aristocratic alliances of English playhouses and acting companies, which gained legal protection and financial patronage from the crown and nobility, as opposed to the mercantile classes. Nonetheless, the fact that sophisticated urban drama was an important vehicle of religious and, to a lesser extent, social reform in the Netherlands is just one of the fascinating discoveries about European early modern culture to be gleaned from this impressive book.

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Gallagher, Catherine, and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Pp. ix, 249.

Practicing New Historicism is a gracefully written account of the genesis, guiding principles, and, of course, the practices that have guided the development of this broadly influential school of literary criticism. Gallagher and Greenblatt usefully supplement our current understanding of the school's genesis in dialogues between like-minded faculty members at the University of California, Berkeley, during the 1970s, who, as they show, were not driven by the "ressentiment" of which its detractors often accuse them. While admitting some "tinge of aggression" toward earlier close-reading practices that "intensified . . . wondering admiration" toward "genius," they primarily situate their practice in the kind of "ideology critique that played a central role in the Marxist theories in which we were steeped." Finding themselves uncomfortable, however, with "such key concepts as superstructure and base or imputed class consciousness," they transformed "the notion of ideology critique into discourse analysis" (pp. 8–9) in ways that the rest of the volume goes on to demonstrate once again. Nowhere, however, do they attempt to modify or refute the determinist assumptions associated with this kind of ideology critique, but instead simply omit their most controversial premise: that even the most apparently innovative, iconoclastic, or indeed "subversive" literary texts are undercut by strategies of "containment" that place them in the service of the dominant ideology.

This omission seems intended to buttress the book's general project of emphasizing the positive rather than the negative elements of New Historicist practice previously pointed out by critics. Its introduction in particular emphasizes how this practice enables the appreciation of aesthetic power without "uncritically endorsing the fantasies that the representations articulate" in the realm of Power (p. 9). Following Foucault in rejecting the alternative Marxist tradition of Lukács, Gramsci, and Goldmann, in which "consciousness" remains a "primary object of analysis" (p. 61), their more liberating approach "embodies" cultural ideology in material objects and actual bodies. For New Historicists, these are the key "sites" of social construction, even when they appear to be mere byproducts of nature or (to use the word re-echoing throughout the book's final chapters) mere "leftovers" of culture. Such objects supply the "Touch of the Real" proclaimed in their first

chapter, which also emphasizes that, in contrast with their predecessors — Clifford Geertz and British Marxist/materialists like Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson — their interest lies in fragmenting and displacing these marginal “matters,” rather than in reintegrating them into either dominant or oppositional discourses. Yet while this strategy clearly avoids the “category of consciousness,” it also calls in question the very affinities they claim. For by omitting it, they sacrifice not only the Marxist/materialists’ ability to generate “deep” historical analysis, but also Geertzian anthropology’s ability to produce socially “thick descriptions.” Moreover, by abandoning the primary purpose of ideology critique — to attack the “fetishization” of material objects and/or bodies divorced from broader social contexts — they often seem to succumb to this fetishization themselves.

Their consequent inability to produce an authentically “new” cultural history is all too evident here — ironically, nowhere more so than when they attempt to justify the suggestive but loosely contextualized use of anecdote closely associated with their school. Gallagher and Greenblatt defend this practice by claiming:

We sought the very thing that made anecdotes ciphers to many historians: a vehement and cryptic particularity that would make one pause or even stumble on the threshold of history. But for this purpose, it seemed that only certain *kinds* of anecdotes would do: outlandish and irregular ones held out the best hope for preserving the radical strangeness of the past by gathering heterogeneous elements — seemingly ephemeral details, overlooked anomalies, suppressed anachronisms — into an ensemble where ground and figure, “history” and “text” continually shifted. The desired anecdotes would not, as in the old historicism, epitomize epochal truths, but would instead undermine them. (p. 51)

On their own premises, the method would seem to be successful, since their approach to ephemera and anachronism does necessarily fragment the “epochal truths” with which it interacts. Yet as their critics have regularly complained, this procedure inevitably makes their method parasitic upon earlier historical paradigms, to which it holds a parodic or disruptive mirror. Their relationship to older methods of close reading is similarly parasitic, for by simply replacing organic patterns and continuities with inconsistencies and disruptions, they merely reproduce New Critical method in a more deeply ironic and (insofar as practical criticism is concerned) truly marginal mode. As a result, their attempt to associate their method with that of Erich Auerbach is at once strangely appropriate and entirely unconvincing. For when Auerbach isolates apparently similar fragments of a text for close scrutiny, like the Russian Formalists and American New Critics, he always means them to stand as metonymies or synecdoches for the whole. But as they themselves insist, New Historicists not only have little interest in, but often a hostility toward, the text as a whole, preferring (as both their theoretical statements and practices suggest) to focus on the leftovers, blank spaces, and blind spots which fill out the rest of the book.

