

NEW HISTORICISM AND RENAISSANCE CULTURE*

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Abstract

New Historicism considers works of literature as historical texts. New Historicism suggests a subjective approach to literature and was practiced mostly in Renaissance studies. According to new historicism, identity is fashioned by social institutions. Literature is another form of social construct, which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society. Literature is a cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. Therefore, social, political, religious, and economic factors of a given society determine the literature it produces. These elements circulate in society through "social energy," which is encoded in the works of art, which trespasses its historicity and becomes the means to represent the ideology of the culture through resonant texts. New Historicism ventures this through its suggestion of historicity of texts and textuality of history.

Key words: New Historicism, Historical texts, Renaissance studies, fashioning of identity, social energy, ideology of culture, historicity of texts, textuality of history.

Özet

Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Rönesans Kültürü

Yeni tarihselci edebi yaklaşım edebiyat eserlerini tarihsel bir metin olarak algılar ve metne tarihselci bir yaklaşım önerir. Bu edebi eleştiri akımı öncelikle Rönesans araştırmalarında kullanılmıştır. Yeni tarihselciliğin önerdiği tarih yaklaşımı eserlerin yazıldıkları dönemin sosyal ve kültürel bağlamları göz önünde tutularak nesnel kaygılar gözetilmeden öznel bir bakış açısı ile, sosyal, ekonomik, ve politik yaşam göz önünde bulundurularak sorgulanmasıdır. Yeni tarihselci eleştiriye

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göre kişiliğin yapılanması öncelikle sosyal kurumların ürünüdür. Yeni tarihselcilik edebi metni sadece bir ürün, eser olarak değil, aynı zamanda bir yaratan, yapılandıran olarak görür. Bir kültürün birikimi ve toplumsal enerjisiyle, yazarın kaleminden ortaya çıkan eser aynı zamanda kendi kültürünün yeniden yapılanmasına katkıda bulunur ve kültürün ideolojisinin anlaşılmasına aracılık eder. Bu sebeple yeni tarihselci edebi yaklaşım metnin tarihselleşmesi ve tarihin metinselleşmesi arasındaki karşılıklı etkilenmeyi inceler.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yeni Tarihselcilik, tarihsel metin, Rönesans araştırmaları, kişiliğin yapılanması, toplumsal enerji, kültür ideolojisi, metnin tarihselleşmesi, tarihin metinselleşmesi.

...the governing context of all literary investigations must ultimately be an historical one. Literature is a human product, a humane art. It cannot be carried on (created), understood (studied), or appreciated (experienced) outside of its definitive human context. The general science governing that human context is socio-historical.

—Jerome J. Mc Gann, *The Beauty of Inflections* (1988)

1. New Historicism: The Critical Perspective

The Literary Agenda of the 1980s proclaimed a new movement in scholarship, which is aptly termed "new historicism" by Stephen Greenblatt, who is its leading theorist and practitioner. New historicism is practiced and developed by critics like Louis Montrose, Catherine Gallagher and Alan Liu in the United States. New historicists are mainly influenced by French philosopher Michel Foucault and American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In Britain, corresponding theories were set by Cultural Materialists like Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield and Peter Stallybrass, who are influenced by cultural theorist Raymond Williams and also Michel Foucault. The main difference between new historicism and cultural materialism is their point of departure. New historicism appeared in the United States as a reaction against literary formalism. Cultural materialism, on the other hand, was powered by a reaction against traditional understanding of literary history in England. Later, these reactions were blended in the criticism and theory of both movements.

Although this new form of historicism centers history as the subject of research, it differs from the "old" in its understanding of history. While traditional historicism regards history as "universal," new historicism

considers it to be "cultural." According to Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, "new" historicism can be differentiated from "old" historicism "by its lack of faith in 'objectivity' and 'permanence' and its stress not upon the direct recreation of the past, but rather the process by which the past is constructed or invented" (1993: 4).

