If I had invented my writings, I would have done so as a perpetual revolution. For it is necessary in each situation to create an appropriate mode of exposition, to invent the law of the singular event, to take into account the presumed or desired addressee, and, at the same time, to make as if this writing will determine the reader, who will learn to read (“to live”) something he or she was not accustomed to receiving from anywhere else.

—Jacques Derrida, Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview

To write a book is in a certain way to abolish the preceding one. Finally one perceives what one has done is—both comfort and deception—rather close to what one has already written.

—Michel Foucault, Foucault Live

Hopelessly, like death’s heads, foreign words await their resurrection in a better order of things.

—Theodor Adorno, “Words from Abroad"

And this brings us back to psychoanalysis, which is where we started from.

—Sigmund Freud, “Dreams and Occultism,” New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis

The only discernible difference between a method and bricolage is the joker. The principle of bricolage is to make something by means of something else, a mast with matchstick, a chicken wing with tissue meant for the thigh, and so forth. Just as the most general model of method is the game, the good model for what is deceptively called bricolage is the joker.

—Michel Serres, The Parasite

Telepathy is the interruption of the psychoanalysis of psychoanalysis.

—Jacques Derrida, “Telepathy”

People don’t want to read nowadays, substituting thematic reaction for reading . . . and if people don’t want to read, they are caught up in the fetishistic project.

—Joel Fineman, fragments in endnote five of the posthumously published “Shakespeare’s Ear”
Cinematic Writing Machines

We may learn something more about academic historicist fantasy and the historian's uncanny by turning away from Davis's dissatisfaction with The Return of Martin Guerre to engage larger questions about visualization, psychoanalysis, and historicism Stephen Greenblatt (1986b) raises in his essay “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture.” We may thereby begin to appreciate more fully what Christian Keathley (2005) has termed “the filmic quality of the new historicist anecdote” (138). The Guerre case is of interest to Greenblatt largely because it connects new property laws to the fashioning of identity Greenblatt locates in the sixteenth century. The uncle of Martin Guerre turned against the imposter Arnaud de Tilh only when his property and profits were at stake. The story of Martin Guerre is for Greenblatt a “Renaissance story,” not “a universal myth” (216). Attributing a “unitary vision” (217) of the subject to Freud, Greenblatt maintains that this vision “is achieved, as Natalie Davis's book makes clear, only by repressing history, or, more accurately, by repressing histories—multiple, complex refractory stories. Such stories become, in effect, decorative incidents, filigrees enched on the surrogate of a solid and single truth, or (in subtler versions) interesting variants on the central and irreducible narrative, the timeless master myth” (217). Historicism can explain psychoanalysis as a belated consequence of changes in property law, according to Greenblatt (1986b), but psychoanalysis cannot explain historicism: “psychoanalytic interpretation seems to follow upon rather than to explain Renaissance texts. . . . psychoanalytic interpretation is causally belated. . . . Psychoanalysis is. . . . less the privileged explanatory key than the distant and distorted consequence of his cultural nexus [of relations, materials objects, and judgments]. . . . Psychoanalysis is the historical outcome of certain characteristic Renaissance strategies” (216, 224).

According to Greenblatt, psychoanalysis is “crippled” (216), much like the real Martin Guerre when he shows up at court with a wooden leg, whereas historicism presumably walks on two legs, fully erect. Practicing a diplomatic disciplinary foreign policy, Greenblatt will allow psychoanalytic interpretation to proceed as long as “it historicizes its own procedures (221),” or, one might say, as long as it is not psychoanalytic. (For an implicit rejoinder to Greenblatt, see Torok [1986], who maintains that “writing a history of psychoanalysis” [84] must be psychoanalytic: “the history of psychoanalysis cannot successfully borrow its methods of inquiry from any other discipline” [84].)

The paratexts of Greenblatt’s (1986b) essay make evident a significant degree of resistance to the psychoanalysis he claims to have historicized: psychoanalysis remains, I suggest, a foreign body within Greenblatt’s historicism. Like Natalie Davis, Greenblatt wants to tell a sequential narrative: first came the possessive individualism of Thomas Hobbes, then came Freud's self-possessed ego, a belated and false universalization of what is in fact the historically specific emergence of the Renaissance literary and legal subject. Yet this narrative sequence in Greenblatt's essay is not matched by a similar paratextual sequence in its endnotes. Just the opposite is the case.
In the first endnote to the essay, Greenblatt scrupulously cites both the English and French editions of Davis's *Return of Martin Guerre*, linking the latter to the film while serving as an annotation note on the textual history of Davis's book: “Davis’s text was originally published in French, together with a ‘recit romanesque’ written by the film’s screenwriter and director, Jean-Claude Carriere and Daniel Vigne (*Le Retour de Matin Guerre* [Paris: Robert Laffont, 1982]).” Quite remarkably, however, Greenblatt (1986b) does not quote a single work by Freud or Lacan, whom he mentions once in passing in the essay, with tentative approval (141), nor does he give the title of even a single one of their works either in the essay or in the endnotes.

