

# **Limits and Beyond: Greenblatt, New Historicism and a Feminist Genealogy**

Chung-Hsiung Lai

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## **Abstract**

Though one of the most powerful disciplines of contemporary literary criticism, New Historicism has faced attacks from various quarters. Accordingly, using Greenblatt's works as examples, I am going to explore the theoretical problems of New Historicism in detail by dividing its development into two stages—the first stage is the “panoptical past: language, self and power” and the second is “go-betweenness: wonder and resonance.” The former is trapped a Foucauldian closure-structure of power relations with the politics of cultural despair, whereas the latter has tended to escape from this pessimistic trap with the strategy of “go-betweenness.” Facing up to these aspects, rather than presenting a “shopping list” of improvements required for New Historicism, I will explain how New Historicism should be reconciled with the mainstream postmodernism, which is more diverse, affirmative and ethico-political than the formalistic and pessimistic theory advocated by Greenblatt. I will then examine the possibility of a feminist new historicism to show how New Historicism can revitalize its critique, cross its limits and thus reach beyond its traditional domain.

**Keywords:** Greenblatt, New Historicism, language, self, power, wonder, resonance, feminism, genealogy.

## The Rise and Theoretical Quandaries of New Historicism

The critical practice of New Historicism is a mode of “literary” history whose “literariness” lies in bringing imaginative operations closer to the surface of nonliterary texts and briefly describes some of the practice’s leading literary features and strategies. (Laden 2004: 1)

Owing to the intricate and ambivalent relationship between text and context, there has been a long-running debate about the disciplinary boundary between history and fiction.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the history of literary theory, in a sense, can be viewed as a series of theoretical battles between textualism and contextualism, swaying like a pendulum, with momentary victories to one side or the other, reflecting the oscillation between the verbal-literary champions of textualism and socio-historical champions of contextualism. The dominant form of textualism—American New Criticism, Russian Formalism and French Structuralism—going roughly from the 1920s to the 1970s would seem complacent about the triumph of literature over history based on a sovereign indifference to facts. By rejecting the voice of history, which is seen as merely a series of documents recording a fixed series of objective facts, literary studies would seem to have banned the dialogue between literature and history.

Since the 1970s, however, historical and literary studies have no longer existed as the opposite sides of a pendulum, but more in a web-like crisscrossing network as contemporary theory has gradually obliterated the boundaries between text and context and between history and fiction. That is to say, history, in the postmodern era, has been regarded as a discourse constructed by a “literary imagination” and “power relations,” and in this sense it is ideological and subjective, always open to multiple inquiries and re-interpretation. Flourishing in the 80’s, New Historicism, mainly based on Foucault’s theories, offered just such a critique of history. It revamped basic concepts concerning literary production and asserted that “history cannot be divorced from textuality.” In Louis Montrose’s most famous dictum, the new orientation to history in literary studies may be characterized as a dynamic dialogue between literature and history and it has a reciprocal concern with “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history.”<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt and other New Historicists thus intend to play the role of a theoretical Samson who tears down the wall between history and literature.

Accordingly, New Historicism’s live, energetic and mutual dialogues between history and literature have led to the announcement of “the death of deconstruction,” an *ahistorical* textualism which dominated in the 1970’s and the 1980’s, and also to the birth of new historical studies. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, the editors

of *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts and Representing History* (1993), point out that the turn towards history that occurred within American literary studies in the past decade has produced a body of criticism given various names such as “the new history,” “critical historicism,” “historical-materialist criticism” and, of course, “New Historicism.” However, any attempt to classify this diverse body of historical criticism is a formidable task, but history has been strongly affected, making for a highly “textualized” view of historical understanding. As Lee Patterson has observed, “[n]o single label can be usefully applied to the historicist enterprise as a whole” (3).

It is unquestionable that New Historicism is part of the postmodern trend in literary history and culture studies. It welcomes the breakdown of genres and invites the analysis of discontinuities, linking anecdotes to the disruption of our understanding history. Though one of the most powerful disciplines of contemporary literary criticism, New Historicism has faced severe criticism from various quarters. Can history be represented by “the textual traces of the past?” Can New Historicism escape the apparent structural closure of Foucault’s historical theory? (Bristol 1985). Why has New Historicism spent so much effort on canonical literature and spent so little time examining the radical pamphlet literature of the English Revolution? (Holstun 1989). Are genealogical readings of New Historicism not merely examples of “*arbitrary connectedness*” between texts and histories? (Cohen 1987). Is New Historicism, from the perspective of historical critique, only one of the new forms of Marxism? (Porter 1990). Does New Historicism not just fail to restore contextualism, but itself remain “a profoundly narcissistic method?” (Liu 1989). Does New Historicism come closer to presenting a new mode of analysis but nevertheless seem less concerned with actively intervening with the making of a new history? (Thomas 1991). Does New Historicism’s balancing formulation—the historicity of text and textuality of history—mask an unsolved tension? (Cox and Reynolds 1993). Is New Historicism, in spite of its radical claims, a genuine hermeneutics operating in a more or less traditional vein? (Veenstra 1995). Does New Historicism proclaim its skeptical activism and neglect native protocols for its own ends while still observing the overall power-structure of the discourse? (Hamilton 1996). Is New Historicism’s adoration of anecdote and personal experience as a critical tool appropriate? (Hamlyn 1997). Does New Historicism miss an essential kind of historical distance: the intercultural and interlingual material that is constitutive of and inseparable from older literature?<sup>3</sup> (Coldiron 2001). Can a New Historicist be a poststructuralist and still be a historian? (Brantlinger 2002). How can female identity not appear to be something fathered upon women by patriarchy in a New Historicist concept of power as an unbreakable system of containment, a system that positions subordinate groups as effects of the

dominants? (Hadfield 2003).

Question-marks have fallen more and more heavily over the whole movement of the discursive formation in New Historicism as it has tended to become a clearly codified discipline and a holy empire of literary theory. Moreover, many cultural critics and feminists attack the ambiguity of New Historicism's *apolitical* position and some literary historians even reject the "New Historicism" label, for they believe no single "ism" can be usefully applied to the heterogeneous and irreducible body of historicist enterprise. Following these criticisms, Derrida, in a conference, ironically surmised that "the conflict between New Historicism and deconstruction can now be narrowed to a turf battle between Berkeley and Irvine, Berkeley and Los Angeles" (Spivak 1990: 155).

New Historicism has become a literary term closely associated with Greenblatt, who is generally regarded as the guru of New Historicism and, as a predictable result of his sudden prominence,<sup>4</sup> the focus of much criticism.<sup>5</sup> By breaching disciplinary boundaries between the text and history, and between fiction and reality, New Historicism, eventually and inevitably, has now come to terms with the decision to set up its priority in a place between textualism and contextualism (I will discuss this later). The aim of this paper is to systematically investigate the Catch-22 (theoretical quandaries) of New Historicism as its limits in terms of "panoptical past" and "go-betweenness." In the conclusion, facing up to these theoretical quandaries, rather than presenting a "shopping list" of improvements required for New Historicism, I will explain how New Historicism should be reconciled with the main theme of postmodernism, which is more diverse, affirmative and ethico-political than the formalistic and pessimistic thinking advocated by Greenblatt.

