
It is the melancholy fate of all historicisms to be swallowed up by history. New Historicism (ah, that intemperate 'new') reaches the age of consent this year if dated from the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning in 1980. Origins do have their uses when considering a critical approach so inimical to an exercise in historical abstraction. As Claire Colebrook describes it here, accredited New Historists are remarkably shy of any theoretical posture, declaration, or demonstration that might ossify over time into a transhistorical body of theory. Committed to the 'impossibility of history', particularly a reflexive historical narrative, New Historicism has sought to vanish down the intricate, present-tense corridors of the literary text. Under New Historicism the text becomes a tardis, much more capacious on the inside than you ever thought possible, contiguous with all other textual time travellers but irreducibly distinct.

The ostentatious empiricism of New Historical...