might best be explained. Even as narrative discourse, the anecdote also subscribes to the "protocol of objectivity" (Gallagher 2000: 49), relying on detail as a sign of truth, that is, on a specific number of minor, seemingly trivial facts, with a

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view to a "reality effect" (on this effect in historical method see, for example, Barthes 1981 [1967], Bann 1984, Laquer 1989, Ginzburg 1989, Carrard 1992, and Simpson 1999). At the same time, anecdotes are intended to stimulate curiosity, a personal "what-happens-next" interest in their participants and the events they set out to recall.

The anecdote has been revived by New Historicists as their most relevant and authoritative trope, in the sense of amplifying archival material and increasing its rhetorical appeal. Consider the anecdote's narrative features: chronological order of occurrence; central subject(s); beginning, middle, and end; identifiable narrative voice; strong connections between events. Each of these features facilitates the shaping of historical events into stories and into more or less formalized "facts," while its "factual" details (such as specific figures, dates, and nomenclature) remain signs of reliable evidence, meticulous scholarship, and the collaborative production of historical knowledge. Although New Historicists seem eager to laboriously plow through archives and libraries for historical sources, it may be presumed that they frequently come up with chance findings. Nonetheless, the act of scouring archival sources, whatever its motivation, is intended to distinguish New Historicists from their relatively "ahistorical" predecessors, namely New Critics and formalist structuralists, who generally preferred to focus on literary texts per se, using the nonliterary as auxiliary data. On a different level yet, the deployment of anecdotes and archival material in New Historicist essays obscures the traditional boundaries between "literary" and "historical" texts, particularly by illuminating the representational powers of both modes of discourse. Here we might say that "poetic" New Historicists deploy such material as a means of "defamiliarizing" or refashioning literary history and broadening the scope of its materials.

3. How the Anecdote Works; or, Evidence as Trope

Archival materials in New Historicist work include both narratized (memoirs, testimonials, reminiscences, theological treatises) and nonnarratized (footnotes, reference notes, and residual notes) texts, official records and unofficial sources, and iconographic evidence (e.g., plans from Albrecht Durer's *Painter's Manual* [1525] [Greenblatt 1988b: 1–10; 1990: 100–6]; plates [Greenblatt 2000b: 76, 84, 86–91; 2001: 53–64]; and figures [ibid.: 15–92]). The recurrent and much-critiqued use that New Historicist writers make of anecdotes and anecdotal evidence (recent critiques include Prendergast 1999: 100; Kastan 1999: 31; and Pieters 2001: 124–33) serves to order the vast miscellany of archival materials into manageable narrative segments.

For our purposes here, the archival repository or library is both a situ-

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ated, concrete spatial domain and, following Michel Foucault (1972: 129–30), a dynamic, complex "system" of discrete yet interrelated (textual) statements whose status as unique events is constantly renegotiated. Although typically presented as unmediated, first-order enunciations, archival documents are probably always mediated, often rewritten more than once and in a number of ways (Carrard 1992: 130–33). However, since they are held to have originated in concrete experience, archival records and statements also provide the very conditions of possibility for the historian's experiential claim to "having been there." Significantly, "there" clearly refers not to the actual historical events believed to have occurred in the past, but rather to the library itself as a culturally sanctioned repository of records describing this past, which invites us to "retreat into the past as if it were the present" (Simpson 1999: 6). Hence, for the literary historian in particular, the library provides a concrete, material setting within which the diversity of its recorded statements and representations, "real" and/or fictional, are encountered, apprehended, and retold by those researchers who would explore them today. In many ways, then, the library is a mediatory space whose material artifacts make it possible for scholars to render "the distant past . . . so intensely present that it lays claim to the material world here and now" (Greenblatt 2000c: 139). New Historicists are therefore committed to rendering the past "intensely present" by reworking archival material into anecdotal narratized forms for present-day readers. Anecdotal narratives generally seek to authorize themselves, however implicitly, as eyewitness accounts, even though they may not always be such.

This raises the question of what precisely the boundaries of the anecdote in New Historicist writing might be and how it can most profitably be defined as a unit of analysis. The answers are by no means clear-cut. Indeed, it appears that the anecdote, not unlike the New Historicist writing practice itself, deliberately resists analysis and evades definition (see Laden 1999: 59–61; Greenblatt in Blume 2001). This despite the fact that Greenblatt (2000a: 35) has recently alluded to "the new historicist anecdote as many of us deployed it," implying that there is indeed such an entity and that it has been collaboratively used by him and his peers. Again, Greenblatt himself has also pointed out that

> anecdotes are among the principal products of a culture's representational technology, mediators between the undifferentiated succession of local moments and a larger strategy toward which they can only gesture. They are seized in passing from the swirl of experiences and given some shape, a shape whose provisionality still marks them as contingent—otherwise, we would give them the larger, grander name of history—but also makes them available for telling and retelling. (Cited in Blume 2001: 3)

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Initially, this attempt to explain anecdotes as products of "a culture's representational technology" initially seems quite apposite, but it soon becomes clear that anecdotes are not being analyzed or explained here but are rather metaphorically described: they "gesture," "they are seized in passing from the swirl of experiences and given some shape" and become "available for telling and retelling" (ibid.). The predominance of figurative language here is ultimately more "poetic" than explanatory and defies accepted protocols of investigative discourse.