This new outlook on history also brings about a new outlook on literature and literary criticism. Traditional literary historicism holds that the proper aim of literary criticism is to attempt to reconstruct the past objectively, whereas new historicism suggests that history is only knowable in the same sense literature is—through subjective interpretation: our understanding of the past is always conducted by our present consciousnesses. Louis Montrose, in his "Professing the Renaissance," lays out that as critics we are historically bound and we may only reconstruct the histories through the filter of our consciousness:

[0]ur analyses and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points; that the histories we reconstruct are the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves, historical subjects (1989: 23).

For Montrose, contemporary historicism must recognize that "not only the poet but also the critic exists in history" and that the texts are "inscriptions of history" and furthermore that "our comprehension, representation, interpretation of the texts of the past always proceeds by a mixture of estrangement and appropriation." (1989: 24). Montrose suggests that this kind of critical practice constitutes a continuous dialogue between a "*poetics*" and a "*politics*" of culture (1989: 24).

In Montrose's opinion, the complete recovery of meanings in a diverse historical outlook is considered necessary since older historical criticism is "illusory," in that it attempts to "recover meanings that are in any final or absolute sense authentic, correct, and complete," because scholarship constantly "constructs and delimits" the objects of study and the scholar is "historically positioned vis-a-vis that object:" (1989: 24)

[T]he practice of a new historical criticism invites rhetorical strategies by which to foreground the constitutive acts of textuality that traditional modes of literary history efface or misrecognize. It also necessitates efforts to historicize the present as well as the past, and to historicize the dialectic between them—those

reciprocal historical pressures by which the past has shaped the present and the present reshapes the past (1989: 24-25).

The new historicist outlook on literary criticism is primarily against literary formalism that excludes all considerations external to the "text," and evaluates it in isolation. The preliminary concern of new historicism is to refigure the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they were produced. In terms of new historicism, a literary text can only be evaluated in its social, historical, and political contexts. Therefore, new historicism renounces the formalist conception of literature as an autonomous aesthetic order that transcends the needs and interests of a society. A literary text cannot be considered apart from the society that produced it: a literary text is another form of social significance which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society (Montrose, 1989: 24). Thus, new historicism explains how texts not only represent culturally constructed patterns, but also reproduce cultural constructions:

Contrary to the New Critical insistence on the autonomy of literary texts and on the importance of reading such texts "intrinsically," new historicists believe that it makes no sense to separate literary texts from the social context around them because such texts are the product of complex social "exchanges" or "negotiations" (Booker, 1996: 138).

As a matter of fact, intrinsic reading of a literary text is unattainable not only because literature is performed with close association with society and culture, but also the reader and the critic bring their extrinsic knowledge, assumptions, and preoccupations while they are reading the texts, since "reading is itself a culturally situated exchange" (Booker, 1996: 138).

New historicism is also critical of deconstruction, which also has an ahistorical method. Nevertheless, it has borrowed certain aspects from post-structuralism like the doctrine of plurality—that a literary work may have different connotations to different people.

The theories that are most close to New Historicism are Marxism, Feminism, and Cultural Materialism in their being skeptical of the formalist view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse.

David Forgacs, in his "Marxist Literary Theories," puts forward that regardless of the diversity of Marxist theories, there is one assumption that is

final, which is "that literature can only be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality" (1986: 167). This social reality is "not an indistinct background out of which literature emerges or into which it blends" (1986: 167). The "definite shape" of social reality is "found in history, which Marxists see as a series of struggles between antagonistic social classes and the types of economic production they engage in" (1986: 167).

As Gallagher points out in her "Marxism and New Historicism," one major distinction between new historicism and Marxist criticism is that "[t]he new historicist, unlike the Marxist, is under no nominal compulsion to achieve consistency. She may even insist that historical curiosity can develop independently of political concerns" (1989: 46).