Why this scrupulousness when citing Davis and yet this striking offhandedness when not citing Freud and Lacan? The question invites a symptomatic reading of Greenblatt’s essay (1986b) that would diagnose psychoanalytically his New Historicization of psychoanalysis as a (legalistic) defense against psychoanalysis. In failing to quote or cite from Freud, Greenblatt has not only to masquerade as Freud, much as Freud often masqueraded as his patients when recounting their dreams in the first persons, and adopt Freud’s own terms when offering a putatively Freudian account of the Guerre case but, in a citational slip, also exposes his need to dream up what he calls the “dream” of psychoanalysis in order to differentiate it from historicism (which can analyze dreams better than Freud can). In short, Greenblatt’s aberrant (lack of) citations make it possible to reverse the terms of his essay and read the New Historicist critic who resists psychoanalysis as a Freudian case study.

Yet it would be much too simple to do a classically Freudian reading of Greenblatt’s misrecognition of psychoanalysis as ego psychology. For Greenblatt (1988) himself adopts a psychoanalytic vocabulary, frequently using the word “uncanny,” for example, and his historicism often consists of a desire to reanimate the past, to “speak with the dead” (i), rather like Freud’s discussion of the inanimate becoming animate in “The Uncanny” (SE 17). As Freud writes, “apparent death and the re-animation of the dead have been represented as most uncanny themes” (SE 17, 246). Similarly, Greenblatt’s interest in literature as estrangement parallels Freud’s account of the uncanny as a self-estrangement and disorientation. If Greenblatt resists psychoanalysis, he also accommodates it or, to use his terms, attempts to displace and absorb it. Moreover, Greenblatt does not favorably
oppose “History” to psychoanalysis but subtly shifts in a single sentence from saying that Freud represses history to saying Freud represses “histories,” which Greenblatt then makes synonymous with “stories.” Indeed, Greenblatt emphasizes that Guerre’s case is a story: “It is important to characterize the case of Martin Guerre as a story” (187, emphasis in the original). The history Freud represses not only becomes plural “histories” but, more radically, history becomes, in effect, fiction. And the historical specificity of a given story amounts to genre fiction: The Martin Guerre story is “a peculiarly Renaissance story” (139). (Somewhat peculiarly, Freud uses the adjective “peculiarly” to modify the noun “uncanny” in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny”; see Freud SE 17, 244.) Even more strikingly, Greenblatt’s unwillingness to cite Freud (and thereby read his writings closely), instead of totalizing them into a seemingly never revised, unified, master narrative, bears on the uncanny and fictional aspects of the paratextual anecdote that I traced in chapter 4 on Natalie Davis’s role as the historical advisor to Daniel Vigne’s The Return of Martin Guerre and that, in the form of the autobiographical anecdote, is the easily recognizable signature of Greenblatt’s New Historicism.10

The Uncanny of the Uncanny, Psychoanalytic and New Historicist

To grasp more fully the uncanniness of Greenblatt’s New Historicism, I would like to compare an autobiographical anecdote related by Freud in his essay “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s Gradiva” (1906/1907, SE 9) with a similar autobiographical anecdote related by Greenblatt in a new preface to the Routledge Classics reissue of Learning to Curse, in which “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture?” appeared a second time after having first been published in the book collection Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts Literary Theory and Renaissance Texts (Greenblatt 1986b) five years earlier.11 By attending to similarities in the differences between these two anecdotes, we may more fully understand the uncanny dimensions of Greenblatt’s historicism. Both anecdotes involve twin sisters, one of whom is dead. Here is Freud’s anecdote, quoted in full:

A man who has grown rational and skeptical, even, may be ashamed to discover how easily he may for a moment return to a belief in spirits under the combined impact of strong emotions and perplexity. I know of a doctor who had once lost one of his women patients suffering from Graves’ disease, and who could not get rid of a faint suspicion that he might perhaps have contributed to the unhappy outcome by a thoughtless prescription. One day, several years later, a girl entered his consulting room, who, in spite of all his efforts, he could not help recognizing as the dead one. He could frame only a single thought: “So, after all, it’s true that the dead can come back to life.” His dread did not give way to shame till the girl introduced herself as the sister of the one who had died of the same disease as she herself was suffering from. The victims of Graves’ disease, as has often been observed, have a marked facial resemblance
to one another; and in this case this typical likeness was reinforced by a family one. The doctor to whom this occurred was, however, none other than myself; so I have a personal reason for not disputing the clinical possibility of Norbert Hanold's temporary delusion that Gradiva had come back to life. (SE 9, 71–72)