More specifically, in his representative essay on the "History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction," New Historicist Joel Fineman (1989) parodies his own attempt to record a history of the anecdote all the way back to Thucydides. Arguing that "the anecdote . . . as the narration of a singular event, is the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real," and claiming to review "the history of historiography as the history of the effect of the anecdotal on the writing of history" (ibid.: 62), Fineman refers to the anecdote

> as a *historeme*, that is, as the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact. And the question that the anecdote thus poses is how, compact of both literature and reference, the anecdote possesses its peculiar and eventful narrative force. (Ibid.: 57)

Located on the cusp of history and the literary, the anecdote also constitutes

> a literary form that *lets history happen* by virtue of the way it introduces an opening into the teleological, and therefore timeless, narration of beginning, middle and end. The anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i.e., it does so only in so far as *its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it reports*. (Ibid.: 61)

In other words, by ascribing to the anecdote centrality in history and historiography, Fineman underscores its representational properties as a mode of narration, interpretation, and critical authority. Throughout this essay, which epitomizes the use of narrative digression or deferment in an attempt to "fit particular events into the intelligible whole of a sequential, framing narrative" (ibid.: 52), Fineman demonstrates the narrative force of the anecdote and finally posits his entire essay as itself anecdotal and elusive: a meta-anecdote, if you will, that demonstrates the "*experience* of history" but cannot formalize the history of the anecdote as he set out to do.

In a different vein, Catherine Gallagher (2000: 51, 54) recalls that, while in "the old historicism" anecdotes were linked to the institutional practice of history, held to "epitomize epochal truths," they later came to be viewed as hallmarks of humanist or "culturalist" British left-wing social history (as

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practiced, for instance, by historian E. P. Thompson [1966] and others), with its strong emphasis on experience, social consciousness, and world making. In the twentieth century, moreover, anecdotal evidence has often been used to convey "the conditions of the everyday as they are experienced by common people" (Iggers 1997: 103) or what is known today as "history from below" (Burke 1991: 4–5, 10; Sharp 1991), which focuses on "views of ordinary people and their experience of social change" (Burke 1991: 4) and "the putatively unprocessed 'voices' of the lower classes" (Gallagher 2000: 55). Greenblatt too uses anecdotes to portray, at times ironically, a sense of "history from below" when representing social transgressors and outcasts and members of "marginal" social groups, such as women, children, and elderly persons as well as prisoners, exorcists, "others," defeated populations, and an assortment of underdogs and "victims" (e.g., Alexander Iden and Jack Cade in "Murdering Peasants" [Greenblatt 1988b: 1–29], Jeane le Febvre and Marie le Maris in "Fiction and Friction" [Greenblatt 1988a: 66–93], and the Digger community in "Filthy Rites" [Greenblatt 1990: 59–79]). Nonetheless, the borders between older and newer historicisms, and the different uses of anecdotal evidence in both, are not always clear-cut.

Giovanni Levi characterizes the anecdote as scientific knowledge of the particular itself, which refuses to be defined only in relation to its subject matter at large (see Levi 1991; Ginzburg 1993: 35). As documentary material comprising small-scale yet densely packed junctions of narrative representation, anecdotes exemplify how the past may be accessed by closely observing clues and signs, how the researcher and research procedures inevitably become implicated in research accounts, and how interpretations of the social and cultural always hinge on shifting interrelationships between constantly changing, often atypical, configurations. Following Levi (1991: 103), it may be argued that New Historicist writing focuses on the anecdote as a means of emblematizing the anomalous, the "socially differentiated nature of symbolic meanings and consequently their partly ambiguous quality," even as it grapples with

> the problem of describing vast complex social structures without losing sight of the individual's social space and hence, of people and their situation in life. (Ibid.: 95)

Here, the anecdote is enlisted as a mark of local and contingent historical evidence whose concrete specificity resists being transformed into theoretical abstraction, although it does embody potentially general dimensions.

The anecdote provides a convenient unit of analysis for the Geertzian notion of ethnography as "thick description," webs of overlapping systems of signification. As such, anecdotes invite New Historicists to engage with

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that central problem in Western historiography, namely, that of historical authenticity versus historical representation. As a local, prosaic event or episode that is clearly part of a larger historical picture, the anecdote and its participants may be considered both, as Geertz (1973: 7) puts it, as "not untypical" and as historically atypical, if not inconsequential, politically insignificant, and socially inconspicuous. Recently, Greenblatt (2000a: 21) has commented on Geertz's use of the "delicate double negative," pointing out how it enables the "not untypical" instance to maintain its representative force without being "absorbed into a larger whole." Moreover, the relative obscurity of the anecdote, its local rather than universal flavor, the frequent anonymity and unmarked cultural status of its acting subjects and of the anecdotalists themselves underscore the role of the particular in relation to the social, play down the regularized consequences of any events it may recount, and ironize the anecdote's apparent triviality and randomness.