Another point that separates new historicism from Marxism and as well as traditional historicism is that new historicists try to reconstruct the ideology through diverse agents. According to Catherine Gallagher, the literary atmosphere of the 1980s challenged the traditional order of importance while evaluating the significance of the agents:

The traditionally important economic and political agents and events have been displaced or supplemented by people and phenomena that once seemed wholly insignificant, indeed outside of history: women, criminals, the insane, sexual practices and discourses, fairs, festivals, plays of all kinds. Just as the sixties, the effort in the eighties has been to question and destabilize the distinction between sign systems and things, the representation and the represented, history and text (1989: 43).

2. A New Outlook on Literary History

Literature, for new historicism, is a social and cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness, and it cannot be diminished to a product of a single mind. Therefore, the best way of analysis is achieved through the lens of the culture that produced it. Literature is a specific vision of history and not a distinct category of human activity. Man himself is a social construct; there is no such thing as a universal human nature that surpasses history: history is a series of "ruptures" between ages and man. As a consequence, the critic is trapped in his own historicity. No one can rise above their own cultural formations, their own ideological upbringing in order to understand the past in its own terms. Therefore, it is impossible for a modern reader to appreciate a literary work as its contemporaries experienced it. As a result, the best approach to literary criticism is to try to

reconstruct the "ideology" of its culture by taking the text as its basis and by exploring diverse areas of cultural factors.

The initial endeavor of new historicism is to relocate the literary text among nonliterary "discursive practices" of an age by making use of documents like chronicles, legal reports, pamphlets and by analyzing other forms of art like painting, sculpture, music, etc. Nevertheless, history is not viewed as the cause or source of literature. The relationship between history and literature is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as product and producer, end and source of history. Stephen Greenblatt explains the new historicist effort to establish relations between different discursive practices as an attempt "to develop terms to describe the ways in which material—here official documents, private papers, newspaper clippings, and so forth—is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property" (1982: 3). Therefore, if the circumstances of a literary text are impossible to recuperate, the concern of the literary critic should be to recover the ideology that gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to spread within the culture.

Catherine Gallagher explains new historicism as "reading literary and non-literary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts" (1989: 37). Gallagher moreover puts forward that the practitioners of new historicism "generally posit no hierarchy of cause and effect as they trace the connections among texts, discourses, power, and the constitution of a subjectivity" (1989: 37). Louis Montrose asserts that the focus of this new vein of literary criticism is an attempt to refigure "the socio-cultural field within which canonical renaissance literary and dramatic works were originally produced" and to resituate them "not only in relationship to other genres and modes of discourse but also in relationship to contemporaneous social institutions and non-discursive practices" (1989: 17).

Montrose asserts that the new orientation to history can be characterized as a "reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (1989: 24). With "the historicity of texts" Montrose suggests "the cultural specificity, the social embeddedness, of all modes of writing," referring both to the critically evaluated texts and to "the texts in which we study them" (1989: 24). With "the textuality of history" Montrose suggests that we cannot have "access to a full and authentic past," and we cannot have access to "a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question" (1989: 20).

Despite the bulky theory written on new historicist criticism, Stephen Greenblatt asserts that he attempts to "situate [new historicism] as a practice—a practice rather than a doctrine" since he finds it to be "no

doctrine at all" (1989: 1). Catherine Gallagher points out that the critics of new historicism find its politics to be "obnoxious" (1989: 37).

Aram Veesser, who has compiled the chief articles of new historicists with diverse voices in his *The New Historicism* manages, however, to bring together certain "key assumptions" that constantly appear in new historicist theory¹. Veesser also points out that new historicists developed a method that describes "culture in action" (1989: xi).

3. New Historicism and Renaissance Culture: Through a Larger Picture

Greenblatt's criticism is mostly centered on the drama of early modern period. In his analyses, he tries to capture the relationship between culture and theater.