For all of the reasons suggested above, the book's three final chapters are not entirely effective. The first of these, "The Wound in the Wall," details the "gaps" in Uccello's predella to Joos van Gent's huge altarpiece, "The Communion of the Apostles," while the next, "The Potato in the Materialist Imagination" (which at times seems a sly self-satire), details the "gaps" between bodies made of bread and bodies bred of potatoes. No conclusions are drawn from either form of gap, whose silent fissures are made to "speak" (through intriguing but unresolved authorial suggestions) as ideological "supplements" of sorts. Yet they can only be supplements "of sorts" once ideology has been made most "present," chiefly by its fragmentation or absence. As this vocabulary is meant to suggest, while it makes no direct allusions to Derridean deconstruction, this more than any previous work reveals deconstruction's many underlying parallels with New Historicism: amorphous concepts of ideology and agency, free-floating notions of textuality, and playful "interventions" in standard social and literary history.

The New Historical retreat from historical continuity is particularly evident in Greenblatt's chapters on early modern representation. "The Wound in the Wall" focuses on two kinds of "aporia" in the Uccello predella, which illustrates a Eucharistic morality tale: the crime of unbelieving Jews who "torture" the sacred wafer or host is inevitably exposed, as its "truly" living blood flows through a gap in the wall of their house. Using this gap as an instance of all the related "tears where energies, desires, and repressions flow out into the world" (p. 109), Greenblatt fits the punishment to the crime by tossing his readers into the critical void: is the hole meant to be accidental or miraculous, aesthetic or ideological, realistic or fantastic (p. 103)? While such questions may seem irresolvable to the uninitiated, they seem strangely incongruous in a putatively historicist essay like this one. For in early modern texts, blood nearly always *will* "out," as it does not only in *Macbeth* but in the vast body of hermetic lore recording how the blood of a murdered man's corpse "naturally" begins to flow in the presence of his murderer. Since the idea is repeated in various forms from Virgil through Spenser, the chapter's neglect of these sources is again appropriately but also annoyingly aporetic. The same is true of the chapter on the "Real Presence" in *Hamlet*, which, while convincingly tracing this problematic doctrine to some of the melancholy Dane's more macabre jokes, fails to connect the classic Protestant problem of the hypothetical mice who might eat the living host's crumbs to "The Mousetrap," the famous inset play featured in the chapter title. Since the Eucharistic controversy was literally a life-or-death issue for its contemporary audience, the chapter's failure firmly to connect either the inset play or the drama as a whole to the ideological disputes bitterly dividing Protestants from Catholics once again signals a retreat from anything resembling "real" history.

The final chapter (presumably by Gallagher) produces the textually dense and historically suggestive reading for which New Historicists are famous, although with similarly inconclusive results. Although much of its data on late-Victorian materialist supernaturalism is fascinating in itself, like the earlier chapters it does little to elucidate the style, plot, or theme, much less the ideological drive of its

textual object, Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Instead, it flirts with fragments of all these subjects without coming close to identifying any but the most amorphous social vision in any of them. While in its own terms this avoidance of closure represents a certain kind of achievement, in the end it comes across as an elegiac one — an unspoken testimony to the unrealized ambitions of the New Historicism itself.

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Joan-Pau Rubiés. *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xxii, 443.

A well-organised demonstration of the importance of the popular tradition of travel narrative in the development of a critical, secular approach to the study of non-European cultures and peoples, Rubiés' book also challenges a common tendency to generalise Said's critique of "orientalism." Careful analysis of a number of Western travellers' reports shows that they were often less bound by their own cultures than were contemporary Muslim observers, who viewed India through the prism of Persian and Mughal norms. Pre-eighteenth-century European orientalism is, according to Rubiés, rare except in the works of armchair tourists, like Botero, who drew on travel narratives to develop overarching theories about "eastern" despotism, contrasted with European civility.

Covering Western travel writers from Gerald of Wales in the twelfth century to the seventeenth-century Roman aristocrat Pietro della Valle, and based on careful reading of a wide range of sources — Persian, Arabic and South Indian — the book presents a sensible and convincing argument that, over the centuries, secular observers of the Indian world developed an increasing ability to distinguish between their subjects' culture and religion. Here they moved much more quickly than most of the missionaries who followed Portuguese expansion to the East. Until the troubled efforts of the Jesuit Nobili to accommodate Indian custom while pursuing an evangelical goal, most ecclesiastics seemed unable to see Hindu culture on its own terms. This did not dissuade lay writers from doing so, but it meant that they usually avoided any objective discussion of religious practice. Nonetheless they played a substantial role in providing Europeans like Montaigne with evidence that could be used to develop an "anthropology" that was relatively unencumbered by Christian presuppositions and that prepared the way for the critique of religion as culture underlying much of the thought of the Enlightenment.

The connections between humanist high culture and the frame of reference of most of the writers studied here were slight, but the interesting presentation of the narrative of Niccolò Conti (who lived in the east for thirty-five years) in a work "edited" by Poggio Bracciolini shows that they were not unimportant. Poggio used Conti to correct the information provided by ancients like Ptolemy and Strabo,