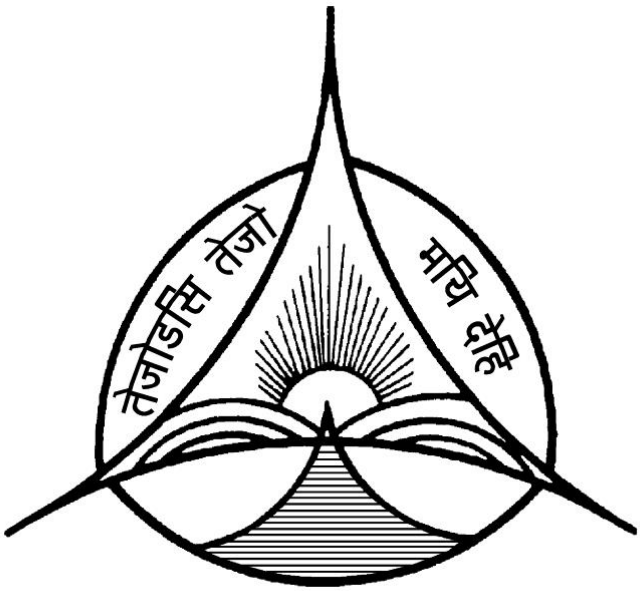
THE JMC REVIEW

An Interdisciplinary Social Science Journal of Criticism, Practice and Theory



Volume 2

2018

Renaissance New Historicism: Unacknowledged Debts and Unusual Blindspots

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I.

Before discussing new historicism, it might help to look briefly at some of the antecedents of this movement. Historicism is a historical and scholarly movement that stresses the need for a historical perspective in the study of civilisation. It rejects the stability of medieval Christianity that the Enlightenment secularises as cultural absolutes. It argues that all ideas and ideals are subject to change. Contingent, historically defined values replace Englightenment absolutes. History is not an integrated system; it does not offer general laws for study; its manifestations are varied and various. The 'infinite variety of particular historical forms immersed in the passage of time', as Hans Meyerhoff puts it, is what the historicist chooses to observe.[1] There is an attempt to understand the past in its difference from the present and not to evaluate it by the standards of the present. Friedrich Meinecke argues for the centrality of the individual, but for the individual no longer seen from a fixed naturalistic perspective, and for the rejection of generalising absolutes that seek to erase difference. In Italy, Benedetto Croce used the term *istorismo* in his *Estetica* (1902) to denote a historical rather than a rationalistic approach to art. In *History—Its Theory and Practice,* he argued that 'all history is contemporary history', influenced by the values and concerns of the present, and that history 'is principally an act of thought'.[2] The tolerant and somewhat idealistic view of historicism was unfortunately narrowed down to a nationalistic view of history as events and facts in 19th century Germany. Nietzsche was one of the philosophers who reacted strongly to this, as I shall discuss later in this essay. Historicism was for the most part optimistic about humanity despite rejecting the Enlightenment notion of progress. However, what is known as 'the crisis of historicism' came about in the 20th century as a result of the two world wars that dealt a severe blow to German nationalism. Following this, a radical scepticism about the possibility of objective historical knowledge became widespread along with notions of the absurdity of history. However, historicists like Ernst Troeltsch still argued that all was not lost. A

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critical selection of certain values and ideas could still present a cultural synthesis of Western civilisation that would be meaningful to the present.[3] Later, the Frankfurt School rejected, like Marx, the notion of human nature as being fixed, and said that norms of history must be extricated from a study of human practice rather than arbitrarily imposed on it. This of course deeply influenced Foucault, as I shall discuss later.

II.

After this very broad overview of historicism, I should like to discuss in greater detail some of the crucial figures associated with it or reacting to it. The earliest formulations of historicist ideas came from Giambattista Vico in his *New Science* (1725). The study of nature and the study of history require different tools, he argues, because humans make their own history. History is not subject to the laws of nature in that sense. Vico also wants to evolve a method that interprets the past without being judgemental and in the idiom of the present. One of his greatest innovations is to stress the importance of the imagination in an age that valued reason and scientific method that eschewed emotion and passion. According to him, it is through poetic metaphor and allegory that we can understand the origins of civilisation, and these tropes stress the need for difference, different ways of being human, civilised (and Vico includes the Egyptians, the Chinese and the American Indians as examples of cultural difference under the common rubric of humanity), while the age in which he lived, the Enlightenment, wanted to sacrifice variety at the altar of the general truth (non-Europeans were frequently dismissed as monstrous, heathen, savage). According to Vico, rather than dismiss talk of Jove or Hercules as so much fable or nonsense, it is more useful to regard them as ways in which earlier civilisations tried to engage with natural elements as vast and mystifying as the sky (hence Virgil's *Iovis omnia plena*), thunder and lightning. Similarly, in the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, Ariadne represents seafaring life, the labyrinth being the Aegean Sea. The Minotaur represents the pirates who carry off Athenians in ships or a foreigner who comes to Crete, indicating the existence of early immigration. When Mars is injured by Minerva, it is an indication of the plebeian defeat at the hands of the patricians. As Isaiah Berlin puts it, 'No myth is safe from Vico's zeal: every legend is so much grist for his socio-economic mill (1976: 54). The historian and the scientist must have the sensitivity to translate the myths of earlier ages into the contemporary idiom—demythologising in Vico's hands, therefore, is not an enfeebling process but an energising one; it is a sensitive reinterpretation of the past and a rephrasing of it within the

language and concerns of the present. Vico writes, 'Whenever men are ignorant of natural causes of things and are unable to explain them even by means of similar things, they ascribe their own nature to them…' (Vico 1948: 171). When wonder first makes an opening in our mind, curiosity, that inherent property of man, daughter of ignorance but mother of knowledge, produces this habit: that whenever [man] observes some extraordinary effect in nature, such as a comet…or midday star, he immediately wonders what this thing might mean or signify' (ibid.: 172). In explaining what he calls the earliest and most 'sublime' metaphor, he says, 'the world and the whole of nature is a vast intelligent body, which speaks in real words and with such extraordinary sounds, intimates to men those things which, with further worship, it wishes them to understand'(Vico ibid.: Section I). Explaining the relation of myth to history in the ancient world Vico writes, 'Men naturally interpret anything doubtful or obscure…in accordance with their own natures and with the passions and customs to which they have given rise. He continues, 'when we wish to draw forth spiritual things from our understanding we require the assistance of the imagination to enable us to express them, and, like painters, to create human images for them (ibid.: 222). However, since early civilisations could not 'make use of the understanding, the theological poets, by means of a more sublime but quite contrary activity…gave sense and passion to [inanimate] bodies and to bodies as vast as the sky, the earth and the sea' (ibid.). With the passage of time, these 'vast fantasies' dwindled and 'metonymy [then] cast an appearance of learning over our ignorance of these hitherto buried origins of human beings', and Jove becomes so small that he can be carried aloft by an eagle (ibid.). As Berlin puts it, metaphor and simile are not 'deliberate artifices' for Vico—they are 'natural ways' of giving voice to a different vision of life. Metaphor thus, for Vico, precedes literal expression rather than the other way around (Berlin 1976: 45–4).

However, Vico was not widely known outside Italy until he was translated by Michelet into French in 1827. Johann Gottfried Herder's *Also a Philosophy of History* (1774) was much better known. Herder agreed that humanity was one but argued that it could only be comprehended in the variety of cultures in which history finds expression. Science, art, religion and philosophy were thus not absolutes (the Western world being the norm); rather, there were sciences, arts, religions and philosophies. All cultures, European and non-European, are worthy of study, as are supposedly primitive and supposedly civilised societies. In fact, a study of the former may be even more useful because they are closer to the original roots, the earliest manifestations of the human spirit. Rather than mechanical tools, what is required in the study of history is empathy.

Nietzsche, the original enfant terrible of Western metaphysics, in his essay, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1956) continues Vico's critique of the scientific and rational claims of the Enlightenment. The latter work deals with the questions of good and evil, and how hypocrisy, sanctimoniousness and meanness often operate in the determining of the former and the condemning of the latter, particularly if institutionalised religion has a say in the matter. Thus self-appointed guardians of society, men of mediocrity and arrogance, determine that persons of genius are evil or have to be somehow cleansed and expurgated, abbreviated like a large work of fiction, in order to be accepted into the realm of the good. In the essay on history, Nietzsche first talks of the need for a combination of '*the unhistorical and the historical…in equal measure of the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture*' (1997: 62). God is dead. Rather than labouring under the illusion of the world as we know it being a vale of error, a kind of flawed dress rehearsal for the life to come, Nietzsche says that the historical and the unhistorical, the rational and the instinctive, truth and illusion are necessary to make life liveable (reminiscent of Vico pursuing historical 'fact' through metaphor). What one must do is embrace life in all its mortal variety and relocate truth and value in it, rather than in a world or an existence outside of it. Traditional philosophy, religion, morality were only personae to disguise the will to power in civilisation. It is the critic's task to unmask this will to power in the work of those who sanctimoniously or otherwise deny its existence or disguise their true motives even from themselves—and this is true of institutions and cultural machinery as well as individuals.

An overriding sense of the past can cripple the individual to the extent that he/she is unable to act; the past can very easily become a burden. The past should be at the service of the present and not vice versa. Nietzsche then divides history into three kinds: monumental, antiquarian and critical. The first views history as a series of mountain peaks, a succession of great triumphs, rather than realistically as an uneven up-and-down movement. The 'past…suffers harm' because 'whole segments of it are forgotten, despised' (1997: 71), or the universalising principle falsifies the past and makes 'what is dissimilar look similar' (ibid.: 70). Rather than dealing with 'absolute veracity', monumental history deals with 'approximations and generalities' (ibid.). The past becomes 'distorted, beautified' (ibid.). (This is a return to Aristotle's distinction between universal and particular, between poetry sand history, but with a twist.) And what is the impulse behind monumental history? It is the 'masquerade costume in which their hatred of the great and powerful

of their own age is disguised as satiated admiration for the great and powerful of past ages' (ibid.: 72). Let the dead bury the living is monumental history's credo.