### **The Panoptical Past: Language, Self and Power**

New Historicists point to the culturally specific nature of texts as products of particular periods and discursive formations, while viewing reality—history—as itself mediated by linguistic codes which it is impossible for the critic/historian to bypass in the recuperation of past cultures. (Spiegel 1997: 190)

Language is bound up with questions of identity because it is through language that we speak of ourselves and interact with others. Greenblatt sees language as an especially potent force in the English Renaissance and therefore this section will look at his particular concerns with language as a discursive power or social self-fashioning force as well as his awareness of it as an impression of the temporal aspect of history. In his early works, Greenblatt often emphasizes the relation of

language to reality. He explores this connection, for instance, in his essay “Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play” in referring to ways in which Marlowe’s characters fashion themselves (at least partly) through language. Language, he implies, is detached from reality (the signifier from the referent) even though the characters try, undaunted, to fill the existential void with words. “Magnificent words” he tells us “are spoken and disappear into a void,” but their detachment is the condition of their existence as “it is precisely this sense of the void that compels the characters to speak so powerfully, as if to struggle the more insistently against the enveloping silence” (1980: 200). Language, in this sense, is primary and precedes the referent. Greenblatt quotes Gorgias to emphasize the epistemological divide between utterance and existence—“that which we communicate is speech, and speech is not the same thing as the thing that exists” (1980: 215)—and points out the inherent instability of language by referring to repetitions which, though intended to generate fixity, serve only to facilitate escape.

Moreover, in saying “I began with the desire to speak with the dead” (1988: 1), Greenblatt evokes the traditional privileging of speech over writing, where meanings are thought to be somehow less ambiguous, as the speaker consciously aims at reducing the chances of misinterpretation. The irony is not only that speech is far from free of ambiguities, but also that Greenblatt uses texts (writing) to effect his “conversation.” In admitting “It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead,” he admits the significance of diachrony (a temporal disjuncture), and implies that the problem of diachrony can be resolved by synchronic study. Language, of course, always has both diachronic and synchronic elements, but to understand diachrony while standing on the synchronic plane is far more difficult than Greenblatt’s statement implies. We can know consciously something of the contemporary forces that shape our discourse; it is far more difficult to detect with such certainty forces from the past. That is not to say that it is impossible; merely that it behooves the historicist to be highly reflexive and to resist the temptation to make totalizing statements on the dynamics of the past, two areas in which Greenblatt, for all his inventiveness in the early works, is not always successful.

Once spoken or written, words, synchronically or diachronically, enter a form of circulation that carries them away from their point of origin. Greenblatt recognizes how language both keeps us at a distance from the past also draws us to it in a quest for understanding. Thus, in the opening to “Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play” the quotation from the journal of merchant John Sarracoll raises a number of questions for Greenblatt at the linguistic level, questions which he says “are all met by the moral blankness that rests like thick snow on Sarracoll’s sentences” (1980: 194). The language is spare, lacking in qualification, and evokes a sense of a rather inhu-

man hand at work. This is so because linguistic communication has a temporal as well as a cultural aspect, a point which Greenblatt alludes to in his raising of questions about the text's assumptions but does not develop. He says that he is "committed to the project of making strange what has become familiar" (1990: 8), but he has nothing but an imaginative response to documents like Sarracoll's that are strange to begin with. And while his response is provisional because it is imaginative, he still offers it as some kind of finite explanation. Therefore, one may argue that Greenblatt uses rhetoric to protect such assertions from escape into indeterminacy.

Greenblatt's thesis on self-fashioning in the Renaissance also shows how words, however powerful, are ultimately never enough. The world will not allow identity to be formed through language alone; action must follow from exhortation, as man must seek to join the signifier with its referent. Language takes place in time and reminds us of the movement of history, even (and perhaps especially) when we try to stabilize it. Reiteration, which Greenblatt says is essential to self-fashioning, never permits exact duplication. Always there is a difference, if only in the mind of the speaker. With each new expression of a goal, Greenblatt suggests, Marlowe's characters move further away from that goal, as "the objects of desire, at first so clearly defined, so avidly pursued, gradually lose their sharp outlines and become more and more like mirages" (1980: 217). While Greenblatt draws this important connection between language and time, the temporal problem of history (to which language promises some kind of solution) never quite becomes a theme in its own right.

Although Greenblatt begins "with the desire to speak with the dead," he admits "all I could hear was my own voice" (1988: 1). However, he believes that the solution to this impasse lies within himself as an historically situated subject saying "my own voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living" (1988: 1). But if those "traces" make themselves heard merely in the form of interpretations that the new historicist puts upon the literature of the past, what is to guarantee their authenticity? It is, of course, a new historicist axiom that knowledge of the world is determined by the position of the observer, but in practice the new historicists require some way out of this *cul-de-sac*. The result is a compromised form of discourse in which the indication of subjectivity is no more than one element of a complex rhetoric that struggles after more objective truths.

Perhaps Greenblatt is correct to say that "self-expression is always and inescapably the expression of something else, something different" in that he recognizes how any utterance is implicated within other structures of power, culture and so on. However, the link to the past is always one of projection of the self (with all of its contemporary associations intact) onto the past, and not a recovering of the past from

within the self. The past may be “in” us in the language that we use and in the interpretations we bring to old literature in the sense that both of these forms—language and interpretation—are evolutionary, but it is impossible to properly appreciate the exact nature of the past, to separate it from the present it has given rise to. The Renaissance has enough in common with the postmodern period for the new historicist to project himself onto the past and believe that what he then sees is an historical image of himself. No wonder that Alan Liu says “the New Historicism is in effect a profoundly narcissistic method” (1989: 746). It applies its own standards to the rhetoric of the past in the hope of releasing genuine historical truths, but in so doing always finds a reflection of itself. As Liu suggests, New Historicism fails to understand the past on its own terms because it does not achieve a proper understanding “of rhetoric, or more broadly, of language as an historically situated event” (1990: 8). Thus, the various voices that are incorporated into new historicist writing are drowned out by a more powerful rhetoric that has no proper appreciation of their difference.

Regarding the subtle and complex relation between self-fashioning and power, Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, states that self-fashioning directs attention to the problematic structure of power in representation. He argues that self-fashioning involves not *self-creation* but *submission* to an absolute power. Thus it is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile: the “threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist” (1980: 9) who must be unveiled or invented in order to be marked, attacked and destroyed. For example, in “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion,” Greenblatt points out that Falstaff’s (the threatening Other’s) resistance to monarchic order is in the end a valuable negative model for Prince Hal (a self-fashioner), who is more effectively enabled to mark, attack and destroy Falstaff’s disorderly challenge to normality and to assume kingly power. In so doing, Greenblatt attempts to demonstrate that the self-fashioning of Prince Hal in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV and V* indicates how the process of the effacement of the alien by the power of authority operates.

In addition, in Greenblatt’s reading of *Othello*, Iago’s successful manipulation of Othello serves as another good example of the unseen power structure of self-fashioning. Greenblatt writes “[i]n *Othello* it is Iago who echoes that last line—‘I am not what I am,’ the motto of the improviser, the manipulator of signs that bear no resemblance to what they profess to signify” (1980: 238). Nevertheless, a sole textual analysis of the improvising power relation in *Othello* is certainly not the task of New Historicism. The reason why Greenblatt strategically highlights the role of Iago is, in effect, to explore how Shakespeare’s literary symbolism of self-fashioning operates within its social and cultural symbolic structures. That is, by comparing Iago’s improvisation of Othello to Shakespeare’s manipulation of his

audiences and social culture, Greenblatt is able to regain “a sense of the complex interactions of meaning in a given culture” (1980: 3).