An important distinction between old and new historicisms, however they are defined, lies in their conventionalized uses of source material, of quotation and discursive strategies. The textualizing apparatus of nineteenth-century "scientific" historical discourse typically prohibits historians from being present in their research, so that anecdotal accounts necessarily include "factual" details, such as specific figures, quantitative descriptions, datings, and nomenclature, intended to highlight the logic of their argumentation and to represent shared rather than individual properties of historical writing. This means that much historical detail is often quite mechanical and impersonal and may even elude the reader's attention. The New Historicist textualization of the anecdote is performed against the accepted "transparent" uses of anecdotal sources that present the historian as an "authentic" witness of original documents, which attest actual historical events, as it were, and require *direct citation and reference* to all cited documents. New Historicist uses of anecdotal materials highlight the ways in which members of a scholarly community can legitimately *draw on* original and secondhand evidence from a shared repertoire of sources, *critically sifting* through the archives, establishing that they have done their archival "homework" and are informed about recent advances in related fields of inquiry. In so doing, they wish to convince readers that their own accounts are more valid and engaging, and to this end they include, often parade, figurative language, emblematic and narrative patterns, irony, puns, subjective evaluations, and personal interventions in their arguments (for a related discussion of the French New Historians see Carrard 1992: 149–217).

A self-parodic case in point occurs in the first essay of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, "At the Table of the Great" (Greenblatt 1980b: 11–73), which allegedly draws on, without directly citing, anecdotal evidence. The open-

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ing line, "A dinner party at Cardinal Wolsey's," locates the reader in sixteenth-century England at an event which (presumably) actually took place. Although there is little factual detail here, a more or less formalized fact is suggested, which may or may not be a narrative; this brief opening line may also be read as a stage direction from a play or screen script. We are next told that years later Thomas More "recalled and refashioned" this dinner party as a "merry tale" (in *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*), "fictionalizing" it in his memoirs. This same incident is subsequently designated by Greenblatt as a "sly joke," a "mythical" representation of More's past, and "an emblem of human society"—confusing the reader as to the actual source material being referred to and its generic classification. Is it More's *Dialogue of Comfort*, Greenblatt's interpretation thereof, or both? Is it an anecdote, a joke, an allegorical tale, or all of these at once? Before this is established fifteen pages later, Greenblatt (1980b: 30) reveals that this same "dinner party anecdote" is actually borrowed from a biography of More written by Nicholas Harpsfield and hence is not evidence "discovered" by Greenblatt, but rather evidence drawn on by him. Most significantly, the anecdote of the dinner party at Cardinal Wolsey's is never actually recounted anywhere in this study: Greenblatt refers to it in the opening sentence and later alludes to Harpsfield's retelling, but the anecdote itself remains conspicuously absent.

Ethnographer James Clifford (1985: 142) has rightly ascribed to Greenblatt's New Historicist writing the "ironic stance of participant observation" as constructed and engaged by the "participant analyst" (see also Laden 1996: 35–36). A direct reflex of this ironic stance is the way the historical evidence re-presented by "poetic" New Historicists at large, and Greenblatt in particular, frequently seems to be placed in quotation marks, although they are not always visible. On the surface, quotation marks, whether explicit or implied, provide a means of differentiating the voices and commentaries of New Historicists, especially "poetic" ones, from the articulations of the historical actors and professional counterparts they cite. Yet more importantly, I believe, they are major constituents of the critical authority of New Historicist essays and their producers. Alluding as though unconsciously to historical, literary, and nonliterary texts, "poetic" New Historicists attest and confirm the cultural authority of the sources they cite and retell. In so doing they enhance the reliability of the historical sources and "voices" they quote, often creating the illusion that these have been internalized and are indeed speaking, as it were, through them.

As narrative discourse, New Historicist anecdotal accounts may range from brief, fragmentary reports to longer, more conventionally marked narrative segments. They contain an adequate range of narrative components

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to inaugurate a narrative sequence: a date of occurrence versus a narration thereof, at least one central subject, an identifiable narrative voice, and at least one described event. “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 Durer published his *Painter’s Manual*, A Manual of Measurement of Lines, Areas and Solids by Means of a Compass and Ruler” (Greenblatt 1988b: 1). Such utterances comply with Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s (1980: 228) minimal characterization of narrative as a speech act consisting of “someone telling someone else that something happened.” Longer, more comprehensive anecdotal sequences of course abound, both as archival material cited verbatim and as anecdotal reproductions thereof.

