INTRODUCTION: GREENBLATT AND NEW HISTORICISM

by Michael Payne

Stephen Greenblatt is the most influential practitioner of new historicism (or what he sometimes calls cultural poetics). This Reader makes available for the first time in one volume his most important writings on culture, Renaissance studies, and Shakespeare. It also features occasional pieces on subjects as diverse as miracles, traveling in Laos and China, and story-telling, which suggest the range of his intellectual and cultural interests and the versatility of his styles as a writer. Taken together, the texts collected here dispel such misconceptions as that new historicism is antithetical to literary and aesthetic value, that it reduces the historical to the literary or the literary to the historical, that it denies human agency and creativity, that it is somehow out to subvert the politics of cultural and critical theory, or that it is anti-theoretical. Such categorical dismissals of new historicism (which is an interdisciplinary and multiplicitous way of knowing) simply do not stand up against a careful reading of these texts. The intended audience for this book includes students of the Renaissance and Shakespeare, those interested primarily in cultural and critical theory, and general readers who have encountered Greenblatt’s journalistic writing and who may want to know more about his work.

Admittedly there is a certain irony here in collecting, singling out, and celebrating Greenblatt’s writing in an anthology such as this, because much of his scholarship has been determinedly part of a collective project that has included, for example, the members of the Editorial Board of the journal Representations, including Catherine Gallagher, with whom he recently coauthored Practicing New Historicism, which is a key text for understanding its subject. (Indeed, his notion of authorship, including his own, seems closely allied to Michel Foucault’s declaration that “The author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture.”) Even the earliest manifesto for a new historicism appeared quite modestly as Greenblatt’s introduction to a collection of essays (a reprint of an issue of Genre published by the University of Oklahoma Press entitled The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance), which included important papers by eleven other scholars.

Greenblatt begins that introduction with Queen Elizabeth’s understandably bitter reaction to the revival of Shakespeare’s Richard II on the eve of the Essex
The introduction to Franchising (pp. 5-6) is a critical part of the learning experience in the business world. It is essential for students to understand the basics of franchising, including its history, benefits, and challenges. This section also covers the different types of franchises and the legal aspects of franchising.

1. **Introduction: Quaint and New Histories**

   While keeping in mind that the new perspective is a collection of processes rather than a school of thought, we may apply a new level of understanding to the field of franchising.

2. **Types of Franchises:**

   - **Initial Franchise**
   - **Royalty Franchise**
   - **Co-Op Franchise**

3. **Legal Aspects:**

   - **Franchise Agreement**
   - **Franchise Disclosures**
   - **Franchise Laws**

4. **Success in Franchising:**

   - **Franchisee Support**
   - **Franchisee Training**
   - **Franchisee Retention**

5. **Franchising in the 21st Century:**

   - **Technology and Franchising**
   - **Social Media and Franchising**
   - **International Franchising**

6. **Conclusion:**

   Franchising is a dynamic and evolving industry, and understanding its principles is crucial for success in the business world.
Whereas Augustine declared in his Sermon 169, “Hands off yourself... try to build up yourself, and you build a ruin,” during the sixteenth century there began to be a widespread self-consciousness about the artful capacity of human beings to fashion their own identity. Thus, for example, Spenser writes that it is his purpose in The Faerie Queene “to fashion a gentleman,” and again in the Amoretti he uses the word “fashion” to designate the forming of the self. Similarly in his translation of the New Testament and in his own writing Tyndale uses the same verb to refer to purposeful shaping of identity. Drawing on Clifford Geertz’s observation that “there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture” (p. 3), Greenblatt adds, “Self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of... the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment.” Furthermore, literature plays a key role in the self-fashioning cultural system of the time, functioning “in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes” (p. 4).

As he proceeds to elucidate the theoretical foundation—both literary and anthropological—of his book, Greenblatt indirectly provides one of his most succinct statements about the distinctive insight of new historicism:

Social actions are themselves always embedded in systems of public signification, always grasped, even by their makers, in acts of interpretation... 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 world in the literary text. (p. 5)

There are significant echoes here of both Geertz’s Interpretation of Cultures and Foucault’s The Order of Things.

For the epigraph to his excellent “General Introduction” to The Norton Shakespeare, Greenblatt takes a familiar line from Ben Jonson’s dedicatory poem “To the memory of my beloved, the author Mr William Shakespeare and what he hath left us”: “He was not of an age, but for all time!” Earlier in the same poem Jonson seems to have set up something of a contradiction, for beginning at line 17 he addresses Shakespeare as

Soul of the Age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!
My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further, to make thee a room:
Thou art a Monument, without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy Book doth live,
And we have wise to read, and praise to give.

Indeed, there are at least two possible contradictions (or paradoxes) here. The first is that Shakespeare is addressed as the “Soul of the Age” in which he lived, only later to be declared to be “not of an age, but for all time!” as though he were both the essence of his historical moment and an instance of its transcendence. Here Jonson may be playing with a buried allusion to Hamlet’s address to the players who come to Elsinore, when he explains to them the purpose of playing as holding a mirror up to nature. Functioning as such a mirror (into which the audience looks to see certain hitherto unapprehended aspects of themselves), plays (Hamlet says all plays, ancient and modern) have the power “to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (III.v.20–2). Perhaps Hamlet means here that one of the three purposes of a play is to convey not only a coherent sense of an age (its form) but also what it feels like to live under its weight (its pressure).

The second Jonsonian contradiction (or paradox) also plays on a buried quotation, this time from the couplet in Sonnet 18:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Jonson transfers this promise of immortality that Shakespeare makes to the Young Man of the Sonnets back to Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare is not dead, Jonson proclaims, let him rise up and make more burial space for Beaumont. He needs no tomb because he has his own special monument, which is this 1623 Folio that Jonson celebrates; but this book is a monument with special powers because it makes Shakespeare live again whenever the text is read. As to whether Shakespeare is the essence of his age or whether he is not of it but for all time—whether he is historically immanent or historically transcendent—Jonson never tells us; he leaves it to his reader to judge.

Greenblatt brilliantly draws from all of this the thematic energy that charges through his detailed General Introduction, knowing full well, as he does, that introductions to Shakespeare have themselves a complex and troubled history. His opening five paragraphs are, however, yet again a subtle manifesto for new historicism, providing as they do some of the key historiographical themes that are taken up by Greenblatt and his three collaborative editors in their introductions to the plays and poems that follow. In those five paragraphs, Greenblatt takes his readers carefully through three essential points (since the publication of this text in 1997, we may wish to recall, there have already been hundreds of thousands of undergraduates who have studied these words). First, he acknowledges that Shakespeare’s “art is the product of peculiar historical circumstances and specific conventions, four centuries distant from our own” (p. 1). Thus, the modern student of Shakespeare can profit from the accounts of life and death, wealth, imports and monopolies, class structure, riots and disorder, the legal status of women, the Reformation in England, Henry VIII’s children, the English Bible, Queen Elizabeth, and other such topics. His second point, though, is that the reader should never forget that Shakespeare was an artist and that art, first and last, is about pleasure: “The starting point, and perhaps the ending point as well...