And here is Greenblatt's anecdote, also quoted in full:

A strange thing happened to me at the Smithsonian conference that had some bearing on my understanding of the instability of resonance and wonder. When I got up to speak, I looked out at the audience in the hall and saw with astonishment someone who looked uncannily like my first serious girlfriend, from university days more than twenty-five years earlier. There was no mistaking it: it was the girl I had once loved, now older of course, but unmistakably she. The circumstance would not itself have been so surprising—though a quarter of century had passed since I last saw or spoke to her—had it not been for something else. Some two months earlier my mother had clipped from the newspaper and sent me my ex-girlfriend's obituary. She had died tragically young of breast cancer. For a moment, in the peculiar heightened intensity in which one begins a talk before a large audience of strangers, I thought I might be going mad. I was almost overcome with wonder. The experience was as close as I will ever get in real life to what Leontes feels when he first sees the state of Hermione. At the time I was far too unnerved to think of a literary analog. But I understood even then, in the split-second of my disoriented response, that the wonder welling up in me conjoined desire and impossibility. Then, as I opened my mouth to speak, my mind raced frantically for some reassurance, some escape route, some exit, from an excess of wonder. I found it quickly enough: it must not have been more than a few seconds before it flashed upon me that my girlfriend had an identical twin sister whom I had briefly encountered, since she went to a different university. And indeed when the talk was over, this twin came up to introduce herself to me. She had brought some pages of her sister's diary from the time we were dating, and wanted me to see how sweetly and poignantly she wrote about our relationship. The voice, the handwriting, the turns of phrase, the snatches of conversation recorded from so long before—all conjured up what was irrevocably past and slowly turned wonder into resonance. (1991/2007, xiv–xv)

The similarities between the two anecdotes are striking: Greenblatt's anecdote is not only about twin sisters, one dead, the other alive, but also phrased using one of Freud's terms: the woman Greenblatt sees in the audience “looked uncannily like” his girlfriend. And like Freud, who tells his anecdote in the middle of an analysis of a work of fiction, Jensen's Gradiva, Greenblatt compares his experience giving his paper with the experience of a literary character in a play by Shakespeare about the reanimation of a woman seemingly dead, precisely the territory of the Freudian uncanny. Moreover, both Freud and Greenblatt occupy a position exterior to literature: Freud's anecdote comes out of his clinical practice; Greenblatt's comes out of an academic conference. One more similarity is worth noting: both anecdotes involve museums. The occasion of Greenblatt's
anecdote is the Smithsonian; more remotely, Freud remarks in “Postscript to the Second Edition (1912)” of his essay on Jensen’s Gradiva that the relief of the young girl Jensen named Gradiva is not Roman, as Jensen thought, but Greek and may be found in “the Museo Chiaramonti in the Vatican (No. 644)” where it “has been restored and interpreted by Hauser (1903)” (SE 9, 95).

The similarities between Freud’s and Greenblatt’s anecdotes are by no means reducible, of course, to a question of unacknowledged citation or appropriation by Greenblatt, nor even to a Freudian “repression” by Greenblatt of what some readers might suppose to be Greenblatt’s unconscious source text. It is the sameness in the difference between Freud’s and Greenblatt’s anecdotes that put them both on an uncanny dialogical wavelength. (Freud says in “The Uncanny” that his “paper is presented to the reader without any claim to priority” [SE 17, 220] and remarks in Beyond the Pleasure Principle that “priority and originality are not among the aims that psychoanalytic work sets itself” [18, 7]).

Freud repeats himself, after all, telling Ernest Jones he saw “another double” of himself, “not Horsch” (Derrida 1981/2007, 232), while travelling on a train and discussing two dreams about two sets of twins, one boys, the other girls, in what Derrida (1981/2007, 241: 249–45; 260) calls Freud’s “fake lectures” (fake because they were never delivered as lectures but published only as epistolary articles) on telepathy and psychoanalysis. (Freud’s view that “only psychoanalysis can teach something about telepathic phenomena and not vice versa” [Derrida 1981/2007, 252] mirrors Greenblatt’s (1986b) insistence that psychoanalysis be historicized but not vice versa; similarly, much as psychoanalysis remains a foreign body in historicism and Marxism, swallowed and vomited back up, or gagged on and coughed up, so telepathy remains, in Derrida’s words, a “foreign body” [Derrida 1981/2007, 256–57] in psychoanalysis; or, as Freud puts it, “the theme of telepathy is alien to psychoanalysis” (cited by Derrida 1981/2007, 258). Freud’s Gradiva autobiographical anecdote is thus not an “original” that Freud might be said to own and Greenblatt unconsciously to imitate. In Freudian terms, there can never be intellectual property or an original, because the uncanny is not proper and always appears as a repetition: there is no home, no archive to house a given text securely as property.