Structurally, most New Historicist essays seem to be constructed around several anecdotal nodes, often strategically placed at the beginning or toward the end of the essay. Anecdotal material in New Historicist essays is drawn from diverse archival disciplines, ranging from theology and ancient Greek history to sixteenth-century occult activities, from political, historical, and medical accounts to contemporary reports of IRA terrorism and Ronald Reagan’s “filmspeak.” Anonymous, anecdotal fragments, both cited verbatim and reported, are placed alongside authorial “culturally sanctioned” literary texts, also alluded to and cited verbatim—with the result that all source material is promoted from “historical background” to the realm of legitimate “historical evidence.” Anecdotal material in New Historicist essays often comprises a seemingly random stock of little-known, previously unseen textual passages from an assortment of non-literary historical documents whose authors and historical actors may be leading historical figures relatively unknown to literary specialists (such as Thomas Harriot, well-known scientist and explorer yet relatively unknown writer, whose text is cited in Greenblatt’s “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion” [1981]; Hugh Latimer, famous Protestant divine martyred under Bloody Mary, who features in “Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne” [Greenblatt 1990: 129–63]; or obscure Jeane le Febvre, thirty-two-year old widowed mother of two from a small town near Rouen, identified in “Fiction and Friction” [Greenblatt 1988a: 66–93]). At other times, we encounter anecdotal retellings well known to readers from prior tellings and other sources, such as Greenblatt’s account of Menocchio from the early version of “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion” (Greenblatt 1981: 40), presumably familiar to many readers directly from Ginzburg 1980 or indirectly from references to his seminal historical study.

The New Historicist return to source study, including anecdotal materials, can be accounted for along several different yet interrelated lines. On

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the one hand, source study is an application of nineteenth-century epistemology of historiography concerning what constitutes appropriate historical "evidence." At the same time, it harks back to late-nineteenth-century positivist literary study, which had not yet begun to center on the literary work itself but focused rather on recovering the genesis of particular works and was committed to a wide range of interests and disciplines, including biography, history, psychology, ethnography, sociology, and aesthetics. However, although New Historicist writing likewise relates to other disciplines and discourses, its poetic practitioners are deeply committed to the study of specifically literary works and strategies: such a practice can be traced back to Anglo-American New Criticism (procedures of "close reading") and Russian Formalism (a concern with "literariness," even within the nonliterary).

In this sense, the "acts of witnessing" through which *evidence*, ostensibly the basis of all of scientific and historical perception, is cited always also represent what Greenblatt (1991: 122) calls "a form of significant and representative seeing," that is, a mode of understanding which operates, as it were, "from the inside" (cf. Shapin and Schaffer's [1985: 66–67, 225–26] account of Robert Boyle's experimental practices; Ginzburg 1991, 1993). At the same time, rather than operating with a unified notion of "historical truth," New Historicists accommodate historical representations which may well be incommensurable among themselves, and in this sense their cited evidence and quotation marks also refer to the actuality of the past. This diversity of "factual" historical evidence, finally, enhances the status of New Historicist writing as a rational and regulated, rather than a purely subjective, mode of discourse and/or knowledge.

The traditional category of evidence privileges the notion of the event represented by a witness as a reliable source of evidence in history (see Cousins 1987: 131). One of the ways Greenblatt successfully generates a sense of anecdotal "fact" is by inserting into his own writing statements conveying an "anecdotal inflection," strongly suggesting that the authorial narrator has personally witnessed or experienced what he or she is in fact in the process of relating, perhaps "making up," before our very eyes. Thus, the opening essay of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, "The Circulation of Social Energy," begins with the well-known, much reiterated line "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt 1988a: 1). This announcement evokes in us the sense of witnessing the way in which the authorial narrator, constructed as a firsthand witness with unquestionable reliability, unfolds as narrative a potentially new way of perceiving a "habitual," yet entirely incongruous, state of affairs: that of "speaking to the dead."

In his essay "The Go-Between," Greenblatt (1991: 119–51) traces his own

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historical authority back to Herodotus, reminding us that it is bound up with an appeal to events that have been personally seen and heard, confirming "the insistent claim to personal experience, the authority of the eyewitness" (ibid.: 123). But he also explains how European imperialism actually rests on a different kind of witnessing, one "understood as a form of significant and representative seeing," whereby

> the bit that has actually been seen becomes by metonomy a representation of the whole. That representation is in turn conveyed, reported to an audience elsewhere, and seeing turns into witnessing. The person who witnesses becomes the point of contact, the mediator between "ourselves" and what is out there beyond our sight. (Ibid.: 122)

Here Greenblatt underscores the synecdochic nature of the anecdote and the mediated, representative nature of personal evidence and "acts of witnessing" in both historical documentation and literary works, which become impossible to distinguish from hearsay. As one important implication, the text enjoys the status of "a witness of the other" (de Certeau 1988: 68) and confers its authority on the historian by deepening "the power and authenticity of the eyewitness" (Greenblatt 1991: 127) without, however, securing or stabilizing that authority. Referring to this entanglement as the "discovery of the self in the other and the other in the self" (ibid.), Greenblatt also perceives its "refusal to respect boundaries" as a celebration of "the historian's blend of ideological engagement and elusiveness" (ibid.) and knowingly extends this "go-between" authority to his own critical persona as literary historian.