Antiquarian history comes from a sense of veneration for the past and a desire to preserve it even if it means stifling and crippling the present. This kind of history, with its emphasis on origins, doesn't engender life, it merely preserves it. Nietzsche refuses to let the dead bury the living. The critical historian is the only one who is not afraid to judge and condemn the past. He/she feels that the past should be in the service of the present. He/she needs to temper the excesses of the first two by his/her sense of history as an enabling, engendering force and not as a disabling one. He/she is the one who 'want(s) to serve history only to the extent that history serves life' (1997: 59), whereas the antiquarian values 'the study history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate' (ibid.). It is the 'architect of the future' rather than the blind worshipper of the past who understands that 'when the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle' (ibid.: 94). In this outspoken attack on what Nietzsche calls the bogus culture of the Germany of his time, a sham culture which he feels needs only a hundred right minds to correct, he also discusses the myth of the historian's objectivity. This so-called objectivity is vanity—the historian actually feels that he/she is equipped to pronounce judgement of the past, which Nietzsche denounces as a fallacy; 'As judge, you must stand higher than he who is to be judged; whereas all you are is subsequent to him. The guests who come last to table have to be content with the last places: and do you want the first?' (ibid.: 95). Objectivity could also be coldness—the historian is completely indifferent to the past and presents this indifference and lack of discrimination as neutrality. Then there are those 'naïve historians' who believe that the 'assessment of the opinions and deeds of the past according to the everyday standards of the present moment' is what objectivity is all about. 'Adapt' the past to 'contemporary triviality' and you are an objective historian (ibid.: 90). (Later in this essay I shall examine how the new historicists turn this around and make a virtue of it.) The Hegelian certainty that history would be a science should also be eroded according to Nietzsche, as should the tendency to impose a final judgement on the past. To this absolutism disguised as a reaching towards historical justice, a concept which Nietzsche abhorred, he presents his notion or method of 'perspectivism': there are no immaculate perceptions just as there are no possibilities of an all-inclusive perspective (this is as impossible as seeing an object from every possible vantage point simultaneously). The curtain must never fall on history: the door to interpretation must remain forever ajar.

With Nietzsche we have one of the strongest critiques of traditional and institutionalised Western metaphysics. Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault's teacher, carries on this iconoclastic strain in his *Essays on Ideology* (1969–70), where he demonstrates the ubiquitous force of ideology in maintaining the status quo, in perpetrating submission. It is in the unmasking of ideology that Nietzsche's will to power and the way it worked was revealed. Ideology, claims Althusser, is not a real but an imaginary relationship between individuals and the real conditions of their existence. It came about as a necessary appendage and tool of the will to power among priests and despots who had to disguise their absolutism with the help of ideological traps like the Divine Right of Kings or the sacramental powers of the clergy. The priests, according to Althusser, 'forged the beautiful lies so that, in the belief that they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the priests and despots' (1971: 163). Since ideology is an imaginary relationship, its trappings must perforce be material: 'It always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices' (ibid.: 166). It operates through seemingly innocuous social and religious rituals like funerals, school days, mass, political rallies, etc. And with the continuation of ideology, ideas gradually dwindle, and practices, rituals and other ideological apparatuses take their place.

Michel Foucault, Althusser's most famous student, was influenced by the theories of both his teacher and Nietzsche. All three share an interest in repression and liberation, and an interest in the exposure of the network of repressive tools adopted by the state and social and political institutions to curb human freedom. While Althusser moves from practice to theory, Foucault believes that theory must perforce lead to a working out of its material ramifications: 'the material operations of power' and 'the techniques and tactics of domination' (*Power/Knowledge,* in Rabinow 1984). Foucault mentions in an interview conducted by Fontana and Pasquino published in *Power/Knowledge*, as well as *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow, that while the Marxists had posed the problem of power in terms of state apparatuses, it was he who worked out the minute, net-like workings of power in institutions like the prison and the clinic in his books *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), *The Order of Things* (1971), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (volume I 1976, volumes II and III 1984). As a result, 'the concrete nature of power became visible' and institutions like the clinic and the prison entered 'the field of political analysis' (Rabinow 1984: 58). Foucault has problems with the notion of 'ideology' because it seems to him to be set up in opposition to something, and that opposition he feels is probably truth (ibid.: 60). Rather than positing a trans-historical or even

ahistorical notion of truth, Foucault is more interested in 'seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false,' 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (ibid.: 60, 74). This is not to say that he claims that Althusser and other Marxist theorists are as nostalgic about notions of truth as the humanists, but that they are less interested than he in working out how certain kinds of truth are fabricated through social institutions in different ages in history. Also, rather than the terms 'science' and ideology', Foucault would prefer to analyse philosophy and history in terms of 'truth' and 'power' (ibid.: 74). And he feels it is important to keep in mind that if power were merely a 'prohibition', it would not be so central. The power of power stems from its ability to 'induce(s) pleasure, form(s) knowledge, produce(s) discourse' (ibid.: 61). The 17th and 18th centuries gave birth to a 'new "economy" of power', in other words, 'procedures which allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and "individualised" throughout the entire social body' (ibid.). History, he feels, may be fruitfully studied as 'a form of war rather than that of language'—again, power rather than meaning is important. This is not to say that history is meaningless, but the meaning is one of conflict. Foucault resists the Hegelian dialectic that tries to calm the violence and bloodiness of history into a cool formula (ibid.: 56–57).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault speaks of the crucial place history begins to occupy from the 19th century onwards. He makes it clear that by history he means not events and dates, but 'the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise'. History from the nineteenth century onwards is analogous to the role of Order in the classical world ('not the visible harmony of things… but the particular space of their being'). History 'defines the birthplace of the empirical, that from which, prior to all established chronology, it derives its own being' (1970: 219). It is thus 'the most erudite, the most aware, the most conscious, and possibly the most cluttered area of our memory; but it is equally the depths from which all beings emerge into their precarious, glittering existence' (ibid.: 219). There is a self-reflexive quality to history: 'it will necessarily lead back to the question of knowing what it means for thought to have a history' (ibid.: 219–20). There is a constant struggle between history and universalism, and Foucault sees this struggle as originating in the 19th century. The more 'history attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the effort it makes to

attain, beyond the historical relativity of its origins and its choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part' (ibid.: 371).

The references to the violence, and bloodiness, the cluttered and self-reflexive nature of history appear in Foucault's memorable essay, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', which became the introductory chapter of his *Archaeology of Knowledge*. The essay is a detailed annotation and elaboration of certain key concepts in Nietzsche's works, particularly *The Genealogy of Morals; Untimely Meditations; Human, All Too Human; The Gay Science;* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. However, Foucault also makes clear the connections between Nietzsche's thought and his own. Foucault singles out for discussion two terms frequently used by Nietzsche, *Ursprung* or *Herkunft*, meaning the origin of duty or guilty conscience. Foucault prefers *Herkunft* to *Ursprung* because it is more exact and it includes a consideration of race (note Nietzsche's *Genealogy* I, 5 where he speaks of Celts and Aryans in connection with *Herkunft*) without being 'a category of resemblance' (ibid.: 145). History has to do with descent rather than origins. The search for origins is actually a metaphysical 'attempt to capture the exact essence of things' (ibid.: 142), whereas history knows that there is no 'timeless and essential secret' to uncover 'but the secret that they have no essence' (ibid.). History is tied up with the body, metaphysics with the soul. History deals with descent, metaphysics with origins. History believes in looking down, in lowly beginnings; metaphysics believes in lofty, god-like origins. History is material, metaphysics is ideal. Metaphysics believes in a grand design, the design of destiny being unfurled through history. History knows better: there is no grand design only haphazardness, randomness and rupture. History is a series of 'jolts…surprises…unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats' (ibid.: 144). History is like the body, heterogeneous, inscribed by the 'stigmata of past experience' (ibid.: 148). Towards the end of the essay, Foucault turns to *Untimely Meditations* and says that the *wirkliche historie*, or critical history, translated in this essay as effective history, does not assume, like monumental and antiquarian history, a 'suprahistorical perspective' or history as a 'completed development' or history's judgement based on 'apolyptic objectivity' (ibid.:152). It is without constants; it rejects the "consoling play of recognitions" (ibid,:154). Monumental and antiquarian history are dependent on metaphysics. The former believes in examining 'the noblest periods, the highest forms' (ibid.:155), in looking up rather than down. Effective or critical history prefers to focus on the nearby, has no fear of looking down at disease, dissolution and decadence, has more in common

with the doctor rather than the metaphysican (needs it more the physician than the divine, if one may rephrase Shakespeare). It revels in various perspectives, in 'dispersions and differences' ("Nietzsche" 156). Effective history is most certainly *not* the 'handmaiden of philosophy' as Plato and, to a certain extent, Aristotle, would have us believe. Foucault ends by commenting on Nietzsche's aversion to the so-called 'objectivity' of the historian. In *Genealogy* Nietzsche had written: '

I can think of nothing as nauseating as such as "objective" armchair, such a perfumed epicure of history, half priest, half satyr….I have no patience with mummies who try to mimic life, with worn-out, used-up people who swathe themselves in wisdom so as to appear "objective"'.