To put it succinctly, Greenblatt aims at examining the subtle *text-context* power circulation in respect of *self-fashioning* in Elizabethan culture. A constantly shifting from the textual matrix to the contextual matrix, from the characters to the author, enables Greenblatt to provide an insightful study of the interplay between fiction and history and between selfhood and culture. In other words, Iago’s self-fashioning as a malicious improviser in the text unveils how Shakespeare skillfully manipulates his audiences’ consciousness and culture in his context. Greenblatt successfully demonstrates that Shakespeare’s plays are significant symbolic acts of cultural formation.

Shakespeare, for this reason, “remains throughout his career the supreme purveyor of ‘empathy,’ the fashioner of narrative selves, the master improviser” (1980: 253). The genius of Shakespeare’s art, in Greenblatt’s analysis, becomes a “limitless talent for entering into the consciousness of another, perceiving its deepest structures as a manipulable fiction, reinscribing it into his own narrative form” (1980: 252). Besides the examination of those masters of power improvisation in both plays and reality (such as Prince Hal, Iago and Shakespeare), Greenblatt explains why Falstaff, Othello and other Renaissance self-fashioners (such as More, Tyndale, Wyatt, Spenser and Marlowe) fail to “identify” and “fashion” themselves. He believes that these self-fashioners (in plays and reality) try to search for their “theatrical self” and various ways of “self-fashioning” in the social and religious institutions in vain. Therefore, they end up discovering that their “authentic self” is tragically trapped in the contextual frames, and, as a result, become victims and sacrificial scapegoats in their institutional structure (1980: 123-27).

The self-fashioning identity, for Greenblatt, always involves its own dramatic subversion or tragic loss in both text and context. The problematical process of self-fashioning generated by a juxtaposition of Renaissance literary works and its non-literary realities proves the mutual influence relation between text and context. That is to say, the text is not merely a passive representation of cultural reality but itself actually influences and produces the cultural reality. Or, one may argue, that text is always already part of con-“text.” The traditional clear boundaries between text and context are thus erased by Greenblatt’s analysis of the self-fashioning in Renaissance study. The problem of Greenblatt’s rather rich exploration of the *re-location* of the Self in the literary and cultural formation is his belief in the almighty Foucauldian dominance of power.

By emphasizing Prince Hal’s, Iago’s, and Shakespeare’s successful manipulation and colonization of the Other, Greenblatt claims that dominant power is an unbreakable structure. Henceforth, self-fashioning engages “submission to an absolute



power or authority situated at least partially outside the self—God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military administration” (1980:

9). While some new historicists (e.g. Michael Bristol) have dissented from this rather functionalist version of Foucault, Greenblatt has been associated with a pessimistic Foucauldian understanding of discursive power in literary representations of the Renaissance and early modern culture and social order. The threat and resistance of the alien are bound to be marked and destroyed by the dominant authority, where the manipulation of the Foucauldian “micro-power” is treated as a symbolic structure of omnipotence and omnipresence by Greenblatt. That is why he concludes pessimistically in the “Epilogue” to his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*:

In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force (1980: 256).

The question is: is there no possibility of an individual’s resistance, ‘free choice’ or ‘autonomous self-fashioning’ (in Foucault’s concept of power)? The answer, as some of Foucault’s critics have pointed out, is definitely “yes.” What Greenblatt worshipped is only a pessimistic version of the early stage of Foucault, mainly from the 60s and 70s. In fact, there are, according to Best and Kellner, three major shifts in Foucault’s works, “from the archaeological focus on systems of knowledge in the 1960s, to the genealogical focus on modalities of power in the 1970s, to the focus on technologies of the self, ethics, and freedom in the 1980s” (59). Accordingly, Foucault, in his later stage, confesses and proposes that “[w]hen I was studying asylums, prison, and so on, I perhaps insisted too much on techniques of domination . . . I would like, in the years to come, to study power relations starting from the techniques of self” (Foucault and Sennett 1981: 5).

Consequently, Foucault’s later work, *The History of Sexuality* (planned as a six-volume study of the genealogy of modern sexuality, although only three volumes were finished), demonstrates his shift from the techniques of domination to that of self by offering an ethic of self as a possibility of permanent resistance. Jon Simons, in *Foucault and the Political*, provides a penetrating study of Foucault’s conceptualizations of power, between the poles of unbearable heaviness (constraining limitations or

domination) and unbearable lightness (limitless freedom or resistance) and how Foucault “resists the magnetism of the two poles, riding the tension by adopting unstable positions between them”(3). He writes:

On the one hand, thought appears to be constrained by the same conditions as truth, to the extent that someone within a particular system of thought cannot render an account of its limits. Not only is thought absolutely constrained, but without the ability to discern limits, resistance is blind. On the other (light) hand, Foucault in his later work suggested that philosophy and reflection itself could be a way to become free of oneself and one’s thought. (5)

Obviously, being constrained by the gaze of panoptical power and unable to detect the limits of human science, truth and subject, Greenblatt, like the early Foucault, believes that all forms of resistance are blind and futile; thus, power, to Greenblatt, is inevitably and unbearably heavy.

### **Go-Betweenness: Wonder and Resonance**

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder. (Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess”)

In his recent work, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) (co-authored with Gallagher), Greenblatt argues that if we look at our entire culture as a text, then everything is at least potentially in play both at the level of representation and at the level of event. “Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a clear, unambiguous boundary between what is representation and what is event. At the very least, the drawing or maintaining of that boundary is itself an event” (15). Obviously, Greenblatt tries to express the “postmodern incredulity” that a clear line between textual representation and social event is difficult to draw nowadays. In what follows, I argue that Greenblatt in his later texts (*Learning to Curse*, *Marvelous Possessions* and *Practicing New Historicism*) attempts to play a utopian role of “go-between” to shift between the ambiguous boundary between what is representation and what is event.

Undertaking a comparable project on a broader scope of cultural identity fashioned in and by (non-)literary work (1990: 9), Greenblatt begins to pay more attention to the possibility of resistance and subversion; that of the colonized both in literary works (such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*) and non-literary works (such as Columbus’ traveling documents). In his late works, Greenblatt on the one hand, tries to

clarify his position with regard to charges that his New Historicism is deterministic, pessimistic and totalizing. On the other hand, he introduces to his readers the new concepts of “wonder” and “resonance” not only to reinforce New Historicism’s dictum on “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” but also to serve as a new probe to explore the minefield of colonial discourses.

After being aware that his insistence on an apolitical stance<sup>6</sup> and the pervasiveness of agency has apparently led most of his critics to find in his works an “unintended embarrassment,”<sup>7</sup> and for others to find in them the apparent structural closure of Foucault’s historical theory—or a pessimistic doctrine of human helplessness as a result of its ironic and skeptical reappraisal of the cult of heroic individualism—Greenblatt begins to defend the disciplinary castle of New Historicism. In *Learning to Curse*, he attempts to tackle these “slings and arrows” by first admitting that “agency is virtually inescapable” and adding:

Inescapable but not simple: New Historicism, as I understand it, does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention. Actions that appear to be single are disclosed as multiple; the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective, social energy: a gesture of dissent may be an element in a larger legitimation process, while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it (1990: 164-65).