4. Toward a Typology of the New Historicist Anecdote

In addition to the opening sentence sequences mentioned earlier, at least three types of anecdotal retellings are recurrent in New Historicist writing. The first seeks to bridge historical distance through recollection with estrangement, causing the reader to oscillate between proximity and removal, heightening the effect of the textual description of human experience in the world. The second presents itself as a recently discovered anecdotal narrative but is in fact a third-order reworking of well-known secondary scholarly source material, familiar to readers more or less directly from other sources in story or fairy-tale form. The third type of anecdotal account presents autobiographical "real-life" tales as fragmented, anecdotal narratives structured in loose episodic form, whereby New Historicists punctuate critical prose with personalized "story-histories" in anecdotal form. The first two will be addressed in this section; the last, in the next.

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The first kind of anecdotal account occurs, for example, in Greenblatt's (1980b) portrayal of Sir Thomas More in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Following a condensed, factual account, most probably based on archival material, of More's career "from modest beginnings in the early 1490s as a young page . . . to the Lord Chancellorship, the highest office in the realm," we learn that the king brought More "in 1534 to the Tower and, on 6 July 1535, to the scaffold" (Greenblatt 1980b: 12). Although this account is not devoid of authorial evaluations and interventions, the anecdotal details presented here indeed seem mechanical, unexciting, and hardly noticeable to the reader. Greenblatt's subsequent use of the anecdote is performed against this conventional way of presenting "objective" historical data. Here, Greenblatt problematizes historical "evidence," and his own uses of anecdotal knowledge, by foregrounding what seem to be hidden powers of the anecdote. Among other things, the anecdote serves here to "drastically foreshorten" historical time, so that "the distant past is made so intensely present that it lays claim to the material world here and now" (Greenblatt 2000c: 139). To evoke what Greenblatt (1980b: 13) might call "a piece of history," the reader is urged to conjure up

> the image of More sitting at the table of the great in a peculiar mood of ambition, ironic amusement, curiosity, and revulsion.

Needless to say, attempts to imagine More's various moods heighten the reader's sense of historical distance rather than identification, yet precisely at this point Greenblatt (ibid.) evokes an homology between the reader and More which is intended to bridge this very distance:

> It is *as if* he were watching the enactment of a fiction, and he is equally struck by *the unreality of the whole performance and by its immense power to impose itself on the world*. . . . No sooner is one fantasy laid to rest than another pops up to be grappled with in turn and defeated, until the whole world, the great body of man's longings, anxieties, and goals, *shimmers like a mirage, compelling, tenacious, and utterly unreal*. (Emphases added)

The counteracting of historical distance through mise-en-scène mediated through recollection, which is at the same time an act of aesthetic estrangement, activates in the reader a crucial tension or oscillation between the two. It is precisely here that the reader shifts from the mode of silent observer into that of active participant, ultimately "referring" to and "making real" a textual description of human experience in the world. We are invited to experience this shift on the same two levels: in history, "as if" we were More, and in the process of reading, as a "writerly" reader, within the overall context of the reconstructed historical reality. This complex use of a literary device par excellence is enhanced here by being "made real" after

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initially being "made up," thus becoming historicized as well as literary. At the same time, precisely because Greenblatt has his own professional and disciplinary interests in mind, he seems intent on impressing upon us that only as competent readers of literary texts can we effectively "cross boundaries of existing constructions of reality and history" and relocate ourselves in history on its own terms, and yet still on our own, by enhancing our own roles in the historical "reality" presented before us.

In this example, we note how making visible the artifactuality of anecdotal reconstruction is what makes it possible for certain bits of experience to be held in our "full analytical attention" in ways that are "unusually intense, nuanced, and sustained" (Greenblatt 2000a: 26) or "more resistant to simple appropriation and hence more nearly autonomous" (ibid.: 24). It is in this sense that the New Historicism best exemplifies how the literary work, the anthropological excerpt, and the historical text (all forms of archival writing) may be compellingly conjoined, so that the literary and the nonliterary come to be "each other's thick description" (ibid.: 31). Traditional boundaries of "fact" and "fiction," the "literary" and the "documentary," are displaced, without relinquishing their commitment to factual re-creation.