The objective historians are the 'lustful eunuchs' who prefer universals to particulars and believe the past is greater than the present. Qualitative judgements must be excluded—'nothing must escape it and, more importantly, nothing must be excluded" ("Nietzsche" 157).

Finally, I want to discuss Foucault's concept of the event and of subjectivity as put forward in this essay, because these influence the new historicists acutely. Nietzsche had observed in *Genealogy* that events are not isolated monoliths, but linked in a chain that is not necessarily causal but constantly changing its configurations and being reinterpreted:

> …everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions; that all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming, and that, in turn, all outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the earlier meaning and purpose are necessarily either obscured or lost….Thus the whole history of a thing, an organ, a custom, becomes a continuous chain of reinterpretations and rearrangements, which need not be causally connected among themselves, which may simply follow one another….While forms are fluid their meaning is even more so (*Genealogy* 209–10).

In a memorable rephrasing of this, Foucault avers that history is not a treaty, a reign or a battle (isolated events), but a 'reversal of the relationship of forces' ("Nietzsche" 154–55). His focus is on the moments of reversal—something that he stresses in *The Order of Things* as well—what was

the moment of crisis when similitude gave way to difference? This is something that lies at the basis of the new historicists' view of history as a series of negotiations (I shall discuss this later in the essay). Another important observation by Foucault is about identity. Just as events are not fixed, neither is identity. It is a 'complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis' (ibid.: 161). The will to knowledge is 'malicious', claims Foucault; it 'dissolves the unity of the subject and releases elements of itself devoted to subversion and destruction'(ibid.: 163). This is the inspiration behind Stephen Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment in the construction of the 16th century individual put forward in the Preface to *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* which I quote a little later in the essay.

III.

After having briefly surveyed some of the important antecedents of new historicism, I shall now analyse the movement proper. Ever since the appearance of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* in 1980, Renaissance studies have been invigorated, former comfortable assumptions challenged, and a quiet storm of protest let loose by a new genre of criticism called the new historicism. The term was first used by Greenblatt in the introduction to a collection of Renaissance essays in *Genre*. Strangely, he does not mention that the term has certain obvious parallels with Foucault's term *wirkliche Historie,* or effective historian, the historian who talks about disunity and fragmentation, disruption and reversal, rather than the unity favoured by traditional historians which is often the unity of the historian's own limited vision, even bias, imposed on past events ("Nietzsche" 154ff.) Towards the end of this essay, discussed in detail above, Foucault even uses the term 'new historian'. Foucault's influence on the new historicists is ubiquitous—perhaps it can be traced back to Foucault's lectures in Berkeley in October 1980 as Greenblatt mentions by way of passing ('Towards a Poetics of Culture). I shall discuss Greenblatt's unacknowledged debt to Foucault in greater detail later in the essay.[4] The members of this movement, Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Adrian Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, Stephen Orgel, Steven Mullaney, Jean Howard, Leonard Tennenhouse, Frank Whigham, Don Wayne and others, originally worked mainly at the universities of California while their English cousins, the cultural materialists (the term is borrowed from Raymond Williams), Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Catherine Belsey, Paul Brown, John Drakakis, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Simon Shepherd, Thomas Healey, Kate McLuskie and others hail mainly from the

universities of Sussex, Cardiff and Essex. Their academic affiliations are important—new historicism and cultural materialism springs not from the privileged, relatively conservative Ivy League east coast universities, but from the iconoclastic west, not from Oxford or Cambridge, but Cardiff and Sussex. It is also significant that while Greenblatt completed his most influential work from Berkeley, he now holds a chair at Harvard, just as Jean Howard, a self-styled 'farmer's daughter', now teaches at Columbia. Despite the more explicitly leftist sympathies of the latter, with their Althusserian emphasis on subversion rather than containment (Belsey's observation), these two groups have much in common. In Montrose's fashionably chiastic formulation, these critics are interested in the 'historicity of texts' and 'the textuality of history' (1986: 305). This somewhat enigmatic phrase implies that these critics rethink history, the text, and the interaction between the two. History is no longer merely a static background, to be cursorily studied through the casual bandying of a few cliches in the first few lectures—history is not something 'timeless', to borrow Jonathan Goldberg's evocative epithet (1982: 515), but is seen as a living, mysterious, yet not undecipherable tapestry, unrecoverable in its entirety, yet speaking through many relics, of which the literary text is one. And this literary text is no longer seen as the mysterious and privileged expression of human agency, but a changeable changeling that everywhere shows traces of the forces that enable and constrain artistic production. The text can no longer be studied in isolation: 'Social actions are themselves embedded in systems of public signification, always grasped, even by their makers, in acts of interpretation', while the words that constitute the works of 'literature are by their very nature the manifest assurance of a similar embeddedness' (Goldberg 1980: 5). 'Pure, unfettered subjectivity' is a myth; the 'human subject' is seen as 'the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society' (ibid.: 256). These lines of course echo Geertz's famous declaration that humans are as much a cultural artefact as the Cathedral at Chartres, and that culture, far from being acquired or added on to a human being's inherent traits was 'centrally ingredient, in the production of that animal itself".

> By submitting himself to governance by symbolically mediated programmes for producing artifacts, organising social life, or expressing emotions, man determined, if unwittingly, the culminating stages of his own biological destiny. Quite literally, though quite inadvertently, he created himself (1973: 48).

Not surprisingly, the new historicists' analyses of Renaissance texts abound in Geertz's famous 'thick description', succinctly defined by Geertz's friend Lawrence Stone as 'a close and well-

informed look at seemingly trivial acts, events, symbols, gestures, patterns of speech or behaviour' which then 'can be made to reveal whole systems of thought…and…problems of kinship, lineage or community structures' (Beier, Cannadine and Rosenheim 1989: 590).

The older generation of Renaissance critics like Dover Wilson and G. Wilson Knight were guided by E.M.W. Tillyard's enormously influential *Elizabethan World Picture* (1944) and J.E. Neale's encomiastic biography of Queen Elizabeth I. The title page of Tillyard's book begins with 'order', goes on to discuss 'sin', 'the chain of being', 'the links in the chain'(from angels to metals)', 'correspondences', and ends with the 'cosmic dance', where the Elizabethan universe executes a stately minuet, in which everything moves in harmony and yet holds its proper place. However, as we know, it was the unruly and energetic galliard that was Queen Bess's favourite dance. And the new historicists and cultural materialists view of history has a similarly upsetting effect. Marx, Foucault and Althusser as well as sociologists like Geertz and historians like Lawrence Stone help the cultural materialists and new historicists claim that Tillyard's world picture, far from being universally accepted, was actually the 'ideological legitimation of an existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability of that order' (Dollimore 1988: 5) as well as being a 'nostalgic commentary that misrecognises the dominant ideology of Tudor–Stuart society—the unreliable machinery of sociopolitical legitimation—as a stable, coherent, and collective Elizabethan world picture, a picture lucidly reproduced in the canonical literary works of the age' Montrose 1977: 6). The ghost of Althusser looms large over this declaration. In his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser claimed that with the disappearance of ideas came the appearance of 'practices, rituals, ideological apparatus', rituals as simple and apparently harmless as a school meeting or a mass in a small church. The need for ideology is felt not by the masses, but by those in power:

> Priests or Despots... 'forged' the beautiful lies so that, in the belief that they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the priests and Despots....There is therefore a cause for the imaginary transposition of the real conditions of existence: that cause is the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the 'people' on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations (Althusser 1971: 163).

In the hands of these critics, history becomes not a set of static and easily recoverable and easily interpretable 'facts' and 'events' and 'people.', but histories: dynamic, fluid, vulnerable, often disjointed processes of interpretation which are inevitably coloured by the person who recounts them. These (hi)stories include accounts not only of the monarch and the court, but also those of marginal figures—poor sheep farmers, witches, alchemists, travellers to the New World. Again, the influence of Foucault's 'effective historian' who looks downwards rather than upwards in awe and devotion to the 'noblest periods, the highest forms...the purest individualities' is apparent ("Nietzsche" 155). The past is never frozen in a hierarchical, inaccessible, monological distance (to borrow Bakhtin's epithet); it constantly interacts not only with the contemporary text, but also with the late 20th century critic who studies it. Once again, an echo of Foucault's observation that while the traditional historian emphasises the difference between the present and the valourised past, the 'effective historian' collapses the distance that separated the past from the present (ibid.: 156). Texts are born of what Greenblatt terms a process of 'negotiation' with the social and ideological powers that both engender and constrain them.

Just as the apparent centres of power—the monarch and the court—are not privileged over the marginal figures by the new historicists, so the literary text is not viewed as superior to other texts such as journals, medical treatises, voyagers' diaries, accounts of royal progresses, letters of out-of-favour courtiers begging to be restored to their former positions of influence, maps, emblems and portraits. Thus, Montrose discusses the portraits of Queen Elizabeth along with Philip Sidney's letters and *The Lady of May*; Greenblatt and Brown pay equal attention to accounts of New World voyagers and *The Tempest*; Goldberg studies Renaissance handwriting and *Hamlet.*

Another crucial difference between the new historicism and older schools of criticism is that the former makes no attempt to present interpretation as either impartial or definitive. Earlier critics were no less subjective: but they disguised this under a veneer of neutrality. The new historicists blandly state that non-subjective, non-judgemental criticism is a myth. Just as the Renaissance subject and the Renaissance text were results of social and political forces, so do the new historicists see their own work as being no less conditioned. In his essay "Resonance and Wonder', Greenblatt, usually unwilling to frame anything approaching a credo, unequivocally

states that the new historicism belies all the old definitions of historicism': '1. The belief that processes are at work in history that man can do little to alter. 2. The theory that the historian must avoid all value judgements in his study of past periods. 3. Veneration of the past or of tradition' (1990: 4).