Phony Shakespeare

Freud’s anecdote in “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s Gradiva,” like his anecdote in “The Uncanny,” is psychoanalytic because it shows that knowledge arrives belatedly as the self-correction of an initial misrecognition. Furthermore, knowledge arrives as a digression, even a paratextual supplement, and, via literary transmission, as a true story. Freud turns himself into a narrator and character in his anecdote about the twin sisters before letting us know that he is the doctor. Freud openly plays a trick on the reader. One last similarity: both Freud’s and Greenblatt’s anecdotes
involving travel and transportation, the story about the author being on the way to somewhere or coming back from somewhere. Grasping the uncanny relation between the Freudian and Greenblattian uncanny requires that we read closely Freud’s and Greenblatt’s engagement with media in terms of the calculated yet risky long-distance, hung up phoniness (meaning both “telephonic” and “fake”) that often (dis)connects many of their autobiographical anecdotes to their paratexts. In Freud’s case, it means reading Freud’s use of letters, postcards, telegrams, and other long-distance correspondence in his essays on telepathy; his comparisons of telepathy to being informed “as if... by telephone...[as] a kind of psychical counterpart to the wireless telegraphy” (SE22, 36), his comparison of thought transference “finding conscious expression in a slightly disguised form” to the way “the invisible end of the spectrum reveals itself to the senses on a light-sensitive plate as a colored extension” (SE18, 185), his reference to his “phonographic memory” (SE22, 5), and his double allusion to Hamlet, linking the same line (“there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”) to the occult in one case (SE18, 178) and to psychoanalysis in the other (SE22, 31), all in relation to his paratextual and textual autobiographical anecdotes staged in the Gradiva essay and elsewhere and as being about both Freud and someone else.

Here we may note a number of significant ways in which Freud’s psychoanalytic uncanny differs from Greenblatt’s historical uncanny. The Freudian autobiographical anecdote emerges as a kind of genre, one in a series, as Freud tells in the autobiographical anecdote in the footnote to “The Uncanny” (SE17, 248) that I cited earlier in chapter 1 in my discussion of David Fincher’s Se7en. If we return briefly to that anecdote, we may appreciate more fully the difference between the Freudian uncanny and the New Historicist uncanny. In the footnote to “The Uncanny,” Freud rewrites a “(p)recursive” anecdote told by another (Mach) and then relayed and repeated by Freud, who cites his source. Furthermore, the anecdote moves from repetition to recognition, the second time Freud sees himself being a correction of error that doubles a failed attempt to correct error (“Jumping up to set it right, I”), failed because premature—“jumping up”—and premature because the jumping up is not rational but arises from a kind of allergic, phobic reaction to the other’s intrusion; the error involves mistaken attribution of error to another or Other. In taking anecdotal form, the experience is repeated as recollection and as a persistent memory at that (“I can still recollect”). Moreover, the experience is linked to the paratext not only as a footnote but literally as a threshold: Freud sees his reflection on the open door window and he sees it because a threshold has been transgressed (“the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments”). Freud’s anecdote comes with a commentary in the last two sentences, when Mach and Freud become a couple.

With this long distance (dis)connection between autobiographical anecdote and paratext in mind, we may now return to the ways in which
Greenblatt’s autobiographical anecdote about the twin sisters differs from Freud’s in “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s Gradiva.” Whereas in Freud's anecdote self-criticism arises from a sense of guilt (he feels he is partly responsible for a death), knowledge follows error (the dead can return to life), and recognition arrives delayed and with a sense of disquiet, in Greenblatt’s anecdote error lasts only a moment, a “split-second,” and a feeling a disquiet soon passes by the time he finishes reading the diaries. He knew from the start (“But I understood even then...”) and any sense of guilt about the dead girlfriend, if there is any, remains unstated. Although Freud tells an anecdote about himself as a digression in the midst of a psychoanalysis of literary characters, he concedes well into the essay that he is discussing as if they were real people, and thereby blurring the real and the literary; Greenblatt turns to a literary text only as an afterthought, thereby distinguishing the real experience from literature. And whereas Freud’s anecdote involves only oral communications, Greenblatt’s involves media/postal relays and delays: a newspaper clipping sent by his mother and diaries delivered by the surviving twin sister. A melancholic sense of loss rather than guilt sets the tone of Greenblatt’s anecdote, the details of which remain opaque, their meaning open-ended in ways that invite speculation. (How did the relationship end? Why did it end? Who ended it? What did the twin sister want from Greenblatt? Did she give him the diaries or only loan them momentarily? If they were a gift, did Greenblatt keep them or discard them as if they were cremated ash?).