Greenblatt believes that although each individual self is fashioned by the generative rules and conflicts of a given culture, it is also overpowered by (Althusserian) ideological apparatuses<sup>8</sup> that relentlessly transform individuals into subjects. “These selves,” he argues, “conditioned by the expectations of their class, gender, religion, race and national identity, are constantly effecting changes in the course of history” (164). That is why he insists that “the subversive perceptions do not disappear, but insofar as they remain within the structure of the play, they are contained and indeed serve to heighten a power they would appear to question” (1990: 165). Therefore, Greenblatt further argues that he does not suggest that all manifestations of subversion or “any apparent site of resistance” in all literature or even in all Shakespearean plays are ultimately co-opted. For him, “some are, some aren’t” (165).

In addition to his *re*-definition, *re*-self-fashioning of New Historicism, Greenblatt also attempts to turn our attention to his concepts of “wonder” and “resonance.” In so doing, he attempts to present his archaeological reading of anecdotes and colonial discourses<sup>9</sup> and to insist on the permeable boundaries between text and history, between works of art and the reality of life and, more importantly, between “wonder”

and “resonance.” He writes: “Wonder has not been alien to literary criticism, but it has been associated (if only implicitly) with formalism rather than historicism. I wish to extend this wonder beyond the formal boundaries of works of art, just as I wish to intensify resonance within those boundaries” (1990: 170).

*Wonder* is something or someone that causes people to feel astonishment or great admiration. To be more precise, it is a spontaneous overflow of powerful, fresh and surprised feelings of delight or horror which a viewer (or reader) immediately experiences after he looks at (or reads) an unfamiliar and incredible sight (or text). Such powerful freshness, I believe, can also be regarded as the result of what Shklovsky called “defamiliarization”<sup>10</sup> (to make strange) and subsequently can create a temporary sense of alienation from what we know and what we are. “The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too” (Lacan 1998: 75). Through freshly provoked eyes, the strangeness opens the heart of wonder.

Nietzsche, in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” also argues that human beings cannot learn to forget but are always left wondering. This act of wondering, for Nietzsche, illustrates the haunting of a specter of the past. He writes: “it is a matter for wonder: a moment, now and here then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment” (1997: 61). The power of wonder as the *re*-turning effect of the past (and thus a disturbing of the present) is often manifested in Greenblatt’s historical analysis.

In fact, as Paxson points out, Greenblatt, in his early article titled “At the Table of the Great” analyzing the self-fashioning of Thomas More, already demonstrated such a powerful refreshment of wonder. He tells an amusing anecdote that presents a characteristic sequence of obsequiousness at Cardinal Wolsey’s luxurious and rich banquet table. “Each succeeding flatterer at the table, including More, tries to undo his predecessor with epideictic calisthenics. Greenblatt assures us that no rhetorical trick has been spared. But the last commentator to go is a humble priest who eschews speech and simply weeps after casting his eyes to heaven and producing an ‘Oh’” (224). This momentary linguistically bankrupt “Oh” provides us with the best example of what Greenblatt means by the power of “defamiliarization” and rhetorical structure of wonder. In short, “[t]he expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed. It calls attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insists upon the undeniability, the exigency of the experience” (Greenblatt 1991: 20).

*Resonance* literally means the quality that a sound has of being deep, clear and echoing. However, what Greenblatt means, by resonance, is an invoked contempla-

tion of complex, dynamic cultural forces which a viewer (or a reader) feels which deeply and clearly echo with the power and experience of wonder, reaching out beyond its formal (or textual) boundaries to a larger world, of a displayed object (or a literary work). “It [resonance] can be achieved” he believes “by awakening in the viewer a sense of the cultural and historically contingent construction of an art object, the negotiations, exchanges, swerves, exclusions” (1990: 172).

In other words, the effect of resonance is forged between the viewer (reader) and the object (literary work), between the past and the present, between the textuality and historicity with the tools of negotiation, exchange and circulation. Indeed, what most New Historicists have done so far is actually to situate the literary text in its context and to recover as far as possible the repressed, contradictory or unknown historical meanings (or historicity) of the text. Then they examine the relationship between these historical and cultural meanings of the text and the situation of the reader in order to arouse the reader’s cultural wonder at the resonance in both the past and the present. That is why Greenblatt concludes his “Resonance and Wonder” by claiming that “it is the function of the New Historicism continually to renew the marvelous at the heart of the resonant” (181).

Accordingly, Greenblatt, in *Marvelous Possessions*, seeks to increase the effects of wonder in historical studies—“the art work’s capacity to generate in the spectator surprise, delight, admiration, and intimations of genius.” He believes that cultural objects from the past show us something that is otherness, something that can extend and renew our personal experience and understanding of ourselves. The notion of otherness thus becomes essential to New Historicism, especially in its colonial analysis. At any rate, the historical (or colonialist) imagination exists only when one can conceive of a time, a place, a people, a culture different from our own, and the present can stand up only when the past provides it with a solid ground. In other words, the present (the Self) can only be understood in the light of the past (the Other). Similarly, however, the past (the Other) can only be interpreted in the light of the present (the Self). Each can be understood in the light of the Other. The hermeneutical circle is drawn tight.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that history, for us, is a diachronic land of the Other while the New World, for early European countries, is a synchronic land of the Other. The land of the Other (history or the New World), is not “necessarily admired for [its] beauty; the marvelous [is] bound up with the excessive, the surprising, the literally outlandish, the prodigious” (Greenblatt 1990: 170) but it must be “the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his track, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention” (177). Greenblatt points out that the knowledge which derives from the wonder of the Other may not be very useful in the

attempt to understand another culture. Nevertheless, it is vitally significant in the attempt to understand and identify our own, and such an experience of wonder does not have an inherent and necessary politics, either radical or imperialist (1990: 180).

The reason why wonder can make us understand and identify ourselves better is it opens up, and introduces newness as disturbance into, the totality of Self. In respect of the returning phenomenon of repressed history in the postmodern/ postcolonial condition, the wonder of anecdotes is, in fact, one of the most effective ways that the unsaid histories of otherness come into history. The impact of wonder upon our ontologized understanding of the past helps us to disconnect the historiographic tangle between event and context as totality. In other words, the unsaid histories often remain repressed and unnoticed simply because our understanding of the past is governed and concealed by the conventional historiography we share. However, when this fixed logic of history is disrupted by the power of wonder, our understanding of the past will certainly be defamiliarized and thus *re*-fashioned. Greenblatt, developing this line of thought, strategically uses anecdotes in his historical studies so that he can create senses of wonder and resonance. In so doing, he is able to illustrate *difference* and *contingency* in the haunting disturbance to the “real” of history. Greenblatt writes:

The historical evidence—“mere anecdotes”—conventionally invoked in literary criticism to assist in the explication of a text seemed to me dead precisely because it was the enemy of wonder: it was brought in to lay contingency and disturbance to rest. I do not want history to enable me to escape the effect of the literary but to deepen it by making it touch the effect of the real, a touch that would reciprocally deepen and complicate history. (1990: 5-6)