The echo from Foucault is quite evident, although not footnoted. Foucault, like Nietzsche, is dead against the tendency of the traditional historian 'effac(ing) his proper individuality', 'blurr(ing) his own perspective and replac(ing) it with the fiction of a universal geometry' ("Nietzsche" 158). But what is strange is that not only does Greenblatt not mention Foucault, but also in this essay he is careful to choose politically correct, indigenous rather than French, materialist rather than theoretical, practices, as his influences. His own criticism, Greenblatt claims, was influenced by America of the 1960s and the Vietnam war. 'Writing that was not engaged, that withheld judgements, that failed to connect the present with the past seemed worthless'. He even goes so far as to associate neutrality with indifference: ' a neutral or indifferent relation to the present seemed impossible' ("Resonance and Wonder" 76).

Montrose, too, is explicit about the relation between the critic and interpretation:

> Integral to this new project of historical criticism is a realisation and acknowledgement that the critic's own text is as fully implicated in such an interplay as are the texts under study: a recognition of the agency of criticism in constructing and delimiting its object of study, and of the historical positioning of the critic vis-a-vis that object (1986: 305).

Once the subjectivity is not sought to be hidden or denied, the old notion of stable, recoverable, eternally coherent and convincing significance is also rejected. The text as much as history is a mass of contradictory detail which lives only if it is not subdued or thwarted by the critic's rage for order. Greenblatt amusingly recapitulates the training he received at Yale:

> One of the most oppressive qualities of my own literary training was its relentlessly celebratory character. Every decision made by a great artist could be shown to be a brilliant one; works that had seemed flawed and uneven to an earlier generation of critics bent on displaying discriminations in taste were

> now revealed to be organic masterpieces (1990: 78).

Greenblatt is referring to the hegemony of the new critics (Brooks, Warren, Empson, Ransome, Tate) over American criticism in the 1960s and 70s. Critics then were devoting most of their attention to lyrics and presenting 'well-wrought' arguments, impermeable and blind to dissonance, for the admission of any loose ends in the work of art was paramount to an admission of defeat on the part of the critic. However, one can also sense an echo here of Foucault's remarks on the downward gaze of the effective historian, the effective historian's need to carnivalise and parody rather than worship ("Nietzsche" 160ff.).

As formalism gave way under pressure from postmodernism, its extreme dissociation of text from context resulted, 20-odd years later, in a swing of the pendulum to the restoration of the interaction between text and context. Structuralism helped rob artistic discourse of its elite status, while deconstruction destroyed the notion of any immanent, mysterious meaning independent of language. Language became of crucial importance because it was the element in which all interpretive transactions took place; meaning no longer had any autonomous existence, as Greenblatt puts it, 'self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively in language' (1980: 9). Although, as Litvak points out, there is a crucial difference between deconstruction and new historicism in that the latter postpones deconstruction's disclosure of 'an essentially transhistoricial or antihistorical undecidability' with the relation of 'local narratives or (hi)stories' ('episodes' in Greenblatt's words) (Litvak 1988: 126.) Post-war culture studies encouraged interdisciplinary criticism, while the women's movement and the rising number of third world voices in what was earlier a predominantly white, male, upper class discourse made the intervention of race, class and gender issues unavoidable. The new historicists are very much a part of their postmodern age in these shared assumptions. In addition, the disempowered position of the academic, particularly the academic in the humanities, in Reagan's America and Thatcher's England, in a society dominated by missiles, MTV and money, probably drew attention, no less than Marxist theory, to the marginalised and the underprivileged in Renaissance.

The new historicims, like any fresh way of approaching a text, raises questions as much as it invigorates Renaissance studies. Marxist critics like Walter Cohen might criticise it for its choice of out-of-the way, even 'bizarre' material (the adjective is Cohen's own)—'dreams, popular or

aristocratic festivals, denunciations of witchcraft, sexual treatises, diaries and autobiographies, descriptions of clothing, reports on disease...' (1987: 33–34); although, as Greenblatt rightly observes, such items are legitimate objects of cultural study (1990: 78). Critics like Edward Pechter, cursorily dismissed as a 'liberal humanist' by Greenblatt (ibid.: 75), are worried by the new historicist reduction of all struggle in Elizabethan drama to power relations between the monarch and the 'Other'," usually a potentially subversive subject: 'anyone who, like me, is reluctant to accept the will to power as the defining human essence will probably have trouble with the critical procedures of the new historicists' (1987: 301). Pechter sees this as the new historicist's attempt to control the threat of the text's 'hostile' otherness (ibid.: 300). Historical context, he feels, is given the dominant position over the Renaissance text, and much of the affective power of the plays are lost: 'In a fifteen-page discussion of *King Lear*, Dollimore finds no room even to consider the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia... in Dollimore's consideration of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the last scene disappears or virtually so' (ibid.: 299). Greenblatt's rejoinder to this is that 'the very idea of a defining human essence is precisely what critics like me find vacuous and untenable, as I do Pechter's counter-claim that love rather than power makes the world go round' (1990: 75).

Greenblatt dismisses Pechter cruelly and a little too easily. One of the most troubling facets of the new historicism is its tendency to impose the master narrative of Foucaultian power relations on almost all texts, literary or otherwise. Ironically, Montrose criticises the trick of reading all texts as retelling the story of class struggle on the part of Marxist critics. Goldberg (1982: 515–21) (lengthily) makes the same criticism of Frederick Jameson. If the notion of the self is indeed so complex, then how does Greenblatt reduce it to a universal two-part process that works, according to him, equally well for Marlowe, Shakespeare, Spenser and More?

> Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed... . The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self' (1980: 9).

In an early discussion of Greenblatt and Montrose, before the movement even had a name, and perhaps even prior to his admission to this select group, Jonathan Goldberg reviewed *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and while he had fulsome praise for the sensitivity, power and imaginative sweep of the work, he objected to his colleague's 'imperialistic and totalistic urge' (1982: 532). Greenblatt's obsession with the 'overriding shape of power' makes his work, and here Goldberg uses Greenblatt's own words on Shakespeare's Prince Hal, an 'odd blend... of spaciousness and claustraphobia' (Goldberg 1982: 533).

James Holstun too draws attention to what he calls the new historicists 'premature totalisation' (1989: 198) and their 'synecdochic aesthetics' (ibid.: 194). By these he means that the new historicists are quick to draw generalisations about culture in its totality merely from the study of literary works. And in this, as in the choice of exclusively canonical works, he sees a resemblance between the new historicists and their supposed antithesis, Tillyard. Ironically, Holstun cites not Greenblatt but Goldberg's conflation of the dominant court culture of the Jacobean period with subordinate cultures. Since the 'dominant subculture always already anticipates all possible opposition and inscribes that opposition within itself, a cultural study may focus on the dominant alone' (Holstun 1089: 195). Not surprisingly, in Goldberg's portrayal of Jacobean London, 'absolutism is the only game in town' (ibid.: 197).

Also, while the focus of the cultural materialists is on the processes of history and ideology and their influence on texts, their American counterparts, while talking about this actually prefer to study the fashioning of the self—Montrose does this with relation to Sidney in his discussion of *The Lady of May*, Goldberg does it in *James I and the Politics of Literature*, Greenblatt does this in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning.* As Alan Liu observes, although the new historicists have renamed the Formalist 'motive' as 'power' and have proved that cultural homogeneity is a myth, their 'core question' still remains '*who* has Power' (Liu 1989: 732). Even cultural materialists like Alan Sinfield have critiqued, albeit subtly, the new historicist emphasis on the individual's contest with authority to Renaissance England: contest is not always 'a matter of individual, abstract, and totalized subversion—the brilliant Marlovian maverick who unaccountably sees through the masks of oppression and whose individual gesture will be all too easily contained—but of the continual exploitation of diverse opportunities for specific classes...' (Sinfield 1985: 265). Four years later, Holstun wonders why the new historicists ignore the marvellously oppositional discourse of the

pamphlet wars of the 1640s and 1650s, particularly Ranter literature. He feels one of the worst drawbacks of the new historicists is to focus on individual self-fashioning at the cost of 'popular collective self-fashioning' (1989: 192) that can and did 'mediate between free individuality and cultural totality' (ibid.: 195). In their study of the Renaissance individual, what often finds expression is a reflection of the 20th century new historicist critic: 'the new historicist interpreter is... a subject looking into the past for some other subject able to define what he himself, or she herself, is; but all the search shows in its uncanny historical mirror is the same subject he/she already knows: a simulacrum of the poststructuralist self insecure in its identity (Liu 1989: 733). This likeness also accounts for the strong resemblance between the writings of the new historicists. With their penchant for reducing history to an endless cycle of subversion and containment, for their tendency to study a 'paradigmatic moment- in-time in which the whole pattern of historical context may be gazed at in rapt stasis' (ibid.: 734), can any movement, any action be possible? Liu graphically compares new historicist subversion to insects chewing on the walls of a 'gigantic, too-quiet house' (ibid.: 734). Another worrisome factor is the new historicist's tendency, if not to silence, then at least overpower, the emotive power of the literary text under discussion with the tour de force of his/her own intellectual ingenuity. So, in 'The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and his Heirs', Greenblatt will begin with the absurd parallel between the power test the 19th century American Baptist minister, the Reverend Francis Wayland, inflicts on his 15-month infant in order to make him submit to his father's will (segregation and near-starvation for over three days), and the love test in *King Lear*. All the critic's energies are employed in eclipsing the Shakespearean text at the expense of proving a very tenuous and ultimately unconvincing parallel between the sadistic minister who believes his infant's ultimate submission is a sign of love freely offered (Greenblatt grotesquely applauds 'the resounding success of Wayland's test' [1990: 83] and calls his segregation and starvation of his infant a 'technique of disciplinary kindness designed to show the child that his misery is entirely self-inflicted' [ibid.: 91]) and Lear's 'withholding of love' from Cordelia. While the literary text remains largely in the dark—out of 18 pages the discussion of *King Lear* occupies less than six. While Pechter characterises these critics as Marxists and Goldberg boasts that it is the new historicist rather than critics like Frederick Jameson and historians like Christopher Hill 'who realise best the aims that Marxist criticism announces' (Goldberg 1982: 525), one cannot cease to be troubled by their choice of authors: the acknowledged kingpins of Renaissance literature—Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe. No female authors are ever discussed. There is no attempt to seek any alternative *literary* cannons: the