Greenblatt’s New Historicist uncanny emerges most clearly, however, not in the enigmatic effects produced by this autobiographical anecdote but in Greenblatt’s more general willingness to put into question the truth-value of some of his most memorable and fascinating autobiographical anecdotes. The anecdote about the twin sisters, like the anecdote in the epilogue to Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980/2005, 25)—about the father traveling to a Boston hospital to visit his sick grown son who has lost his will to live and who asks his fellow airplane passenger Greenblatt to say soundlessly the words “I want to die. I want to die”—has an aspect of incredibility and implausibility about it, as if Greenblatt were inviting or perhaps even daring the reader to wonder if Greenblatt made it up. Consider some further differences between Freud and Greenblatt. While Freud plays a trick on the reader and exposes it as such, Greenblatt makes one wonder if he is a trickster. Freud’s anecdotes do seem factual, not because they are inherently more plausible (they aren’t) but because Freud distances his anecdote from fiction, even exorcizing fiction from “Jensen’s Gradiva” anecdote by deferring knowledge that he is the doctor or by using a scholarly citation before relating his story about seeing his reflection while traveling by train in “The Uncanny” footnote. Unlike Freud, Greenblatt spectralizes and fictionalizes his historicist anecdotes.

Greenblatt’s most uncannily powerful anecdotes are the ones that most seem to be detached from history, the ones with a literary, parabolic relation to the text in excess of any retrospective account of the work’s
genesis or meaning that frame them and that they help frame. This sense of detachment arises in part because Greenblatt dissolves Freud's opposition between story and commentary, making the anecdote itself a commentary. Yet Greenblatt's more memorable anecdotes also seem to float free of the history in which they are apparently anchored in his framing paratexts. For example, Greenblatt (1991/2007) relates the anecdote in *Learning to Curse* at the very end of the preface, after seeming to finish two pages earlier with “a final description of the setting of one of the essays...a 1988 conference at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.” (xiii). Greenblatt caps that paragraph with a quotation about wonder from the last scene of *The Winter's Tale*. In returning to the conference, Greenblatt recounts his anecdote as a potentially extraneous afterthought. His personal history stands in a relatively external textual place even as it pushes toward a deeper sense of inwardness than his more historical account of giving the paper allowed.13

Greenblattiana: Cinema and the Touch of the Reel

What the New Historicism counts as history or values as a means of accessing history conceived as the voices and bodies of the dead, namely, the anecdote, is thus tied up as much with a fictionalizing of the academic self in the anecdotal form. And this fictionalizing is at the same time a spectralization or externalization of the self, authenticated and authenticating by virtue of misrecognizing itself as interior and self-present. This uncanny crossing between traces of the real inside memory and outside in writing also makes clear the mediatic dimensions of the Greenblattian uncanny. In a review of Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher's *Practicing New Historicism*, David Simpson (2001) makes use of a cinematic metaphor:

The new historicism, in its early essays, emphasized the cinematic bringing to life of the past—avowedly “representational” but giving the effect of the real . . . . Like a slice of movie footage, the new historicist past was wholly there and yet not there, and not implicated in any pattern beyond that of its own telling, except by loose association with something in the teller’s own place and time that was itself resistant to full knowledge. History, in this way, became synchronic: events were conjured up in densely contextual detail, but they were cut loose from what came before or after. Some said that this was as much of history as we could have in an age that had forgotten how to think historically; others found only another incarnation of the “slice-of-life” criticism, now in a mode more fully cinematic than ever.

Simpson’s cinematic metaphor applies even more precisely, I think, to the New Historicism’s interest in narrative framing and specters than it does to the use of anecdotes culled from raiding the archives to generate counter-histories. Insofar as it is uncanny, the New Historicism is engaged in not only reading the past but, like Natalie Davis, also in attempting
(and failing) to visualize it. For Freud, the uncanny is largely about the failure to see. The anec-notal repetitions I have traced thus far in Greenblatt’s uncanny historicism present a problem of visualization and discernment.

The uncanniness of Greenblatt’s historicism is registered acutely in Greenblatt’s analysis of a problem of academic authorization arising from the academic’s autofocus, through a framing of his intellectual autobiographical narrative. In his essay “The Touch of the Real,” an essay that first appeared in the journal Representations and then again in revised form in Practicing New Historicism, Greenblatt observes that what the historicist takes to be reality effects, or traces of the past, are produced through a narrative frame. As he puts it when discussing anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s seminal essay “Thick Description”: “thickness is not in the object; it is in the narrative surrounding, the add-ons, the nested frames... Thickness no longer seems extrinsic to the object, [it is] a function solely of the way it is framed... The frame is crucial, since in this case it helps us to conjure up a ‘real’ as opposed to an ‘imaginary’ world.”