However, when he discusses, in *Marvelous Possessions*, the effect of wonder in the adventures and colonizing exploits of early European travelers and the consequent tragedy caused to the natives, he acknowledges that although wonder “does not inherently legitimate a claim to possession” (74), “[t]he claim of possession is grounded in the power of wonder” (83). That is, otherness does not only serve as a means of identity for the Self but also arouses a power of wonder and, consequently, a desire of possession to internalize, demonize and objectify the Other as part of the Self—by any means necessary. Greenblatt constantly makes his reader aware of both Mandeville’s and Columbus’s fallacious understandings of the New World during their adventures of wonder. In addition, he indicates how their wonder results in not only cultural resonance but also in brutal, violent and irrational possession—imperialism and colonialism. With a self-reflective mind, he emphasizes the importance of grasping

ing the differences between “mimetic capital” and “non-mimetic form of capital” and between presentation and reality. However, he then states: “It is, I think, a theoretical mistake and a practical blunder to collapse the distinction between representation and reality, but at the same time we cannot keep them isolated from one another. They are forced to live together in an uneasy marriage in a world without ecstatic union or divorce.” (7)

Although Greenblatt admits that we may risk ignoring the qualities of non-mimetic production and reproduction if we concentrate on the qualities of mimetic presentation and representation, his unsaid major concern still lies in the representation and circulation in mimetic capital and “the dazzling power of display” (6-7). The problem is the *dazzling power* of representation, in Greenblatt’s analysis, indicates its manipulation of the actual reality as if the textual representation were a garrulous wife while reality a silent, hen-pecked husband in this unbreakable and unhappy marriage. Language, for Greenblatt, seems superior to, and thus more real than, reality *per se*. Moreover, Greenblatt might be accused of—in order to avoid falling into the pan-political trap—putting his emphasis on the resonance of European culture, instead of analyzing and highlighting the dispossessed, enslaved and repressed culture of the New World. That is, he mainly *re-news* the European marvelous, not the suffering of the colonized, at the heart of the resonance. However, when Greenblatt *re-news* the wonder of earlier European countries and emphasizes the resonance of European culture, he also, more or less, implies his own wonder and resonance at the violence, ignorance and brutality of colonialism.

He detects, in “Introduction: New World Encounters,” that the “attempt to reduce the distance between the self and the other by ‘direct substitution’ is one of the enduring principles of the early European response to unfamiliar lands and peoples, but it is set against the opposite response, the recognition of baffling and confounding otherness in the newly discovered lands and peoples” (Greenblatt 1993: xi). The land, people, culture of the Other, in fact, play an ambiguous role in Greenblatt’s New Historicism. It seems, on the one hand, less significant than the Self in his analysis; but it has, on the other hand, an absolutely essential role in the program of renewing the marvelous at the heart of the resonance. Otherness looks like being *internalized* by the Self from time to time but it is also repeatedly *externalized* by the Self in order to make a distinction between the two. By doing so, it continually builds up the contrast between the Self and the Other in the process of *self-fashioning*, *power-negotiation* and *re-location*.

It is my conviction that the marvelous object of the Other is not only possessed by the Self, as it seems to be, but, in the deep layers, also possesses the Self. For instance, everyone regards himself/herself and his/her life as a *cage* in order to catch

and possess the *birds* (such as material possessions, power, fame and wealth) in his/her life. Nevertheless, it ironically ends up that everyone is but a bird, captured and possessed by the cages (material possession, power, fame, wealth and so on) in his/her life. From this perspective, we may say Columbus does not only colonize the New World but is also colonized by his *desire* for the New World. The inability of the Self to resist its own desire to possess (and be possessed by) the Other inevitably and tragically results in the brutal reality of colonialism.

Facing the brutal reality of colonialism, Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, points out the splitting of identity into two selves—one, “white mask,” which speaks the language as if it were the authentic aspect of his identity, and the other, “black skin,” which realizes this linguistic identity as a theatrical self and a form of colonization. Similarly, Said, in *Orientalism* and *The World, the Text and the Critic*, develops a binary opposition critique. He criticizes the long-term images, stereotypes and general ideology about “the Orient” as the Other or the colonized, constructed by generations of Western scholars who produced myths about the laziness, deceit and irrationality of Orientals. Thus, what the West wants to conquer and colonize is not the real East but merely the imaginary East of the West.

Spivak, on the other hand, produces a non-binary critique known as a deconstructive postcolonialism. She believes that it is impossible and useless to seek the “origin” of violence in the cultural text. Accordingly, she advocates “strategic essentialism” to replace the binarism-oriented subaltern studies. It is a strategic means rather than an end (*telos*) of resistance—the postcolonial strategy of “catachresis” as “the practical politics of the open end,” a method of the reversion, re-description, displacement and insertion of history (1990: 95-112). From the perspective of the openness and ambivalence of analytic structure, Bhabha, like Spivak, also deploys, in the British context, a more specifically poststructuralist repertoire (Foucault, Derrida and a latter-day version of psychoanalysis) for his exploration of colonial discourse. He proposes the notion of “relocation” as a transformative instrument to grasp the “in-betweenness” in the *ambivalent* field—the gray zone of intersection in which all culturally determinate significations are being questioned by an aporia-like *hybridity*: between the colonist and the colonized.

Unlike these postcolonial critics, Greenblatt claims himself, in “The Go-Between”, to be an agent of the go-between which is neither subject nor object (1992: 150). He explains: “We are incomplete and unsteady, we are go-betweens, we don’t know whom God loves and whom He hates” (150). Therefore, in order to explore the complex system of mimetic circulation of cultures, “I must act as the go-between” (150). This claim of being an agent of go-between in fact contradicts his insistence on the unbreakable ideological structure of self-fashioning. That is to



say, Greenblatt, on the one hand, states that human existences are always conditioned by the expectations of their class, gender, religion, race and national identity (164). While, on the other hand, he believes that he himself can take the enunciative stance of neutrality to analyze the discourses of the cultural encountering. The aporia is—how can one act as a neutral agent of the go-between when he/she is inevitably conditioned by his/her own ideologies? Consequently, owing to this Utopian desire, Greenblatt is unable to invoke a deeper historical and cultural wonder at the heart of the resonance in his analysis of colonial discourse and to explore and unmask the *chiasmus* relation between the colonist and the colonized, and the historical and cultural violence caused by such a complex and unjust relation. The non-subjective and non-objective go-betweenness is therefore a hallucinatory rope with which Greenblatt attempts to get out of the mire of formalism and pessimistic Foucauldian power theory.

### **A Newer Historicism: A Feminist Genealogy**

The new historicists (most of them are members of literature rather history departments) have gone too far in the poststructuralist direction of indeterminacy—or, more paradoxically, of “radical historicism”—for the Beyond historians to follow. (Brantlinger 2002: 1500)

If the feminist chronicling of women’s oppression and celebration of women’s difference have appeared misguided to many New Historicists, the New Histori-  
cist universalization of power and blurring of genders have struck many feminists as nothing short of reactionary. (Wai-Chee Dimock 1991: 601)

If one summarizes the criticisms of New Historicism, one can discern that there are, interestingly, two contradictory and conflicting charges against it. To those who accuse New Historicism of failing to restore the historicity of text and of remaining a narcissistic vision of textualism, New Historicism and formalism seem to be Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Yet for others, New Historicism’s works possess, from the perspective of a historical and cultural critique, a continuity with certain assumptions of Marxism and its employment of contextualism, which can be linked to Marxists like Benjamin, Althusser and Williams.