experimentation is limited to a discussion of non-literary material. Moreover, despite their avowed interest in the marginal, these critics form some of the most influential and powerful members of the American academy. They are definitely part of the elite of an admittedly marginalised community: the humanities academic community. As Alan Liu puts it in his perceptive and searing comparison between formalism and new historicism (he sees both as being embarrassed by the subordinate status of literary studies vis-a-vis the study of history; both are highly self-reflexive and are apt to launch into meditations on modernity or postmodernity; both substitute for the history of ideas 'the fantastic interdisciplinary nothingness of metaphor' in between text and context ([1989: 743[); 'to read the world, after all, is not an ideologically neutral act. It is to appropriate the world from the masses of the less articulate and literate. It is a statement of privilege' (ibid.: 755).

Another shortcoming of the movement which critics have surprisingly failed to comment on is the snapshot view of history these critics favour. Peculiar details are culled from Renaissance history and are presented as somehow giving a faithful picture of times past or of Renaissance society as a whole. The sad tale of Pocahontas swells out to become an emblem of the effects of colonisation ('The Thing of Darkness'); the Earl of Gowrie's bloodless corpse is emblematic of the Renaissance view of treason ('Lying Like Truth'); the Protestant divine Hugh Latimer's conversations with a pregnant woman sentenced to death says all there is to say about the interaction or negotiation between 'fictive representations' and social practice ('Material Law in the Land of Cockaigne').

Feminists can and do quarrel with the new historicists' indifference to attempt to create alternative canons. 'Non-feminist "new historicism"...has been widely criticised for its tendency to insist upon the totalizing power of hegemonic ideologies, ideologies implicitly informed by elite male values', complains Judith Lowder Newton, and unless the new historicists take into account the history of women's suffering and women's anxieties, their version of history she claims will not be much more than 'history as usual' (Veeser 1989: 166). The 25th issue of *English Literary Renaissance*, a journal which has published some of the most vital new historicist essays in the 1980s, is devoted to the current state of Renaissance scholarship. It appeared in 1995. On the one hand, articles such as A.C. Hamilton's 'The Renaissance of the Study of the English Renaissance' clearly bring out the impossibility of returning to the days of the old historicism with its inflexible condemnation

of the new historicists' cyclical view of history as 'presumptious, even dangerous' because it smacks of 'critical narcissism'. Even as 'critics investigate the past', laments Hamilton, 'they remain imprisoned within the tyranny of the present' (374-375). On the other hand, articles such as Kate McLuskie's 'Old Mouse-Eaten Records: The Anxiety of History', for all its expert citing of historical evidence, ultimately expresses the impossibility of doing historicist literary criticism unless one has spent at least 50 years in the archives sifting material. And at the end of it all, one is even further from definitive pronouncements because of the contrary and insufficient nature of the historical data. Articles such as Katherine Eisaman Maus' 'Renaissance Studies Today' (402-414) carries the new historicist passion for establishing the critic's own place in history to new heights by referring to the problems of "finding employment at a decent school within commuting range of a professional spouse" and the joys of tenure: flexible work-hours, intelligent conversation, a nice house and yard" (410-11). In these claims of one of the co-editors of the Norton Shakespeare, the new historicists seem to have travelled very far from their Marxist beginnings, if, in fact, those beginnings ever were Marxist, to a self-absorbed, self-indulgent and yes, bourgeois, view of the past and its links with the present.

In 2001, 21 years after the publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt wrote *Hamlet in Purgatory*. This work evinces some typical new historicist traits and some unusual departures from accepted method. True to new historicist practice, Greenblatt does not begin with the literary text. He begins with a personal anecdote, to which I shall return later, and non-fictional materials: illuminations in various Books of Hours owned by European and British nobility depicting scenes from Purgatory and paintings of Purgatory by Hans Holbein and Hieronymus Bosch, and three prose works, *The Gast of Gy*, Simon Fish's anonymous *A Supplication for the Beggars* (1529), and Sir Thomas More's reply to Fish, *The Supplication of Souls*, which appeared a few months after Fish's work. It is in the last two chapters that Greenblatt devotes close attention to the ghost in Shakespeare. One troubling fact is that although he mentions these prose works and illuminations in the last two chapters of the book, the mention is by way of passing and no clear connection is made between them and Shakespeare's implicit references to Purgatory. According to Greenblatt, there are four perspectives through which to view the ghost: (a) as a figure of false surmise; (b) as a figure of 'history's nightmare'); (c) as a figure of deep psychic disturbance); and (d) as a figure of theatre. The ghosts in the tragedies express what Greenblatt poetically calls 'the longing to grasp the poetic or tragic structure of history' (2001: 173). The ghost is 'an element in

the moral structure of the universe, a universe that is not…merely neutral, indifferent or empty' (ibid.: 179). The ghost, in blessing the survivors, acts as an agent that restores 'health and wholeness' to a 'damaged community' (ibid.: 180). When Greenblatt uses phrases like 'the moral structure of the universe', one is disconcerted by the resemblance to critics like E.M.W. Tillyard or G. Wilson Knight, from whom the new historicists and cultural materialists have taken such pains to disassociate themselves. There is another surprise later on. The close link between ghosts and the theatre, both encouraging a willing suspension of disbelief, is illustrated by a look at *The Winter's Tale*; here again Greenblatt does the unexpected—a formalist close reading. This was, in the past, considered anathema to the new historicists, interested as they were in the sweeping movements of history, the textuality of history, rather than the mere textuality of the text. Greenblatt analyses the passage where, shortly before his gruesome death, Antigonus recounts the visit of Hermione's ghost in graphic detail while simultaneously expressing his scepticism. The audience is tempted to believe him by the news of Hermione's death—something of which Antigonus was unaware—and by the apparition's accurate prophecy that Antigonus will never more see his wife. The magic of the ghost Greenblatt compares to the magic of Hermione's 'statue' coming to life, and it is the space of the theatre that allows such illicit things to happen credibly.

The last chapter of *Hamlet in Purgatory* finally gets around to talking about what the title of the book promises: *Hamlet* (although in the Prologue Greenblatt had stated, somewhat misleadingly, that the discussion of this play was dispersed throughout his book). The main question Greenblatt asks himself in this chapter is why, to all appearances, Protestant Hamlet (he says that the ghost must either be 'a spirit of health or goblin damned' [1.4.21], granting the existence of heaven and hell but no third possibility), is so susceptible to a Catholic ghost ('doomed *for a certain term*' as the ghost puts it [1.5.10, emphasis added]). Greenblatt doesn't really answer this question, pointing instead to the secret papers belonging to Shakespeare's father (discovered in a church) which begged for specifically Catholic rituals like chantries and prayers to be sung and chanted after his death in order to release his soul from Purgatory. This Greenblatt relates to the name of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, who died young, as two possible impulses behind the play. He writes how the play sets up contradictory points of view, a Protestant hero and a Catholic ghost, an innocent Gertrude and a lascivious and conspiratorial one, a mad Hamlet or a Hamlet feigning madness, without really wanting to resolve these conflicts. Shakespeare seems to be portraying in

his merging of Catholic and Protestant beliefs and practices how the 'rituals for managing grief', for alleviating anxiety on the part of the surviving kin and for the restoration of 'order' (again, Greenblatt seems to be using the vocabulary of those critics, namely Tillyard and his ilk, from whom he had disassociated himself in his earlier writings) have been polluted and disrupted.

Most readers of this book will observe that Stephen Greenblatt has, for want of a better word, mellowed. He is unusually generous with praise, Dante's *Purgatorio* is 'a supreme instance' of a literary masterpiece; More is a 'visionary author' and *Utopia* 'the century's greatest work of social criticism'; Donne's *Devotions on Emergent Occasions* is 'remarkable', while Shakespeare is presumably the Arabian bird that defies description. Greenblatt stays true to the new historicist practice of devoting equal if not more time to non-literary material (the illuminations, *Owayne Miles; St. Patrick's Purgatory; The Gast of Gy*; *The Supplication of Souls* and other works take up three chapters while Shakespeare takes up two), thereby denying the hierarchy prevalent in literary criticism before postmodernism of the literary text being the most supreme expression of human imagination. However, in the readings he does of scenes like the banquet in *Macbeth*, the scene in Gertrude's closet in *Hamlet,* or Antigonus' account of the visit of Hermia's ghost in *The Winter's Tale*, he comes close not to Geertz's 'thick description', the attention paid to seemingly unimportant gestures and symbols which then reveal whole systems of thought, but to formalist close textual readings: analysing the possible connotations of a word, tying utterance to character, or talking about the audience's possible reaction. References to a moral order guiding the universe (of which Greenblatt sees the ghosts as messengers) makes him sound strangely like the nemesis of the new historicists and cultural materialists: E.M.W. Tillyard. Old debts to Giambattista Vico and to Clifford Geertz are acknowledged if not paid, but Foucault remains conspicuous by his absence. This is no surprise: even in the books dominated by Foucault's notion of the omnipresence of power and history as a zigzag, arbitrary movement where the depths of disorder and rupture are as important as the heights of noble and heroic exploits (*Shakespearean Negotiations*, *Learning to Curse*, 'Resonance and Wonder'), his name rarely appeared. In this book, rather than the Greenblatt masterplot (borrowed from Foucault) of power and its subversion, we have the discourse of *powerlessness*: ghosts, spirits, spectres, the dregs of the marginalised and the underprivileged, barely able to speak themselves or even be seen. The book is uncharacteristic of Greenblatt in other ways as well. Edward Pechter (1987) had complained about these critics underplaying the emotive value of Shakespeare's plays; Greenblatt in 'Resonance and Wonder' had