In the process, New Historicist writing significantly enacts its transformation into a form of exegesis which conducts itself as bits of "experience artfully shaped" (Greenblatt 1980b: 6). Able to maintain a hold on "real" bits of the world, to compress its "uncanny vividness" (Greenblatt 2000a: 30), it recovers

> a confident conviction of reality, without giving up the power of literature to sidestep or evade the quotidian and without giving up a minimally sophisticated understanding that any text depends on the absence of the bodies and voices that it represents. (Ibid.: 31)

The question of "realism" in New Historicist writing pertains not to the uncorrupted materiality of evidence nor to ways of describing the empirically factual but rather to the textual traces which "poetic" practitioners at times flaunt and at others try to conceal. As discerned by Elaine Scarry, it is precisely the labor entailed in trying to "make invisible the traces of . . . having been created in the first place" that bring the "made-up" close to the "made real" (Scarry 1987: 311–14 and 1994: 214–24).

We now come to a second type of New Historicist anecdote, far more storylike. In a transposed version of well-known source material familiar to readers from elsewhere, Greenblatt (1981: 40) begins by telling us that

> in Italy in 1583 the Inquisition arrested a Friulian miller named Menocchio who had been denounced for heresy. In the long Interrogations that followed, Menoc-

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> chio proved to be oddly willing, even eager, to expound his beliefs which came, he said with an untimely measure of pride, entirely from his own head. After a great deal of thought and some reading—for the miller, surprisingly enough, was literate—he had come to the conclusion, he told the Inquisitors, that the entire cosmos had originated in the manner of a giant cheese that had coagulated out of chaos; and as cheeses spontaneously generate worms, so this newly formed world generated beings, the purest of whom were God and the angels.

Manifesting maximum connectivity among its distinctly storylike sequences, displaying a beginning, a middle, and an ending (artificial, for our purposes here), this anecdote is packed with authorial evaluations and interventions, as against a minimal number of anecdotal details or facts, all mentioned in the opening sentence. Retold in the past, rather than the present tense, like the previous anecdote concerning More, it does not evoke the distant past quite so intensely present—it purposefully presents itself as a tale told many times over, a version of Menocchio's case. In keeping with the view that some of the ideas attributed to Menocchio derive from an oral tradition since they "cannot be traced to any particular book" (Ginzburg 1980: xxii), Greenblatt has chosen a mode of retelling that simulates the oral storytelling, in written form, of a fairy tale. Greenblatt draws on Carlo Ginzburg's acclaimed *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980), without, however, referring to it, except in a footnote.

By generating a sense of "anecdotal authority," by producing an "anecdotal inflection," and by appropriating existing narrative forms and conventions, "poetic" New Historicists succeed in reassembling various kinds of anecdotal components into their own versions of stories that "might be told" (Hunt 1991: 103). These comprise versions of *virtual* history. New Historicist texts suggest certain possibilities of historical reconstruction within a plurality of coexisting possibilities. Moreover, even where anecdotes may well be "fictional" in the sense that we can never really prove that the historical figures, events, and situations they represent definitely existed and took place in the ways suggested, producers and readers of New Historicist texts seem to have contracted to regard them "as though" they did. After all, as Carlo Ginzburg (1991: 84) reminds us, fictional events and even false documents may provide us with extremely relevant information about societies, so that, paradoxically, perhaps, "the analysis of social representations cannot disregard the principle of reality."

5. Personalizing Anecdotal Evidence

Greenblatt deploys the anecdote's "opening" (see Fineman 1989) into teleological narration by systematically destabilizing it, bringing the contingent

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and the personal into the Renaissance field of play and into his own critical enterprise. In his personalized and autobiographical introduction to *Learning to Curse* (1990), he already claims to be sketching the trajectory of late-twentieth-century literary studies in America, yet he "interrupts" the narrative flow of this "more general tendency" with episodes of his personal history as a scholar at Cambridge and Berkeley and with stories about his father's narrative impulse that served to generate his own (ibid.: 1–9).

On a different level entirely, and to different ends, Greenblatt also frequently manufactures "critical stories" or "real-life" tales that privilege his authorial self. Reflecting both his "desire to play with boundaries" and his "will to tell stories, critical stories or stories told as a form of criticism" (ibid.: 5), Greenblatt's critical stories often exhibit a high degree of self-consciousness. This is manifested in what Bruss calls "auto-commentary" (frequently in the form of autobiographical anecdotes) and "meta-fictions" that expose the constructedness of their textuality. Greenblatt confers upon himself "authorial privileges" that rank him a cut above his nonpoetic contemporaries as a more "writerly" literary historian, even as they run the risk of minimizing his commitment to methodological and scientific responsibility. For his historical accounts may frequently strike the experienced reader as arbitrary, contrived, even simplistic. For instance, he seems to overextend the idea of "implicated subjectivity," so that at times it becomes too reductive to enhance our putative understanding of the empirical world.

Inserting his own narrative "self" or critical persona into the picture, deploying the self-ironic stance of the "participant analyst," Greenblatt (1980a: 74) often locates himself

> on the brink of a Borges-like narrative that is forever constituting itself out of the materials of the present instant, a narrative in which the storyteller is forever swallowed up in the story.