These contradictory charges are, I believe, a result of the problems of New Historicism’s *apolitical posture* and *slippery theoretical affiliations*. That is, New Historicism has faced its fundamental and insoluble predicament: its theoretical Catch- 22:

*how to claim, as a post-structuralist, the primacy of textuality and yet to claim, as a historicist, the primacy of contextuality?* (Krieger 77). This priority becomes impossible to assign if it still insists on the double claim—a claim on behalf of both textuality and contextuality—or the policy of neutrality. Although cloaking itself in the myth of political neutrality or go-betweenness, New Historicism, being a form of literary criticism which developed and flourished in English literature departments is, in fact, more closely allied with formalism. It is also the reason why the accusation of its being a textual formalism is more frequently made than that of its being a strain of contextual Marxism. Nevertheless, cutting loose from its theoretical lines, both poststructuralism and Marxism, New Historicism appears to be just like Peter Pan living in a never-never land of neutrality, playing with little anecdotes and traveling endlessly from one unknown historical event to another, from anywhere and everywhere. Finally it is doomed to wander at the intersection between poststructuralism and Marxism, or, more precisely, between textualism and contextualism.

Moreover, there is another deeply rooted criticism of New Historicism, which is leveled at its primary concern with Renaissance and Romantic canonical texts and dominant culture. Unlike British Cultural Materialism, which is more interested in the possibility of subjects not only refusing the subject positions offered but actually producing new ones, New Historicism, as we have mentioned, tends to see power structures as a panoptical gaze of Big Brother. Thus, New Historicism inevitably falls into the trap of the apparent structural closure of Foucault's historical theory. Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of "carnival," for example, as a form of sub-culture opposed to the official and dominant culture, might introduce a more open model for cultural study. That is why, in *Carnival and Theater*, Michael Bristol argues that Greenblatt fails to recognize the vitality and power of popular culture in the Elizabethan period. He suggests the potentially subversive mode of "carnival" as a form of critique which "draws attention to the radical 'otherness' of literary works" (23) and thus brings privileged and authorized culture into a crudely familiar relationship with common and everyday culture (19-25).

Some new historical literary critics such as Jane Tompkins and Cathy Davidson have drawn attention to popular and genre fiction. In *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, Tompkins points out that "[t]he literary canon, as codified by a cultural elite, has power to influence the way the country thinks across a broad range of issues" (201); therefore, it is, molding public opinion, closer to propaganda than to art (186). The sentimental and popular novel, for Tompkins, offers a critique of American culture and society which is far more devastating than any delivered by notable critics such as Hawthorne and Melville. Indeed, the New Historicists' dominant-cultural study of canonical texts is less involved with

the investigation of their “others” than a repeated challenging of the familiar privileged texts which, while casting them into a new perspective, not only leaves the canonical texts themselves pretty much undamaged but also re-vitalizes them. One thing I need to make clear in advance: Tompkins rightly states that “my purpose is not to depreciate classic works but to reveal their mutability” (4). Likewise, what I am against is surely not the value of Renaissance and Romantic canonical texts, but their evident domination over works in New Historicism.

Based on the preceding criticism of New Historicism, it is reasonable to assume that the New Historicists steering into the roundabout of textualism and contextualism can no longer cloak themselves in the myth of apolitical neutrality and therefore must make a decision to move towards a new direction. New Historicism needs to seek a “beyond.” I suggest that New Historicism should move from singular and linguistic dimensions to plural and socio-historical dimensions, from the pessimistic concepts of panoptical power to the dynamic possibility of subversive resistance, from monolingual historical assumptions to a comparative new historicism in an international culture, from the analysis of canonical texts to that of popular texts, and from the examination of dominant culture to the analysis of marginal culture and multiculturalism, including the historical study of the Renaissance and Romanticism and that of the contemporary world. Besides, this “beyond” should give up the Utopian illusion of an apolitical posture or the myth of go-betweenness and diversely ally itself with other powerful ethico-political theories and “isms,” such as feminism, postcolonialism, multiculturalism and Bakhtinian theory. Owing to the limit of the discursive space in this paper, it is not possible for me to examine all the possible unions between Historicism and those otherness-oriented postmodern “isms.” Therefore, I will use the exploration of a feminist genealogy—the reconciliation between New Historicism and Feminism—as an example to explain how the incorporation of the concepts and methodologies of postmodern “isms” can help rescue New Historicism out of the mire of formalism and pessimistic Foucauldian power theory.

Let me begin by pointing out that “herstory is history with a difference” (Hamilton 194). The haunting of *herstory* has resulted in an increasing crisis for postmodern historicism. “It has been argued that past histories have generally been written by men about men, and that women have been rendered almost invisible, their roles, contributions, and achievements correspondingly minimised or totally ignored” (Southgate 1996: 94). Patriarchal power structure admittedly has reduced history *per se* into *his* story. Accordingly, the impact of feminist projects upon historical studies in the postmodern era, by contrast with the work done in the field of political, social, psychoanalytic and linguistic studies, has been comparatively late in coming, mild in striking and slow in reacting, but is nevertheless crucial and rigorous. In this

section I will try to suggest a possibility of a “beyond” for New Historicism—to reconcile feminism with it so as to femininize *the* gender-blind New Historicism and to historicize feminist projects. In so doing, we can inject a new and more radical impulse of feminist genealogy (or a feminist new historicism) into the movement of feminist historical studies. To this end, I shall closely examine and carefully solve the problems between New Historicism and feminism in order to offer a possible discursive platform on which they may have a chance to work together in partnership.

Actually, the relation between New Historicism and feminism (especially second-wave feminism) has so far been an uneasy one, although both share some fundamental assumptions (for example, both regard themselves as practices instead of merely rote textual analyses). But, to what extent can this presumably potent and happy union be one of unease? In “The Family in Shakespeare Studies; or — Studies in the Family of Shakespeare; or — The Politics of Politics,” Lynda E. Boose sarcastically points out the genealogical difference between these two methodologies in contemporary academic institutions. She writes:

Of the two methodologies [New Historicism and feminism], feminism is the child not born to the manor of literary fathers but outside it, without academic foremothers, but thus perhaps endowed with that peculiar liminality of daughters that leaves it oddly free to constitute itself. New Historicism is, by contrast, the legitimate son, the heir that developed not only inside the academy but specifically inside Renaissance studies, appearing shortly after feminism and preceding Marxism into the field. (738)

In addition to this genealogical difference, there are, I believe, two major problems in coupling New Historicism with feminism: firstly, New Historicism, by and large, *lacks women’s voices*. Perhaps a more objective way to demonstrate New Historicism’s tendency to ignore women’s history is to examine its mainstream performances retrospectively. From the 1980’s to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the journal *Representations*, as the primary stage of most New Historicist performances, has published more than seventy volumes. Nevertheless, there were only a few articles which really deal with gender or women’s history. That is to say, “women” only held a very marginal proportion of the New Historicist program during the last nineteen years. Furthermore, New Historicism is generally a historical and cultural practice of gender-erasure, not only in the early 80’s but also, with very little improvement, in the late 90’s.