rather cruelly said that it was no less true to say that power made the world go round than love did. However, in this book, from the description of the 'gast' of Gy's attempt to appeal to his widow's love, to More's earnestness in the cause of Purgatory, to Hamlet's dizzy anxiety upon seeing the ghost and his sense of all the ways of remembering a loved one being polluted forever by the living, Greenblatt excels in expressing in his usual impeccable prose the emotive tug of these texts. The book charmingly comes full circle—here we have again a look at Sir Thomas More, whose career Greenblatt so acutely analysed (1980) 23 years ago. The new historicist anecdote comes back as the resolute expression of personal biases and motivations for writing the book. Just as Greenblatt on that plane so many years ago, while writing *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* , could not say the words 'I am dying' to help a fellow passenger visiting his dying son, here he writes a whole book on the cult of the dead and on various ways of remembering for his dead father who asked for certain religious rituals to be conducted after his death for the well-being of his spirit—but not by his sons. Greenblatt conjectures that Shakespeare composed *Hamlet* with its collision between old and new religious practices, with its dead fathers imploring living sons, in memory of his dead father, John Shakespeare, who wanted the rituals of Roman Catholicism to be carried out after his death. We may conjecture that Greenblatt writes this book for his dead father as a very private act of penance.[5]

IV.

In the last section of this essay I wish to look at two particular examples of new historicist and cultural materialist criticism of Shakespeare that I find particularly worrying. As a postcolonialist reader, I cannot but be deeply disturbed by the new historicists' political non-committalness. These omissions appear all the more noticeable in those who profess to value history. Take two specific examples, one cultural materialist, the other new historicist: Paul Brown's essay (1985) and the first eponymous essay of Greenblatt's *Learning to Curse* (1990). These two readings of *The Tempest* and early colonialist discourse begin by sounding very different from the conservative discourse of critics like Frank Kermode (the editor of the 1954 Arden edition of *The Tempest*) and end up, sadly, by sounding not very different. Greenblatt writes on linguistic colonialism and Brown on the ambivalence of colonial discourse and its sites of subversion and disruption. But before I analyse the two essays, let me say a few things about *The Tempest*. In spite of E.E. Stoll's famous assertion about the absence of imperialistic or colonialist themes in *The Tempest*, echoed more recently by Meredith Ann Skura, that 'There is not a word in *The Tempest* about

America or Virginia, colonies or colonizing, Indians or tomahawks, maize, mocking-birds, or tobacco. Nothing but the Bermudas, once barely mentioned as faraway places, like Tokyo or Mandalay',[6] most recent critics conclude that it is impossible to cut the play off from the narrative of colonialism. While Kermode in his 1954 Arden edition of the play mentions some of the travel literature sources (William Strachey's 1610 'A True Reportory of the Wracke', Sylvester Jourdain's *A Discovery of the Bermudas* and *The True Declaration*), he prefers to keep them at a distance and talk instead of the play's themes of art versus nature. More recent editions like Orgel's 1987 Oxford edition, or Vaughan and Vaughan's 1999 Arden 3 edition, discuss at length the influence of travel narratives like Richard Eden's travel anthology of 1555 and 1577 (in which there is mention of the Patagonians of South America worshipping 'the great devil Setebos' as well as reports of cannibals and St. Elmo's fire), Fletcher's journal of Drake's 1577–1580 circumnavigation (which speaks of 'Settaboth' and of the New World inhabitants' addiction to wine), Strachey's account, available in manuscript form and not published till 1625 (of miraculous recovery after a tempest, St. Elmo's fire, the names Gonzalo and Ferdinand as well as certain words and phrases which Shakespeare could have picked up while perusing the manuscript) and Montaigne's essay 'Of the Canniballes', written in 1578–1580 and published in John Florio's English translation in 1603 (Vaughan and Vaughan [2001]: Appendix 1: 304-5). Vaughan and Vaughan even go on to draw a parallel between Caliban and accounts of the 'wilde Irish' in Barnaby Rich's *A New Description of Ireland,* probably published the same year that Shakespeare finished writing *The Tempest*. While it is true that at the time of the play's composition Englishmen were travelling to the New World with hopes of trade rather than imperialistic conquest, it is also true that Portuguese, Spanish, French and Dutch imperialistic ventures were well established for over a century and that frequent reports of these reached English shores: for example Antonio Pigafetta's account of Magellan's 1519–1522 circumnavigation of the globe. And despite Stoll's and Skura's arguments, it is difficult to ignore the many instances in the play which bear the stamp of the voyages of discovery and the reports of exotic denizens of the New World. Caliban's initial interaction with Prospero mimics the hospitality and generosity with which European travellers were frequently greeted in the New World. When Drake reaches the 'islands of Molucca' on his 1577 circumnavigation, the king allows the sailors 'to have what things [they]…needed...and within a short time after came in his own person to [the]…ship, to bring her into a better and safer road than she was at present' (Hakluyt 1982: 183). : 183). On Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe's first voyage (1584) to what was later called Virginia, each day the king's brother sent the sailors 'a brace or two of fat bucks,

coneys, hares, fish the best in the world. He sent us divers kinds of fruits, melons, walnuts, cucumbers, gourds, pease and divers roots, and fruits very excellent good, and of their country corn, which is very white, fair and well tasted', while the women 'plucked off our stockings and washed them, some washed our feet in warm water' (ibid. 273–74). The narrator concludes, 'We found the people most gentle, loving and faithful, void of all guile and treason, and such as live after the manner of the golden age' (ibid. 274).

As the voyage literature of the 16th and 17th centuries demonstrates, occasionally the Europeans describe the indigenous inhabitants of the New World as cannibals and devil worshippers having no culture, sometimes even no language of their own. Thomas Cavendish casually mentions that he has seen a 'great store of savages…they were men eaters, and fed altogether upon raw flesh, and other filthy food' (ibid,:279) in his 1586–1588 voyage around the world. Caliban's name carries an echo of the word 'canniba' and is probably an anagram of that and 'carib'—a Carib Indian, but far from eating human flesh his diet seems to be commendably organic and does not desecrate or despoil the birds and animals of the island.[7] He promises Stephano and Trinculo that he will get crabs and pig-nuts, jay's eggs, marmosets and 'scamels from the rock' (*The Tempest* II ii 166ff). This is a marked contrast to the travel narratives where Drake's men speak casually of killing 200 or 300 seal 'in the space of an hour' or massacring on an island in the Strait of Magellan 3,000 fowl, the size of geese, to feed 164 men (1972: 175). Montaigne's comment on barbarism and cannibalism is worth quoting here: 'there is nothing…that is either barbarous or savage, unlesse men call that barbarisme, which is not common to them' (Vaughan and Vaughan 303). Thus 'barbarous' or 'cannibal' are words that we would today (hopefully) substitute with 'different.' Caliban's appearance has been presented as half-dog (John Mortimer's 1775 engraving), half-fish, half-animal, a monster with scales and serpents' heads surrounding his face (Hogarth's 1736 painting and Fuseli's 1789 painting,) a creature with long fangs, long nails, long hair and pointed ears (Herbert Beerbohm Tree in his 1904 production), all as a result of the remarks made about his appearance being taken literally. Rather than having long hair, the indigenous inhabitants are often described by the travellers as wearing animal skins and fur cloaks. Amadas and Barlow on their voyage to Virginia in 1584 describe the king's sister-in-law as wearing 'a long cloak of leather, with the fur side next to her body' (ibid,: 272). Martin Frobisher says of the inhabitants of the 'west and northwest regions' that they 'apparel themselves in the skins of such beasts as they kill….They dress their skins very soft and supple wit the hair on. In

cold weather or winter they wear the fur side inward: and in summer outward' (ibid.: 193). Shakespeare obviously recalled such details when he made Caliban wear a gaberdine cloak (*The Tempest*: 2.2.37). Also, far from being a monster, Caliban distinguishes between himself, Trinculo and Stephano on the one hand and apes on the other. When he sees Trinculo and Stephano being distracted by the fancy garments they have found, he fears that they will be caught and be 'turned to barnacles, or to apes/ With foreheads villainous low' (*The Tempest* : 4.1.248-9).