Greenblatt indeterminately oscillates between narratives, interpretations, hence ontological levels, acknowledging the ambiguity of his own position within the auto-anecdotal mode. Deviating from historical documentation and evidence while distancing himself from history as such and from his role as literary critic/scholar, Greenblatt undertakes the role of the ever-omniscient narrator who can at all times relocate himself wherever he so desires, both within his own work and outside it. A striking use of the mode of personal reminiscence or "critical stories" together with the "Trajectory" of the New Historicist practice appears in *Learning to Curse* (Greenblatt 1990: 4). There Greenblatt presents several autobiographical "real-life" tales as fragmented, anecdotal narratives in loose episodic form. He also merges conventions of social realism with heightened patterns of lit-

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erariness and punctuates critical prose with personalized "story-histories" or anecdotes. He thus generates a range of "critical stories" with narrative devices typically found in tightly organized fiction, such as nineteenth-century romances (contes). The devices include various forms of mise en abyme (such as stories within stories, the mirroring of other art forms, and doubling/doppelgänger), ultimately opening up an apparently endless network of equivalences and/or repetitions.

In the series of personalized narratives that "introduce" this collection of essays, Greenblatt seems actively to resist what David Hull (1979) calls the unavoidable "presentism" of history. That is to say, he recollects those episodic representations of his past as though he were still enclosed within that past, neutralizing his present-day privileged viewpoint. At the same time, Greenblatt's own represented "voice" from the past is otherwise in constant tension with his current viewpoint, which seeks to "describe an intellectual trajectory," even as it claims not to "tell a unified story" (Greenblatt 1990: 1). If an intellectual trajectory is conventionally communicated in "objective" terms, "from the outside," as it were, Greenblatt's personal digressions clearly vary from traditional scholarly writing that is typically unfocalized.

Ideally, a historian is expected to be located somewhere in between, not outside of, specific times and spaces (Carrard 1992: 105). But Greenblatt demonstrates the privileged autonomy assumed by the historian who writes in retrospect. His perspective (for instance, on Menocchio's story) is frequently grounded in knowledge that could not have been available to those who lived through and witnessed the period in question. However, historiographically speaking, there are always bound to be different versions of "what happened between the end of the story and the time of writing." This raises the question of how the multiple viewpoints and voices in a given historiography can best be represented.

Greenblatt (1988a: 1) also clearly takes his historiographical practice, his father, and his "family and group identifications" quite seriously, as part of the living "industry of the dead" (an allusion to his desire "to speak with the dead"). This also newly suggests that the incorporation of personal anecdotal evidence in the New Historicist mode of "literary" history has serious theoretical implications. As Hayden White (1999: 6) generalizes,

> historical discourse is not to be likened to a picture that permits us to see more clearly an object that would otherwise remain vague and imprecisely apprehended. Nor is it a representation of an explanatory procedure intended finally to provide a definitive answer of "what really happened" in some given domain of the past . . . is less a matching of an image or a model with some extrinsic reality than a making of a verbal image, a discursive "thing" that interferes with

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> our perception of its putative referent even while fixing our attention on and illuminating it.

That is, the ubiquitous presence of anecdotal evidence in New Historicist texts marks a difference. Although anecdotes still putatively bear the same function(s) of "historical evidence" ascribed to them in the late nineteenth century—as both representative units and units of analysis in historical discourse—they also keep announcing that "historical discourse is systematically intra- as well as extrareferential" and cannot be analyzed through logical concepts alone (ibid.: 7). In other words, the textual materiality of the anecdote and its potential relations to a variety of historical contexts serve to remind that we must always discriminate between the practices entailed in historical inquiry and those through which these are transposed into written forms of historical discourse.

A case in point is Greenblatt's latest study, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), a learned attempt, among other things, to understand, through *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's appropriation of purgatory in the play, how this

> middle space of the realm of the dead was conceived in English texts of the later Middle Ages and then attacked by English Protestants of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Ibid.: 3)

For our purposes, the full-length study itself is less important than the prologue. In it, Greenblatt (ibid.: 5) convincingly describes, through an anecdotal account of his father's curious obsession with death, his own refusal to bracket "his own origins," intellectual, disciplinary, genealogical, and familial/tribal, and his efforts "to transform them, most often silently and implicitly, into the love he brings to [his] work." Thus, he informs us that his own undertaking of the Jewish mourner's kaddish (which may or may not have originated at the same time as Christianity formalized the practice of praying for the dead in order to alleviate their sufferings in purgatory and which he scarcely knew how to pray) is the personal starting point for his exploration of purgatory. We will never really know whether there is any "truth" to this claim. But given what we do know about random motivations for scholarly enterprises, let alone literary ones, the link between his father's death and the full-length study is made to sound plausible, and Greenblatt skillfully deploys personal anecdotal evidence in the service of a Greenblattian "literary" history and historical "realism."