Clifford Geertz, a precursor of New Historicism, asserts that "[t]here is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (1973: 51). Geertz does not see culture as "complexes of concrete behavior patterns—customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters" (1973: 44) but as "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions...—for the governing of behavior" (1973: 49). As Greenblatt asserts "[s]elf-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meaning that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment" (1980: 3). According to Greenblatt literature "functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of these concrete behaviors of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (1980: 4). Thus, the author, social factors, and the text all help us understand the larger picture. New historicist criticism is concerned with these three functions and all three must be the concern of literary criticism since,

if interpretation limits itself to the behavior of the author, it becomes literary biography (in either a conventionally historical or psychoanalytic mode) and risks losing a sense of the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works

¹ The "key assumptions Aram Veesser points out are as follows: that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably; that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature; that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe (1989: xi).

participate. If alternatively, literature is viewed exclusively as the expression of social rules and instructions, it risks being absorbed entirely into an ideological superstructure ... Finally, if literature is seen only as a detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioral codes, a view from a safe distance, we drastically diminish our grasp of art's concrete functions in relation to individuals and to institutions, both of which shrink into an obligatory "historical background" that adds little to our understanding. We drift back toward a conception of art as addressed to a timeless, cultureless, universal human essence or, alternatively as a self-regarding, autonomous, closed system—in either case, art as opposed to social life (Greenblatt, 1980: 4).

Instead, Greenblatt aims to introduce a "more cultural or anthropological criticism"² (1980: 4). Greenblatt's view of anthropological criticism grasps culture and its observers "drawn to a metaphorical grasp of reality."³ And such interpretation must be self-conscious and understand literature as "a part of the system of signs that constitute a given culture:"

Social actions are themselves always 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 (1980: 5).

Literature is another attempt to evaluate early modern culture since it is an implicit emissary of public signification:

Language, like other sign systems, is a collective construction, our interpretive task must be to grasp more sensitively the consequences of this fact by investigating both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the word in the literary text (1980: 5).

Still, Greenblatt is aware that literary interpretation cannot fully reconstruct the culture of the 16th century, nor can the critic reenter the world

² The "anthropological criticism" of Greenblatt is in tune with Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, where he asserts that the understanding of a discourse is based on dispersion rather than unity. We should abandon preexisting notions of unity in order to understand the formation and development of discourses.

³ Metaphorical reality later becomes a crucial factor of Greenblatt's theories as he puts forward in his *Shakespearean Negotiations*.

of a distant past leaving behind one's own consciousness. This may seem like a defect in "articulate criticism"⁴ but such defects can be compensated for by constantly returning to literary and non-literary texts of the time which may reveal "the material necessities and social pressures that men and women daily confronted" (1980: 5). These literary and non-literary texts, which may help our understanding of the distant past, must be viewed not because "we may see through them the underlying and prior historical principles but rather that we may interpret the interplay of their symbolic structures with those perceivable in the careers of their authors and in the larger social world as constituting a single, complex process of self-fashioning and, through this interpretation, come closer to understanding how literary and social identities were formed in this culture" (1980: 6).

4. Fashioning of the Self and the Society in Early Modern Period

Stephen Greenblatt in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, suggests that during the Renaissance, the fashioning of identity, both in formation and expression, is primarily a product of social institutions. That is the reason why the "fashioning" of identity was less autonomous since in Renaissance "... family, state, and religious institutions impose a rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle class subjects" (Greenblatt, 1980: 1). Therefore, identity fashioning is artificial and imposed during early modern period. Although, there has been a long-time interest in character identities as Chaucer's personas show us, Greenblatt suggests that especially in the 16th century this interest in the fashioning of human identity had become more "self-conscious" and understood as "a manipulative, artful process" (Greenblatt, 1980: 2). This sense of fashioning is not seen in Chaucer's poetry despite the interest in particular characters. For Greenblatt, 16th century poetry like Spenser's *Faerie Queene* or *Amoretti* presents a much deeper awareness of self-fashioning. (1980: 2)

Greenblatt evaluates four 16th century authors, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Wyatt, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, who are all mobile characters, who moved toward diverse paths than what normally would be expected from them. All these authors knew about fashioning since they had to adapt themselves to different identities, as they did not follow the expected pattern. Being sons of middle class families, they did not inherit their personalities; they had to reinvent them (1980: 8).