This tendency towards gender-blindness is even more obvious in Greenblatt’s four major books: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (1980),

*Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988), *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1990) and *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1991). In these cornerstones of New Historicism, Greenblatt, not very surprisingly, does not analyze the gender subject. “Women,” in fact, are almost absolutely invisible in all Greenblatt texts except, as Lynda E. Boose observes, in one of his articles: “Fiction and Friction.” In this article, despite the long awaited expectation of Shakespearean feminists that Greenblatt would extend his incisive analysis to Renaissance women, he spends only three pages discussing the sexual identity of Shakespeare’s plays, especially *Twelfth Night*. His conclusion further reveals the gender-blind tendency in his analysis: he claims that Shakespearean women are only “the representation of Shakespearean men . . . the projected mirror images of masculine self-differentiation . . . since on stage there is in fact but a single gender, the open secret of identity, that beneath or within differentiated individuals is a single structure, identifiably male, is quite literally presented” (52).

Thus, Shakespearean heroines on stage, for Greenblatt, are pessimistically and inevitably assimilated into “a single gender”: the male. “Suddenly, there is only one gender and there are no more women in Shakespeare’s plays. According to Greenblatt, from the basis of this genealogy we can inferentially conclude that English Renaissance plays present only maleness” (Boose 730). One of the major reasons which most New Historicists are not interested in women’s past and their gender analysis is, I believe, because their theoretical and historical impulse are mainly inherited from Foucault’s genealogy as an interconnected notion of power which subjects both men and women. Henceforth, “gender trouble” analyses, in mainstream New Historicism, are overshadowed by Foucauldian New Historicism’s dominant interests in the circulation of social energy, the exchange of political power, and negotiation of self-fashioning forces. As a matter of fact, though crediting the methodology of genealogy with having great value for contemporary historical and political studies, many critics (Barky, Sawicki, McNay, Newton and Simons)<sup>11</sup> have pointed out that Foucault’s defects of ungendered genealogies have left no place in which women can enunciate their past.

For instance, although speaking highly of genealogy as “both a justificatory and an emancipatory strategy” (101), Sawicki charges Foucault’s negative freedom for women with disengaging from their political identities and the presumptions about gender differences. She argues that “women” and the “feminine” are sources of oppression in the male-dominated historiography and thus “genealogy is indispensable to feminism” (102). Indeed, if genealogy is the politics of otherness, of marginality and of the repressed, a feminist genealogy or a feminist new historicism is in great

demand. It serves as “both a justificatory and an emancipatory strategy” for the enunciation of the long-repressed women’s voices on the stage of Foucauldian New Historicism and for the transgression of the limits of *history* that subject women’s past.

Secondly, New Historicism, as we have discussed, is *apolitical* and *pessimistic*. The notion of history as a neutral power and the belief in all resistance being doomed as futile have prevented New Historicism from taking a political stance or giving any kind of political commitment. Consequently, it shuns contemporary political movements like Marxism and feminism. Facing criticisms of his apolitical position, Greenblatt acknowledges his reluctance to take up politics. He writes: “[i]t’s true that I’m . . . uneasy with a politics and a literary perspective that is untouched by Marxist thought, but that doesn’t lead me to endorse propositions or embrace a particular philosophy, politics or rhetoric, *faute de mieux*” (1990: 147).

Whereas New Historicism declares there is no possibility of any moment of pure, unfettered and autonomous subjectivity (and thus attempts to maintain a safe distance from any political “ism”), feminism is unquestionably regarded as a radical political movement inspired by a belief in the fundamental equality of men and women and committed to the eradication of gender-based injustice. Hence, feminism emphasizes women as speaking, acting and thinking subjects in the developing process of history, politics, society, and culture and with possibilities of resistance to dominant power. However, all the so-called autonomy of the subject, for Greenblatt, is inevitably constrained by the social and ideological system in force (1980: 256). Autonomous self-fashioning for free choice of either men or women, in Greenblatt’s vision of absolute containment, is a myth.

In “History as Usual? Feminism and the ‘New Historicism,’” Judith Newton wonders whether she is a new historicist or not and rightly states that “[n]on-feminist ‘new historicism,’ in its non-cultural materialist modes, has been widely criticised for its tendency to insist upon the totalizing power of hegemonic ideologies, ideologies implicitly informed by elite male values and often presented as typical of the way culture itself is constructed as a whole” (166). As a feminist historian, she sincerely hopes that New Historicism can give up its apolitical stance and take “material” conditions seriously in order to provide some channels for the voices of repressed others. In her conclusion, she answers the question in the title (History as Usual?) by asserting that only when “women’s contribution to culture and that of other oppressed groups can be taken adequately into account,” can New Historicism “produce something more than history as usual” (166).

However, in the researching the causes of the uneasy relationship between feminism and New Historicism, it would be unfair to set the blame only on New Histori-

cism, since feminism is not without its problems. In *Feminism and History*, Joan Wallach Scott argues that feminism should not be seen as a homogeneous category. She believes that a feminist search for a common ground for “women” will repress differences since there are, in terms of race, class, nationality and religion as well as culture, so many different “women” — white women, women of color, Jewish women, Nazi women, working-class women, bourgeois women, peasant women, socialist women, lesbian women,<sup>12</sup> Catholic women, Muslim women and so forth. To claim a universal notion of women is certainly to assimilate the difference into the same. That is why she states:

historical explorations of women’s past experience produce *and* undermine the singular category of ‘women’; histories of different groups have both consolidated contemporary categories of identity (those of ‘class,’ ‘race,’ and ‘sexuality,’ to take just a few examples) *and* made them relative to specific moments and circumstances of history at the same time. (9)

Indeed, one can safely say that there could be as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists nowadays. This raises the legitimate question: which feminism or which “women” should New Historicism reconcile? It is certainly inappropriate for a feminist new historicism to unite only one, or two, “women” or feminisms, since it is simply against the fundamental principles of *herstory* or a feminist genealogy: diversity, plurality and difference. However, to unite all feminisms is too ambitious and equally inappropriate because not all theories and practices of feminisms are comparable with that of New Historicism. The idea of a feminist genealogy or feminist new historicism in the postmodern condition is essentially otherness-driven and, in the past decades, the voices of dominant groups (such as white women, upper-class women, heterosexual women and Christian women) are more pronounced much more than those of women in marginal groups. For these reasons, a feminist new historicism, I suggest, should pay more, but certainly not total, attention to the past of marginal women (such as third-world women). In other words, New Historicism should reconcile with the emerging third-wave of feminism, or post-feminism,<sup>13</sup> which has moved beyond the boundaries of white bourgeoisie Christian women to cope with the problems of, for instance, non-white working-class women, lesbian women and younger women (such as teens).

Clearly from first-wave feminism (such as Virginia Woolf and Simone De Beauvoir), to second-wave feminism (such as Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and Julia Kristeva) and third-wave feminism (such as Daisy Hernandez, Judith Butler and Kathleen Hanna) the essential task most feminists have shared is to defy the

male-dominated world in respect of the social, political, linguistic and legal inequalities and injustices. Accordingly, it is beyond argument that the subversive resistance of anti-phallogentrism and anti-repression are also at the heart of every theory and practice of a feminist genealogy in the postmodern era. However, one should keep in mind that, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault points out: “[w]here there is power there is resistance; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). The arguable and inevitable irony, consequently, is that when feminism or other marginal “isms” become institutionalised and universal they tend to replace the dominant authority which they questioned and challenged. The danger then is that they begin not only to lose their subversive force but also to exercise their own institutionalised dominant power.