A similar mechanism is displayed in another recent "metacritical" essay, "The Touch of the Real" (Greenblatt 2000a), published more than twenty years after the institutionalization of New Historicist writing and its conspicuous yet unarticulated recourse to the anecdote and modes of anecdotal evidence. In this case, Greenblatt straightforwardly, and hence quite

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uncharacteristically, names two seminal sources whose writing has shaped what he now openly identifies as "the new historicist anecdote" (ibid.: 35): Clifford Geertz and Erich Auerbach. As noted earlier, his allusion to Geertzian analytic and interpretive modes is both well known and well documented. However, his overt reference to Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1953 [1946]) is new and, not unsurprisingly, presented as self-evident and uncontrived, "given" rather than "constructed," as it were, for present-day readers. Auerbach's authority as a "learned literary historian" (Greenblatt 2000a: 37) is rendered unquestionable, suggesting, by analogy, that Greenblatt's is equally so: intertwining the quasi-magical representational powers he would confer on himself with repeated references to Auerbach's critical authority and creative, generative power, his *genius literarius*. Thus, we hear that the latter's paradoxically "characteristic opening gambit" (ibid.: 35), frequently manifested as an "increasingly arbitrary" (ibid.: 38) use of the anecdote, in fact prefigured the deployment of anecdotal fragments in New Historicist writing. "The new historicist anecdote," he tells us, "is an Auerbachian device" (ibid.: 35).

Whether it genuinely is or not, however, noteworthy here is Greenblatt's use of White's "figure-fulfillment" model to establish the origin of the device. By linking two historical events that may well be disconnected, he reconstructs his own and other New Historicist uses of the anecdote *as if* they indeed descended from Auerbach's. No less significant here is the way this "fact" is both "made up" and "made real" by divesting it, in true Greenblattian style, of all traces of its making. For by changing his own posterior relationship to earlier events, namely, Auerbach's uses of the anecdote, through their assimilation to his own past, Greenblatt assumes heightened narratorial or authorial responsibility and enhances his own agency as a highly competent "literary" historian.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we might argue that, more than Fineman and Montrose or, for that matter, any other New Historicist, Greenblatt problematizes the anecdote as factual historical proof, even as he broadens the scope of its uses as a mode of figurative and narrative representation. I have tried to show here that, although anecdotal materials are generally regarded as unmediated, already substantiated, historically authorized documentary evidence from the perspective of those interested in reviving the "category of the aesthetic" and discerning poetic patterns in historiographical discourse, this is clearly far from being the case. It would appear, rather, that anecdotal materials and forms have been borrowed by practitioners of New

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Historicism as a means of generating new historiographical tools or perhaps even of suggesting new historiographical rules. In this regard, I have tried to clarify that Greenblatt's use of historical and anecdotal evidence displays several modes of authorial intervention, all of which rely, more or less directly, on the way historians and their audiences frequently still seem to ascribe the same function(s) to historical evidence as their predecessors did in the late nineteenth century.

What is at stake here, then, is the nature of the "reality" with which New Historicists appear to be concerned and their acknowledgment of the different claims the literary and the nonliterary make upon the actual. Hayden White (1978: 121) has pointed out that "historians are concerned with events that are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable" and that can be ascribed to "specific time-space locations," whereas writers of literature (poets, novelists, playwrights) "are concerned with both these kind of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones." In this essay I have tried to show that New Historicists combine these two categories to extend their inquiry to events that are in principle conceivable or possible even as they are frequently constructed and nonfactual. Hence, their writings examine "units of social action small enough to hold within the fairly narrow boundaries of full analytical attention" (Greenblatt 2000a: 26), accounts of events that can be accorded relative time-space locations within a range of possible, or even plausible, options, although they may not have taken place precisely where and when described. Remodeling historical reality "as it might have been," reviving the ways history is experienced and concretely reproduced by contemporary readers of literary history, the textual reproduction of anecdotal evidence enables the New Historicist mode of "literary" history to sustain its links (discoursal and institutional) to literary artifacts, literary scholarship, and conventional historical discourse. Moreover, it is precisely this "imaginary" conceivability which operates to restore explanatory force to New Historicist versions of reality by "expanding the conception of historical reality and meaning," extending "the levels of reality beyond all of our commonsense attempts to describe it in one-dimensional or essentialist language" (Kramer 1989: 127).

Finally, and no less significantly, by frequently interjecting into his historical accounts anecdotes from his personal history, Greenblatt illustrates that testimony by a "witness" is no less "subjective" than it is "objective" and in so doing reinforces the authority of the subjective point of view that in literature typically determines the credibility of narrators and/or characters. In this way, Greenblatt revives some of "the wonder of literature," demonstrating that the primacy of historical evidence over narrative is by no means conclusive. For historical evidence and "truth" alone cannot gen-

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erate empathy, nor can they enable readers to experience events as though they were their own, and isn't this after all where the most valuable contribution of literature "really" lies?

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