When we read accounts of the conquest of the New World by European invaders, we make another interesting discovery. The Europeans had a trick of projecting many of their own less likeable qualities onto the invaded peoples. A Dominican friar, Father Antonia Montesino, asks the Columbus-led Spanish in Hispaniola, 'By what right do you wage such detestable wars on these people who lived mildly and peacefully in their own lands, where you have consumed infinite numbers of them with unheard-of murders and desolations?' (Keen 1972: 88). The phrase 'consumed infinite numbers of them' prompts one to ask the question, who is the cannibal? Montaigne replies, 'I think there is more barbarisme in eating men alive, than to feede upon them being dead; to mangle by tortures and torments a body full of lively sense, to roast him in peeces, to make dogges and swine to gnawe and teare him…then to roast and teare him after he is dead' (2001: 308). Significantly, it is Prospero who inflicts such physical tortures on Caliban and not the other way around. The first exchange that he has with Caliban in the play details the 'cramps', 'side-stitches' and stinging pinches that will bruise him 'as thick as honeycomb' (1.2.325ff). Caliban complains of being 'all wound with adders, who with cloven tongues/Do hiss me into madness' (*The Tempest:* 2.2.13-14). Prospero organises spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds to frighten Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano. Not content with this he gives instructions to his goblins to 'grind their joiunts/With dry convulsions…more pinch-spotted make them/Than pard or cat o'mountain' (4.1.258ff). Like the enslaved indigenous inhabitants of the New World, Caliban has to do all the hard physical labour for Prospero ('he makes our fire,/Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices/That profit us', as Prospero tells Miranda [1.2. 312ff]), but he is entitled to none of the benefits. Cavendish writes of Indians on the west side of Santa Maria island who are enslaved by the Spanish, take care of all their farming and animal husbandry and yet 'dare not eat a hen or an hog themselves' (1972: 281).

Friar Montesino's sermon also describes an incident where the Spanish, after being greeted by

generous gifts of provisions by the Indians, respond in the following manner: 'the devil entered into the bodies of the Christians, and in my presence they put to the sword, without any motive or cause whatsoever, more than 3000 persons, men, women and children, who were seated before us' (Keen 1972: 90). In *The Tempest*, after revealing himself to Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio, and after hearing Gonzalo describe the indigenous inhabitants of the island as 'gentle, kind', indeed gentler and kinder than themselves, Prospero mutters that some among the Milanese present are 'worse than devils' (*The Tempest*: 3.3.35). Again, the detail about the devil entering the Christians is significant: the Europeans frequently described the Indians as 'devil worshippers'. In *The Tempest*, Prospero, too, says Caliban was the offspring of Sycorax, a witch, and the devil. While the earlier critics took this literally, recent critics suggest that these appellations are expressive of Prospero's indignation rather than fact. And witches and devil worshippers were, in any case, common markers for unruly women and people who worshipped non-Christian deities, particularly if these people suffer from any physical deformity. Thus, Martin Frobisher in his second voyage made to 'the west and northwest regions' in 1577 mentions capturing an old woman who metamorphoses in the space of a few lines from 'wom(a)n' to 'wretch" to 'witch': 'Two women not being so apt to escape as the men were, the one for her age, and the other being encumbered with a young child, we took. The old wretch, whom divers of our sailors supposed to be either a devil, or a witch, had her buskins plucked off, to see if she were cloven footed, and for her ugly hue and deformity we let her go…' (Hakluyt 192).[8] What is even more significant is that after describing that the younger woman and her child are carried off by the sailors and later killed, Frobisher writes that they named the place 'Bloody Point' because of the indigenous inhabitants' 'fierceness and cruelty' (Hakluyt 192).

Another common misapprehension about the New World was about the 'cultural nakedness' of its inhabitants, as Greenblatt puts it. Prospero assumes that Miranda and he have taught Caliban all he knows, whereas Caliban's account of their initial meetings clearly indicates an exchange of knowledge (*The Tempest:* 1.2.332ff.). Furthermore, Caliban's instructions to Prospero are essential for survival in a strange and hostile environment, while the skills the Europeans impart, knowledge of their language being foremost, are not.[9] Once again, it is the invader's ignorance of the new environment and of the new people that is ascribed to original inhabitants. When Columbus wrote in his diary, 'I, please our Lord, will carry off six of [the Indians] at my departure to your Highnesses, that they may learn to speak', he is conveying not the Indians' muteness, but

his own inability to understand their language as Greenblatt insightfully observes (1990: 25). Peter Martyr's *Decades* (1555) echoes the same sentiment. Using the tabula rasa theory, he compares the Indians' minds to 'a smooth, bare table unpainted, or a white paper unwritten, upon which you may at the first paint to write what you list' ("This Thing of Darkness" 56). Miranda says exactly the same thing when she chides Caliban with having no thoughts or concepts, leave alone words, before being taught by the Europeans:

> …when thou didst not, Savage
> Know thy own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known (*The Tempest*: 1.2.350ff).

Miranda conveniently forgets that it is her ignorance and not Caliban's inarticulateness that makes his language sound strange to her ears. And along with teaching him language, she claims to have taught him comprehension and self-knowledge as well. As a matter of fact, through this learning process, Caliban has merely become more intelligible to her and her father; there is no evidence to suggest that his powers of self-apprehension have been enhanced.

Although Caliban learns their language and Prospero and Miranda fail in learning his (not making an attempt is equivalent to failure), he is in no way regarded as Prospero and Miranda's equal, testified, above all, by Prospero's rage at Caliban's sexual desire for Miranda. Brown claims that since Caliban does not contest the charge of rape, the charge stands. Yet, accounts of travellers to the New World abound with information about how marriage and monogamy were not observed among the indigenous inhabitants. Montaigne tells us in his essay that 'Their men have many wives, and by how much more they are reputed valiant, so much the greater is their number….the same jealosie our wives have to keepe us from the love and affection of other women, the same have theirs to procure it. Being more carefull for their husbands honour and content, then of any thing else…' (Vaughan and Vaughan 312). Thomas Cavendish in his 1586–1588 voyage around the world comes to Java where he finds that the king, Raja Bolamboam, 'hath a hundred wives' and 'his son hath fifty' (Hakluyt 294). Caliban has not seen any female other than his mother Sycorax and Miranda. Is it not then entirely natural for him to desire Miranda sexually? Why should he consider such an act to be taboo? Also, is it not possible that such an advance because of

its inappropriateness in the eyes of the Milanese be construed as rape? The naturalness of Caliban's response is underlined by the fact that Prospero expects Ferdinand to act in exactly the same way, hence the stern injunctions not to 'break' Miranda's 'virgin-knot' before 'All sanctimonious ceremonies may/ \With full and holy rite be ministered' (*The Tempest:* 4.1.15ff). And one would have thought that Ferdinand would be better able to control himself because of being exposed to many women back home in Milan. So the charge of rape is really more a reflection of the extent to which the Milanese regard Caliban as alien and savage rather than a heinous and unnatural act in itself.

Caliban realises that he has been duped into a false sense of kinship, even equality, after learning his tormentors language, and this is why he burst out,

> You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The rad plague rid you
> For learning me your language! (*The Tempest*: 1.2.354ff).

The alien language has only created a sense of inferiority and intensified his loneliness. Caliban's words expose the lie that the words of the 16th-century humanist, Father Bartolome de Las Casas, author of *The History of Indes*, and widely reputed to this day as a model of liberality and Christian tolerance (Greenblatt, usually unwilling to praise, describes him as 'great' [1990:19]), disguise. Las Casas tried to discourage the carnage unleashed upon the Indians with an appeal to humanity's 'common essence': 'all mankind is one, and all men are alike in what concerns their creation and all natural things, and no one is born enlightened'. However, Las Casas betrays himself a little later when he admits that 'the savage peoples of the earth may be compared to uncultivated soil that readily brings forth weeds and useless thorns, but has within itself such natural virtue that by labour and cultivation it may be made to yield...sound fruits' (Keen 1972: 92). All mankind is one, but in spite of that the Spanish, with their history of wanton brutality, are still the ones to cultivate the 'rough soil' of the Indians and improve their 'savage' nature through their own illustrious example.

Brown and Greenblatt both eschew the blind laudation of Prospero so popular with the Kermodian school, and Greenblatt acutely rejects the myth of a common human essence so beloved of Las

Casas: 'All men the play seems to suggest, are *not* alike; strip away the adornments of culture and you will *not* reach a single human essence' (Greenblatt 1990: 26; emphasis original). However, in an effort to prove his point, Greenblatt views Caliban in much the same way as the European characters do in *The Tempest*: 'ugly, rude, savage', 'deformed, lecherous, evil-smelling, idle, treacherous, naive, drunken, rebellious, violent and devil- worshipping' (ibid.: 25, 26). Brown, while perspicaciously observing the many times Prospero's 'forging of colonialist narrative' is exposed as a 'forgery' (1985: 67), repeatedly refers to Caliban as a 'savage' and a 'monster', and unquestioningly accepts Prospero and Miranda's premise that Caliban was a tabula rasa before he met them: 'Paradoxically, it is the eloquent power of civility which allows him [Caliban] to know his OWN meaning, offering him a site of resistance even as civility's coercive capacities finally reduce him to silence' (1985: 61-62). This implies that Caliban had no touch of recognisable civility before he met the Milanese, and that his desire for freedom is a gift of European 'civility', both completely unacceptable assumptions if one examines Caliban's account of the early days of his relationship with Prospero and Miranda:

> When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me,and made much of me'
> ...and then I lov'd thee,
> And show'd thee all the qualities o'th isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile... (*The Tempest:* 1.2.332ff).

The climax comes when Brown interprets Caliban's famous lines to Stephano and Trinculo—

> In dreaming
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
> I cried to dream again… (The Tempest: 3.2.133ff).

—as a 'utopian moment' in 'the colonialist project's investment in the process of euphemisation of what are really powerful relations' where 'powerlessness represents *a desire for powerlessness'* (1985: 66; emphasis original). It is rather difficult for me to interpret Caliban's urgent desire for the restoration of his lost autonomy as a 'desire for powerlessness'. Caliban's lines capture

perfectly the colonialist subject's sense of being cheated by 'gifts' like the invader's language: not only do such gifts create an illusion of kinship and equality between invader and invadee, they are the primary tools through which the indigenous inhabitant is colonised by the European invader.