Greenblatt adds that there is also a "direction enacted by the works of literature in relation to society: a shift from absorption by community, religious faith, or diplomacy toward the establishment of literary creation as a profession in its own right" (1980: 8).

⁴ "What Greenblatt means by articulate criticism is accurate and proper literary criticism.

in his Introduction to *Representing the English Renaissance*, Greenblatt further explains his attempt in evaluating the Renaissance texts in a historical contingency. He argues that any form of art is performed in a cultural environment and producing literature is not a private matter but a social act with its "contests" and "negotiations." Imagination is created in a social environment and is a product of public condition:

These contests and negotiations are all social; they do not occur in a private chamber of the artist's imagination, for that imagination, in its materials and resources and aspirations is already a social construct. This does not mean that art can be reduced to social structures such as class, status or kinship, any more than it can simply be collapsed into the material basis for its production and consumption. A culture's diverse social constructions are at once interconnected and differentiated, so that if, for example, a culturally dominant conception of social inequality shapes artistic representations, those representations have at the same time the power to constrain, shape, alter, and even resist the conception of social inequality (1988: viii).

Therefore, social construction is twofold: Social structures create public imagination and at the same time, art, which is a social construct itself, helps alter and shape the social pattern. History and literature are thus interrelated and are "agents" of meaning:

For history is not simply discovered in the precincts surrounding the literary text or the performance or the image; it is found in the artworks themselves, as enabling condition, shaping force, forger of meaning, censor, community of patronage and reception. And the work of art is not the passive surface on which this historical experience leaves its stamp but one of the creative agents in the fashioning and re-fashioning of this experience (1988: viii).

in his essay "Murdering Peasants," Greenblatt puts forward that history and art are not constituent but their production requires numerous elements; and the outcome of social and political values are introduced to us through the text:

The production and consumption of such works are not unitary...; they always involve a multiplicity of interests, however well organized, for the crucial reason that art is social and hence

presumes more than one consciousness. And in response to the art of the past, we inevitably register, whether we wish or not, the shifts of value and interest that are produced in the struggles of social and political life (1988: 14).

Greenblatt also asserts that historical forces play a great role on generic codes. During the Stuart and Tudor times there was unrest, class hostility, inflation, unemployment, together with religious and political disturbances:

Instead of depicting the ordinary operation of the law, functioning to defend property, English artists most often narrate events at once more menacing and more socially prestigious, event colored by feudal fantasies in which the sixteenth-century gentry dressed their craving for honor. Thus instead of the assizes and a hempen rope, we have tales of mass rebellion and knightly victories (1988: 15).

Therefore, artists preferred to narrate events that belonged to the feudal society, instead of capitalist relationships.

Greenblatt's later criticism, which appears in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, defines New Historicism as a "turn away from the formal, decontextualized analysis," and suggests an "embeddedness of cultural objects in the contingencies of history" (1990: 271). New Historicism is not inclined to use the word "man" as a general term to refer to all human beings who are not thought as "making concrete choices in given circumstances at particular times" (1990: 271). The interest is towards the "particular, contingent cases" when "the selves fashioned and acting according to the generative rules and conflicts of a given culture," since reality is not in the "abstract universal" (Greenblatt, 1990: 272). Through the expectations of the individual's class, gender, religion, race, and national identity, history is shaped and reshaped. All the elements in a society are an agent from minimalism to marginality:

Indeed, if there is any inevitability in the new historicism's vision of history it is this insistence on agency, for even inaction or extreme marginality is understood to possess meaning and therefore to imply intention. Every form of behavior, in this view, is a strategy: taking up arms or taking flight is a significant social action, but so is staying put, minding one's business, turning one's face to the wall. Agency is virtually inescapable (1990: 271-72).