Greenblatt’s historicism becomes uncanny when he turns to a discussion of academic self-narration. Greenblatt raises the question of whether Geertz and his Maghreb native informant Cohen might have fabricated their stories and then proceeds to make a telling distinction between the two storytellers:

If it turned out that Geertz’s Cohen had taken it upon himself to be the Flaubert of the Maghreb and had made up his entire story, we might have still concluded that we possessed something of ethnographic allure: a glimpse of the fantasies of an old man who had been steeped in the symbolic systems of colonial Morocco. If, however, it turned out that Geertz had made up Cohen, we at least would have concluded that as an ethnographer Geertz was not to be trusted, and his work would immediately lose much of its value. For it was precisely not as a fiction or as a little philosopher’s tale that Geertz invites us to read his anecdote; it is as a “raw” sample of his field notes. The frame is crucial... If it is only a matter of rhetoric—then only a reality-effect is conjured and nothing more. (29–30)

Greenblatt distinguishes the value of the real from the reality-effect of the fake easily enough: if the academic doing the framing is telling the truth, then his or her story and writing have value.

Why, then, does Greenblatt ask hypothetically about Geertz’s possible lack of truthfulness in the first place? There is after all no reason to think that Geertz is making up his notes, and Greenblatt does not imply that he did. For an answer, we may consider that Greenblatt’s odd hypothetical question arises in relation to Greenblatt’s quite subtle deconstruction of a distinction between the real and reality effects. Both are acts of conjuring: “The frame is crucial, since in this case it helps us to conjure up a ‘real’; if it is only a matter of rhetoric—then only a reality-effect is conjured and nothing
more (29, my emphasis).” The highly valued real exists only in quotations marking it as a conjured up “real,” hardly distinguishable from the conjured “reality effect” Greenblatt devalues. By questioning the truthfulness of Geertz’s account without doubting it, Greenblatt suggests that the real is always an illusion and may always be exposed as a conjuring trick, or what would be called in cinematic terms a magic trick.

What I find especially remarkable about Greenblatt’s uncanny as opposed to Freud’s is Greenblatt’s willingness to risk entirely deflating the value of his own work, to call into question, albeit very subtly, the value of the kind of historicist criticism he writes so incredibly well by making his historicist writing seem like fiction and by inextricably intertwining and yet freely disassociating fraud and Freud. Unlike Freud, who moves from repetition to recognition, and hence from error to knowledge, Greenblatt moves, as Joel Fineman put it in a wonderful essay on the anecdote, from fiction to fiction.

The Greenblattian historical uncanny emerges from Greenblatt’s apparent resistance to recognize openly that what he puts at risk is what largely accounts for the power of his historicism as writing. I say “apparent” because, unlike Freud, for whom the transition from repetition to recognition is also a transition from error to knowledge, Greenblatt repeats himself rather than attains closure by advertently letting on that which he knows his anecdotes are made-up of or, inadvertently, that which he doesn’t know. His resistance to Freud’s resistance makes Greenblatt more or less like Freud; but Greenblatt’s willingness to inhabit the gap between Freud and fraud, to risk seeming to engage in Fraudianism rather than Freudianism, makes his uncanny historicism all the more uncanny. For Greenblatt does not repeat himself across his different texts in the same way: he not only tells new autobiographical anecdotes, for example, but also comments on the anecdote as well as his own critical practice (see 2007b). Whereas in Freud’s case, the autobiographical anecdote has a discrete size and works as a fragment (the footnote to “The Uncanny,” a digression in “Jensen’s Gradiva,” and an introductory story in “The Moses of Michelangelo”), in Greenblatt’s case the anecdote and the text are not clearly differentiated by a frame. In the new preface to the 2005 reedition of Renaissance Self-Fashioning, for example, Greenblatt returns to an anecdote about teaching a course on Marxism at U.C Berkeley he (re)tells in the Introduction in his essay “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” reprinted from one of two “slightly different” versions in Learning to Curse (1991/2007, vii–ix; 197–98).