And the echoes of colonialist discourse, distant but unmistakeable, come from a quarter where we would least expect them. Discussing Caliban's words to Stephano and Trinculo about the resources of the island ('I prithee, let me bring these where crabs grow and sometimes I'll will get thee/Young scamels from the rock' [*The Tempest*: 2.2.167 ff.]) Greenblatt comments:

> The rich irreducible concreteness of the verse compels us to acknowledge the independence and integrity of Caliban's construction of reality. We do not sentimentalise this construction—indeed the play insists that we judge it and that we prefer another—but we cannot make it vanish into silence. Caliban's world has what we may call *opacity*, and the perfect emblem of that opacity is the fact that we do not to this day know the meaning of the word 'scamel' (Greenblatt 1990: 31; emphasis original).

The masterful 'we' presupposes an entirely homogeneous audience. In addressing the academic community of the 1990s, Greenblatt forgets that this is no longer so, not in terms of race, gender, class, language, shared history or political affiliation. In fact, he would have done well to recall his own words about the absence of a 'single human essence' earlier in the chapter. Such memory lapses appear strange in a critic who values historicity and who claims that his discourse is very much a product of his age. Moreover, are we to believe that someone who has taken great pains to unravel many obscurities of the Renaissance can be defeated by a single word, 'scamel'? In fact, Steven Orgel in his Oxford edition of *The Tempest* admits that the word has 'provoked endless debate' but nevertheless conjectures that it could mean a sort of rock-fish, or be emended to a sea-mell, or that Shakespeare is 'adapting' or 'misunderstanding' a foreign word from travel literature, e.g. *fort scameux* (very scaly), or from the French *squamelle* (having small scales) (Orgel 151n.). Vaughan and Vaughan add that there may be a reference to what Thomas Hariot in Hakluyt's volume calls 'Seekaunk, a kinde of crusty shel-fish', or the Irish *scallachan* (Vaughan and Vaughan 217n.). What is the point of admitting that Caliban's discourse is different if that difference then becomes an excuse not to probe further and to dismiss his words as 'opaque'?

Also, someone who believes in the contingent nature of interpretations now declares that the play *insists* on a single definitive interpretation. Strange indeed. Greenblatt's eloquent and powerful prose now arouses reactions very different from resonance and wonder.

In fact, 'scamel', with its not impossibly indeterminateness, is a perfect marker for the hybridity of Caliban and his language. Vaughan and Vaughan have shown how the figure borrows from the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, the African slaves and the 'wilde Irish', and cannot clearly be said to denote any particular race. Fittingly, Caliban's language too shows traces of these various strands. One is almost tempted to attribute to him the iconic status of the hybrid, if this did not run the risk of depleting and minimising his resonance. Homi K. Bhabha has this to say about the hybrid:

> Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid. It is such a partial and double force that is more than the mimetic but less than the symbolic, that disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic (Bhabha 1994: 111).

The memory of this hybrid presence disturbs Prospero in the middle of the wedding masque, makes the nymphs and reapers 'heavily vanish' (Barker and Hulme 1985), and makes him later own Caliban as both 'a thing of darkness' and his. It is hybridity that signals the moment of disruption and disquiet, that reveals the anxieties in a text that is not wholeheartedly either colonialist or anti-colonialist. The disowning of one's rightful heritage which comes with the gift of the coloniser's language that seems to promise riches but which results usually in impoverishment, denial and a sense of exile, both from what had earlier seemed familiar (the colonised subject's own culture) and to what he/she has now become accustomed (the coloniser's culture). However, what is intriguing is that the same should be replayed on the stage of criticism with the new historicists surprisingly adopting Prospero's role and the postcolonial critic Caliban's.[10]

When Greenblatt speaks of the 'opacity' of Caliban's use of the word 'scamel', he seems to be echoing what Bhabha calls 'the repeated hesitancy afflicting colonialist discourse when it

contemplates its discriminated subjects: the *inscrutability* of the Chinese, the *unspeakable* rites of the Indians, the *indescribable* habits of the Hottentots' (Bhabha 1994: 112). It is not that 'the voice of authority' is expressing its own inarticulateness: being at a loss for words has never been Greenblatt's defining virtue. Rather, what finds expression is the disturbing presence of hybridity which in turn questions 'the rules of recognition' that power has formulated (ibid.: 112). 1t is the mystification surrounding colonialist discourse that is ripped apart at moments like this.

There is no doubt that despite its many shortcomings, the new historicism movement has energised Renaissance studies and left an indelible impression on the progress of literary criticism. If this movement could overcome its theoretical reticence and examine its own viewpoint with a little more rigour and honesty, it would be welcome. Greenblatt says that his values 'are pervasive: in the textual and visual traces I choose to analyse, in the stories I choose to tell...in my syntax, adjectives, pronouns' (1990: 77), but he is inordinately sensitive to any discussion or analysis of these values, as his handling of Neely, Cohen, and Pechter's observations demonstrate. Yet, he is unwilling to undertake such a project himself. But with their conscious choice of a self-reflexive, non-neutral, self-involving, even self-proclaiming dialectic, is not 'the explicit articulation of one's values and methods', which Greenblatt fails to see as 'inherently necessary or virtuous' (ibid.), in fact, inescapable?

Notes

[1] See Meyerhoff (1959), quoted in Wiener (1973: 458). In the ensuing discussion of historicism, particularly its manifestation in 19th century Germany, I am indebted to Georg G. Iggers' account (1973: 456–64).
[2] Croce (1921), in Wiener (1973: 461).
[3] Troeltsch (1922, in Wiener 1973: 461).
[4] As John Brannigan points out, Foucault does a gradual disappearing act from Greenblatt's books—from a slight reference in the text to an endnote to a complete absence.
[5] For a full discussion of *Hamlet in Purgatory* see my review of the book in *Yearly Review*, (2003), 11: 157–64. This section of my essay is indebted to the review.
[6] Stoll (1927). Skura's 1989 essay is excerpted in Childs' *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*. Countering the new historicist identification of Caliban with the indigenous inhabitant of 16th century Virginia, Skura points out that Caliban lacks 'almost all the defining external traits in the many reports from the New World—no superhuman physique, no nakedness or animal skin…no decorative feathers, no arrows, no pipe, no tobacco, no body paint…no love of trinkets and trash' (Childs 1999: 80). Skura also points out how the presence of Sycorax and Ariel complicate attempts 'to cast Prospero and Caliban as actors in the typical colonial narrative' (of domination over a previously free indigenous inhabitant) since Sycorax, who comes from the Old World, could well be the first colonialist, imprisoning Ariel into a cloven pine, 12 years before Prospero set foot on the island. Skura also points out

the variety of discourses on the New World and how many English travellers appreciated the dignity and difference of the indigenous inhabitants of the lands they visited, while other travellers condemned them as heathens, savages and devil worshippers.

[7] Ralph Fitch in his 1583–1591 voyage to Goa and Siam says that some of the Indians he meets 'will kill nothing not so much as a louse: for they hold it a sin to kill anything. They eat no flesh, but live by roots and rice, and milk' (Hakluyt 256), referring possibly to the Jain community, although in his next sentence he makes a reference to the Hindu ritual of *sati*, making no distinction between the two groups.

[8] Ralph Fitch describes what he calls an Indian 'beggar' thus:

Here I saw one which was monster among the rest. He would have nothing upon him, his beard was very long, and with the hair of his head he covered his privities. The nails of some of his fingers were two inches long, for he would cut nothing from him, neither would he speak' (in Hakluyt 259). Although this man is described as a beggar, and obviously seen as contemptible, he is probably a mendicant or holy man, suggested by his nakedness, his silence, and by the fact that he is followed by a number of men. Note too how loosely the word 'monster' is used by Fitch.

[9] At the risk of sounding somewhat anachronistic I cannot resist mentioning the 1878 Forest Act introduced by the British in India which replaced *jhum*, or the hunting, gathering and shifting agriculture of the Indian tribals, for forests were seen as impediments to imperialistic progress. Ramachandra Guha writes that by 'exposing their subjects, to the seductions of the industrial economy and consumer society, the British ensured that the process of ecological change they had initiated would continue…after they left Indian shores' (Guha 1994: 22). A further result of this act was that the denizens of the forests, the tribals, those who eked an eco-friendly living from their natural habitat, were now allowed limited access to the forests and to forest produce. Inevitably, this made them turn to banditry, for part-time employment prospects were thin. The language used by the Inspector General of Forests expressed his complete alienation from the people whose interests he supposedly looked after: *jhum* agriculture, he wrote, is carried out 'by a set of savages in every sense of the word' and should not be tolerated (ibid.: 25).

[10] The Cuban writer Roberto Fernandez Retamar singles out Caliban as a symbol of what he calls 'our *mestizo* America': 'The most venerated word in Cuba—*mambi*—was disparagingly imposed on us by our enemies at the time of the war of independence, and we still have not totally deciphered its meaning. It seems to have an African root, and in the mouth of the Spanish colonists implied the idea that all *independentistas* were so many black slaves—emancipated by the very war of independence—who of course constituted the bulk of the liberation army. The *independentistas*, white and black, adopted with honour something that colonialism meant as an insult. This is the dialectic of Caliban' (1988: 8). Octave Mannoni, a French official in Madagascar in the early 20th century, in his *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (1948), identified the colonialist ruler with Prospero and with his desire to leave civilisation. Caliban, he thought, exemplified the colonised subject's tendency to 'dependence'. A typical colonialist suffers from a number of complexes which turn him into an insensitive ruler who is completely unaware of the 'awareness of the world of Others, a world in which Others have to be respected' (see Vaughan and Vaughan Appendix 2, pp.331-342). Needless to say, Mannoni was criticised by postcolonial thinkers for denying any initiative to the colonial subject.

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