Such agency could be multilayered, diversely motivated, and subversive:

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 order of things may turn out to subvert it (1990: 272).

Political patterns may change, at times abruptly, and one form of transformation may be the cause of chain reactions creating progressive circumstances (1990: 272).

Greenblatt points out that works of art, even though they may have been produced by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are actually products of collective negotiation and exchange. This "negotiation and exchange" pay homage to Foucault's "regularities" or rules⁵, both avoiding "the kind of thought for which events, texts, or social formations represent larger, more 'real' formations" (During, 1992: 200).

5. "The Desire to Speak with the Dead:" Social Energy in Early Modern England

Stephen Greenblatt opens the first essay in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* with his "desire to speak with the dead" (1990: 1). He asserts that the dead left "textual traces of themselves" and these traces "make themselves heard in the voices of the living" (1990: 1). Some of these texts are less resonant than the others, but the literature simulates "in the formal, self-conscious miming of life" and therefore is more functional than other textual traces left by the dead because "simulations are undertaken in full awareness of the absence of life they contrive to represent, and hence they may skillfully anticipate and compensate for the vanishing of the actual life that has empowered them" (1990: 1).

To the question of how much of that life got into texts, Greenblatt offers the idea that especially Shakespeare's plays had "precipitated out of a sublime confrontation between a total artist and a totalizing society" (1990: 2). The total artist, Greenblatt explains, is he who is complete at the moment of creation through training, resourcefulness, and talent (1990: 2). Totalizing society is that which "posits an occult network linking all human, natural,

⁵ According to Foucault, external conditions govern the rules of formation of discourse. These "discursive regularities" are the objects, forms, concepts, and themes of discourse, which are conditions for existence.

and cosmic powers" and that which "claims on behalf of its ruling elite a privileged place in this network" (1990: 2).

One should, on one hand, "pull back from a notion of artistic completeness" and "totalizing power," and on the other, strive for complete literary understanding (1990: 3). This does not happen by taking the "text itself as "the perfect, unsubstitutable, freestanding container of all of its meanings," but one should follow the "textual traces" since "there is no escape from contingency" (1990: 3).

Literary pleasure and interest is "a collective production" since language as the "heart of literary power" is the "supreme instance of collective creation" (1990: 4). In textual analysis it is as if the artist produces only with personal skill and effort, as if "whole cultures possessed their shared emotions, stories and dreams only because a professional caste invented them and parceled them out" (1990: 4). On the contrary, Greenblatt compares the function of the Renaissance artist with the Renaissance monarchs since "at some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention" since it is "the symbolic embodiment of desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects" and also "the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear, the agent rather than the maker of social will" (1990: 4).

According to Greenblatt, Shakespearean theater is openly the product of collective intentions, and the moment of writing is a social moment. Moreover, the theater compels its audience to a collectivity since Shakespearean theater "depends upon a felt community: there is no dimming of lights, no attempts to isolate and awaken the sensibilities of each individual member of the audience, no sense of the disappearance of the crowd" (1990: 5).

The textual traces that Greenblatt and new historicism are very interested in are "signs of contingent social practices" (1990: 5). Therefore, the questions we ask of them should be how these collective "beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption" so that we can examine the boundaries that divide cultural practices appreciated as art forms and other contiguous forms of expression:

We can attempt to determine how these specially demarcated zones were invested with the power to confer pleasure or excite interest or generate anxiety. The idea is not to strip away and discard the enchanted impression of aesthetic autonomy but to inquire into the objective conditions of this enchantment, to discover how the traces of social circulation are effaced (1990: 5).

Greenblatt explains that there is a "social energy" that we experience within ourselves, whose "contemporary existence depends upon an irregular chain of historical transactions that leads back to the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (1990: 6). There is no direct transmission of the aesthetic power from Shakespeare's time to our own as the circumstances are continually and radically refigured. This does not mean that we are perpetually locked into the present, but that these refigurations work as "signs of the inescapability of a historical process, a structured negotiation and exchange" which are "evident in the initial moments of empowerment" (1990: 6). There may be no direct link between Shakespeare's plays and ourselves, but still, the "life" of the literary work lingers after the death of the author and the culture it belongs to. This is a "historical consequence;" and the "social energy," is "initially encoded in these works" (1990: 6).