In similarly providing a retrospective account of New Historicism, “The Touch of the Real” could be read not only as a restatement of this essay but also as one long autobiographical “anec-note.” The anec-notal character of the essay becomes clear if one attends to both versions, or, more precisely, to the fact that the revisions of the second version are left unnoted. Though the first parts of both versions of the essay are identical while the second parts are entirely different, the copyright page refers to the article in the book version as if it were the same. No prefatory remarks about this earlier version are made, so that the
copyright permission implies by default (without the author intending or not intending) that the article republished in the book is unrevised. Though nothing like a straightforward repression happens here, a ghosting effect can nevertheless be detected when the two versions of Greenblatt’s essay are put into dialogue. Both versions offer a retrospective account of the New Historicism, but roughly the second half of Greenblatt’s earlier version of the article, which drops out in the book version, relates and historicizes an exemplary anecdote of Greenblatt’s practice, which just so happens to involve ghosts. In the book version, this discussion is replaced by a discussion of Erich Auerbach, which falls—uncannily—into two parts. The uncanny haunts this account of Auerbach. Greenblatt refers to “specters, the specters of mimetic genius” and to a “quasi magical effect” (37). Most strikingly, Auerbach is a “conjuror” (37; see also 28) who, it is twice said, performs “a conjuring trick” (38). The addition of the new second half of the essay introduces a new repetition. Greenblatt had already written of “Geertz’s conjuring of the real” in the first part (30). Though the more explicitly autobiographical and ghostly anecdote offered in the Representations version drops out, then, the register of the uncanny becomes more explicit only in the revised version’s various mentions of the “spirit of representation”, specters, spectral effects, the supernatural, conjuring of spirits, the magus, and “charmed space” (48). In moving from Geertz to Auerbach, that is, we move from an academic conjurer who might not have told the truth to an academic who comes close “to acknowledging that [he] is [performing] a conjuring trick” (38).

Greenblatt’s New Historicist uncanny goes further than the historian’s uncanny of Natalie Davis in spectralizing the evidence of history and calling into question the historian’s ability to not only retell history correctly but to also gain access to the voices of the past through the archive. In contrast to a legal notion of evidence that is supposedly transparent and indexical and on which he relies in his essay “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture,” Greenblatt’s generally regards historical evidence, of what he sometimes calls recorded “traces” of now disembodied voices, as opaque. Access to these voices is a matter of “conjuring,” of prestidigitation rather than digitation. The final sentence of Greenblatt’s anecdote in the new preface to Learning to Curse about the twin sisters (which is also the final sentence of the new preface to the 2007 edition) gives agency to inanimate pieces of evidence: “The voice, the handwriting, the turns of phrase, the snatches of conversation recorded from so long before—all conjured up what was irrevocably past and slowly turned wonder into resonance.”

“Literature professors are salaried, middle-class shamans,” Greenblatt writes on the first page of Shakespearean Negotiations (1988). Yet his daring willingness to hauntologize history threatens to turn the authorized and authorizing New Historicist uncanny, or New Histori-shaman-ism, into its unauthorized, discredited double, the New Histori-sham-ism, by blurring the line between showmanship and shamanship.
As we have seen, the historian and the New Historicist both depend on a certain version of the uncanny that involves estrangement and reanimation and that nevertheless allows for a linear temporality and subjective interiorization. What troubles the (new) historicist uncanny, however, is the mechanical nature of the returns and repetitions that mark its practices. Precisely because of their automaticity, these repetitions cannot be fully internalized and thus redeemed as the grounds of the humanist historian’s pathos. We are now in a position to understand why Greenblatt focuses specifically on Freud’s humanist psychoanalysis. Greenblatt can hold the mechanical repetitions of his practice at bay only by means of a melancholic, deeply personal, and even private, pathos or failing, which is a potentially corrosive demystification of his own New Historicist practices as a conjuring trick: conjurer or trickster amounts to the same humanist difference. Lacan, the psychoanalyst who was called a charlatan and a shaman and whose seminar lectures were taped, transcribed, and published with notes, is perhaps too close for comfort. By repeating his anecdotes in a “characteristic” manner, Greenblatt produces “Greenblattian” subjectivity effects that exceed his desire to interiorize his academic self. His anecdotes are almost always delivered, that is, in paratexts, usually prefaces, introductions, and epilogues, and at the beginning or end of a given text or paratext. Though quite varied and wonderfully written, the anecdotes are mechanical insofar as they are predictable. A similar kind of mechanism may be detected in the way Greenblatt sometimes ends essays with a repetition of the already uncanny word “return.” After seeming to end “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture” (“I want to end,” 1986, 191), for example, Greenblatt repeats his concluding point about the belatedness of psychoanalysis, already made earlier in the essay (184) in the last sentence of a paratext that takes the form of an appendix: “I return to the notion that psychoanalysis is the outcome of certain characteristic Renaissance strategies” (195). The same word “return” recurs in the first and last sentences of the first version (1997b) of “The Touch of the Real.” The spaces between text and appendix or between article and republished book chapter serve as cuts, or breaks, that enable and apparently require returns, repetitions, and possibly redundancy as well.