This ironic predicament is perhaps the nature of any form of subversive resistance. Thus, in order to avoid being hurt by the double-edged sword of resistant power while making marginalized women visible on the New Historicist stage, what a feminist new historicism needs to do is to keep on challenging *history* from different quarters. Nonetheless, this is done not simply by unearthing hidden facts of women’s past, nor by desiring to replace patriarchy’s dominant position or usurping its power. Rather it does so by unmasking and attacking the foundations upon which the dominance and authority of this male-oriented history is based, offering new perspectives on the past and radical interpretations of politics. In so doing, it can open new horizons of *herstory* where a male-centred historical vision has stopped short, thereby enriching the diversity and multiplicity of history. It is this position which a feminist genealogy or feminist new historicism needs to seek.

In short, I believe that New Historicism needs to go beyond its limits in order to welcome a “newer historicism.” By injecting new discursive blood into the formalistic, conservative and pessimistic body of New Historicism, a “beyond” of New Historicism can provide literary and historical critics with a powerful critical tool with which to re-energize the dialogues between literature and history and re-investigate the diverse worlds of texts. More importantly, it will enable New Historicism to not only “renew the marvelous at the heart of the resonance” and put historical literary study to contemporary use, but also to bring about brighter and more diverse possibilities in the future.

## **Conclusion**

We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life. (Nietzsche 1997: 59)



Just as no other philosopher has brought to Nietzsche's writing an intellectually powerful practice equal to Foucault's, so in Foucault's writing of historical critique no one writer, nor any "ism," has made a contribution in the postmodern epoch equal to New Historicism. For this very reason, it would seem preferable to explicitly bring to light the discursive formation and the theoretical quandaries of New Historicism so as to bring about a "beyond" from the codified horizon of New Historicism, rather than to simply accuse it of blindness and therefore completely reject the contribution and power of its critique. A feminist genealogy as we have discussed offers us an example of such a beyond of New Historicism. This genealogical approach can help us put values to a feminist interpretation of history and bring forth the long-neglected voices of different women into *herstory* as "the enunciated."

To sum up, "[w]e want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life" (Nietzsche 1997: 59). The past indeed needs to be constantly *re*-figured and *re*-presented for the life of the present and future. Accordingly, we require a new version of New Historicism to serve our lives in the new millennium. I am greatly convinced that only by adopting the otherness-oriented genealogical study of literary and non-literary histories (such as a feminist genealogy), can New Historicism vitalize its critique, cross its limits, prolong its academic life and thus reach its beyond. In this beyond in the 21st century, it may become more open, dynamic, affirmative and ethico-political than Greenblatt's variety of New Historicism which preceded it.

## Notes

1. Paul Hamilton, in the very beginning of *Historicism* (1996), points out that "[f]rom ancient times, philosophers have been eager to separate history from fiction. Like many others, this disciplinary boundary proved fragile from the start" (7).
2. In "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," Montrose defends New Historicism as a practice that recognizes the "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history"(23). He explains that "[b]y the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question—traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement. Secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the 'documents' upon which historians ground their own text, called 'histories'" (20).
3. In "Toward a Comparative New Historicism: Land Tenures and Some Fifteenth-Century Poems," Coldiron points out: "Despite its fine efforts to clarify and then bridge historical distances, however, New Historicist criticism sometimes misses an essential kind of historical distance: the intercultural and interlingual material that is constitutive of and inseparable from older literature" (98). For this reason, Coldiron questions the applicability of New Historicist (monolingual) assumptions to older literatures and therefore advocates a hybrid "comparative new historicism."
4. According to Paul Hamlyn's "Greenblatt: Act 2, Scene 1" in *The Times* (March 28 1997), Greenblatt was asked by Don Lamb, the president and chairman of the board of Norton, to join the team preparing the Norton one-volume edition of Shakespeare and quickly agreed. "It is the ultimate accolade to get

the Norton,” Lisa Jardine, a professor at Queen Mary and Westfield College, applauded. “To get the Norton is a mark of how far Greenblatt has risen above trendy criticism and proves that he wasn’t just an oil slick on the water.”

5. Donald Pease, for instance, in “Toward a Sociology of Literary Knowledge,” puts New Historicism into question by focusing on Greenblatt and unveiling the theoretical blind points in Greenblatt’s texts, especially his discourse of colonialism which plays an essential role in the formation of New Historicism’s discipline.

6. Greenblatt’s stance on the issue of political commitment is less clearly political. In “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” he admits “It’s true that I’m still more uneasy with a politics and a literary perspective that is untouched by Marxist thought, but that doesn’t lead me to endorse propositions or embrace a particular philosophy, politics or rhetoric, *faute de mieux*” (1990: 147). However, he later, in “Resonance and Wonder,” argues that “I am certainly not opposed to methodological self-consciousness, but I am less inclined to see overtness—an explicit articulation of one’s values and methods—as inherently necessary or virtuous. Nor, though I believe that my values are everywhere engaged in my work, do I think that there need be a perfect integration of those values and the objects I am studying” (1990: 167).

7. Lee Patterson claims: “[g]iven both its explicit polemic against a reactionarily ‘idealist’ old historicism, and its own commitment not only to the priority of the social but to conceptualizing it in terms of instability and contradiction, the conservative drift of New Historicism is best understood as an unintended embarrassment” (70).

8. Althusser, in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” defines ideology as “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (223). The imaginary consciousness helps us to make sense of the world but also masks or represses our real relationship to it.

9. In “Resonance and Wonder” and *Marvelous Possessions*, Greenblatt analyzes Cardinal Wolsey’s hat in a small glass case in the library of Christ Church, Oxford, the Old-New Synagogue in the State Jewish Museum in Prague, an intensive, largely unexcavated late Classic Maya site called Coba in the Yucatan and the historical travel manuscripts and colonial discourses—the great Jordanus’s *Marvels of the East*, Macro Polo’s *Book of Marvels*, Mandeville’s *Travels* and Columbus’s log-book.

10. Shklovsky is one of the key Russian Formalists. In his essay “Art as Technique” (1917), he argues that perception becomes automatic once it has become habitual, and that the function of art is to challenge automatization and habitualization, and return a direct grasp on things to the individual perception.

11. See Jana Sawicki’s *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (1991:17-32 and 101-102), Lois McNay’s *Foucault and Feminism* (1992: 9-16), Judith Newton’s “Historicism New and Old: ‘Charles Dickens’ Meets Marxism, Feminism, and West Coast Foucault” (1990: 449-451) and Jon Simons’ *Foucault & the Political* (1995: 105-110).

12. Scott points out that some lesbian critics, like Monique Wittig, argue that lesbians did not belong to the category of “women” because they were the outsider of “the symbolic economy of heterosexual relationships” (6).

13. It is not easy to define both so-called “third-wave feminism” and “post-feminism,” simply because there are many newly emerging feminist moments. However, both similar “isms” questions hegemonic assumptions held by second wave feminism that patriarchal oppression was a universally experienced oppression. They believe that second wave feminism tried to treat the experience of white, middle class, heterosexual women in Western countries as representative of a universal women’s experience. For the detail of their arguments, see *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms* (1997), *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997), *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* (2002) and *Not My Mother’s Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (2004).

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*Chung-Hsiung Lai is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan*  
*Email: chlai@mail.ncku.edu.tw*