Social energy, for Greenblatt, is traceable indirectly with its capacity of "verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences" (1990: 6), Social energy, aesthetically, has a minimal predictability, and a minimal range" and it reaches out beyond a single creator to a number of people. Furthermore, aesthetic forms of social energy have a minimal adaptability, so that they survive certain social and cultural changes (1990: 7).

Greenblatt's theory offers "typology of transactional modes" where he "figures the barriers, hierarchies and distances, across which transactions move, spatially" (During, 1992: 200). There are "zones" through which transactions change place. In order to explain this, he offers three modes of cultural transpositions. "Appropriation" is the move from one zone to the other freely, which engages language as the primary mode of circulation. "Purchase" refers to objects circulating in exchange for money. "Symbolic acquisition" is the theater's exchanging from one zone to the other through "representation." He asserts that symbolic acquisition can either be "metonymical" or "metaphorical." Metonymical acquisition occurs when the theater represents a part of the whole.⁶ Metaphorical acquisition, on the other hand, is in question, when something is represented instead of another—like changing names, settings with distant ones in order to avoid censorship. Also "simulation" may lead the theater to borrow from other zones when the actor simulates "what is already understood to be a theatrical representation" (Greenblatt, 1990: 10).

⁶ Theater being the representative of the whole culture it was produced in.

⁷ Other than his histories, Shakespeare's plays never take place in England. Still through metonymical acquisition, the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* is taken as an exemplar of contemporary London.

According to Greenblatt, social energy circulated in early modern England. His concept of social energy is similar to Foucault's concept of "power" which existed as "power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience" (1990: 12). However, unlike Foucault, Greenblatt does not exclude the market in his theory. As Derrida puts it, for Greenblatt, "...social energy, itself the expression of an expansionist, mercantile society, circulates into the theatre simultaneously through social (especially economic) and rhetorical channels, which continually displace the intensities through which energy is experienced" (1992: 201).

While he is examining the English theater in Elizabethan times, Greenblatt asserts that social energy is best understood through certain "abjurations" which he lists as follows:

1. There can be no appeals to genius as the sole origin of the energies of great art.
2. There can be no motiveless creation.
3. There can be no transcendent or timeless or unchanging representation.
4. There can be no autonomous artifacts.
5. There can be no expression without an origin and an object, a from and for.
6. There can be no art without social energy.
7. There can be no spontaneous generation of social energy (1988: 12).

Greenblatt also lists certain "generative principles" that are tied to these negations:

1. Mimesis is always accompanied by—indeed is always produced by—negotiation and exchange.
2. The exchanges to which art is a party may involve money, but they may involve other currency as well. Money is only one kind of cultural capital.
3. The agents of exchange may appear to be individuals (most often, an isolated artist is imagined in relation to a faceless, amorphous entity designated society or culture), but individuals are themselves the products of collective exchange (1988: 12).

It is through these "abjurations" and "generative principles" that Greenblatt ventures into his new historicist analysis of Elizabethan theater.

Since it was first introduced in the 1980s, New Historicism has been a powerful vein of criticism that influenced critics and historians alike, and this new outlook on history and literature ventured not only the notion that every single person lives her own historicity and ensuing ideology with codes embedded in the society, but also the fact that objective approach to a culture in the past is impossible, as the critic, like the author, is historically bound and cannot escape the power of her culture and ideology. Text, on one hand is a collective creation that contains the needs and desires of a society, and on the other is an agent that helps reshape the society in return. Therefore, texts can be evaluated not to achieve an objective reconstruction of the past, but to understand the social energy in order to decipher the ideology of a given culture.

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