This mechanism is, moreover, not merely a metaphor. Greenblatt’s anecdotes are also a form of travel literature, a genre on which he has often written: On an airplane, talking to his dead father; on his way back from an airport after picking up his codignitaries for a dinner party who then mistake him for the chauffeur; on his way to a conference at the Smithsonian; in Bali where he encountered a villagers’ screening of Charles Bronson in Death Wish; on his arrival at U.C. Berkeley as an assistant professor; about a woman student in a graduate seminar who read Utopia and then went to
Jonestown and committed suicide there. As in Freud's autobiographical anecdotes about seeing his reflection on the train car window and returning unintentionally three times to the red-light district of Venice in “The Uncanny” (SE 17 248 n.1; 237), the New Historist uncanny autobiographical anecdote is always linked to transportation networks. The autobiographical anecdote, whether Freudian or Greenblattian, stands in relation both to the anecdotal and the grand narrative like a train wreck stands in relation to an otherwise internally regulated mechanism. The uncanny involves not only “the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity” but also deferral and expectancy, especially the unexpected, and ghosts and mourning, or what Derrida (1994) calls “awaiting (at) the arrival” (60–61). Unlike uncanny detours and wanderings, which for Freud (17, 213) always bring one back involuntarily and unintentionally to the (never quite the) same place (because one arrives there unexpectedly), the catastrophic transportation accident brings things to a stop, arrests them, slows down reading as readers crane their necks driving by the wreckage or, in some cases, crawling from it. Furthermore, the accident externalizes the viewer reader in relation to the event: one looks at it from the outside; the anecdote thereby derails the destination of the locomotive death drive into the leisurely drive by death. Yet the uncanny is also about who can travel and who cannot, who has his papers in Ordnung, and who doesn't, who is able to emigrate and who isn't.

The relation between Freud’s uncanny and Greenblatt’s uncanny is itself uncanny. Freud sees the uncanny coming out of a repressed childhood, even infantile trauma, which later returns and takes the form of repetition compulsion (SE 17, 220–21). In an anecdote about his childhood, Greenblatt links his interest for travel to media in ways that are very (anti-)Freudian. In a profile on Greenblatt, Lucasta Miller (2005) relates the story: “His own childhood was marked by a similarly visceral love of reading. Born in 1943 in Boston, the son of a lawyer and a housewife, he escaped from his typically humdrum 1950s suburban childhood into ‘mind travel.’ It was not a bookish household. ‘I remember my parents saying “Stevie, don’t strain your eyes reading, come and watch TV.”’ But the young Greenblatt remained addicted to feeding his imagination with The Arabian Nights or popular travelogues.” Freud’s analysis in “The Uncanny” of being robbed of one’s eyes (SE 17, 205) and the split father image in Hoffmann’s story is about optics, a telescope, automata, and blinding, as in The Sandman (SE 17, 207–8, note 1); Greenblatt’s parents fear that he will hurt his eyes by reading. In this primal screen memory, the structure of the personal anecdote begins to resemble the structure of the anecdote as analyzed by Freud, with Greenblatt inverting the post-Freudian, Lacanian schema of childhood development: he is already in the symbolic (books), while his parents are still back in the imaginary (television). In a kind of threshold, perhaps pre-psychoanalytic space of will between the child wanting to read and the parental, solicitous call to watch television, Greenblatt is both more inside the home and outside it (a Wunderkind already going places) than his parents, who remain engaged in the presumably deferred, mindless travel of
television. The touch of the real is not confined to pathos but extends to irony, to the (sometimes bitter) joke, or what I call the ghost of schlock in the aftershocks of historicism.23

Academic Auto(out-of)focus: Cinema and the Touch of the (Un)Real

Although Greenblatt wants psychoanalytic interpretation to (new) historicize its own procedures, an even more direct New Historicist engagement with Freud’s writings—through, say, a reading of Freud’s “The Uncanny”—might get more fully at the uncanny relation between Freud and Greenblatt by attending to Freud’s own repetitions in writing his essay as Freud’s resistance to psychoanalysis.24 Freud never defines the uncanny in a self-consistent manner in “The Uncanny,” spending most of his time talking about what it is not. Furthermore, the New Historicist might attend to Freud’s own desire to exorcise spirits from his writings as well as to the various paratexts he added, or what editor James Strachey added, in various editions of his works, as well as Freud and Marx’s common interest in ghost busting and in exposing conjuring tricks.25 Yet any such engagement would necessarily be a belated recognition, relayed via another anec-postal-note to self: “Remember to reread that spectre Freud, again. And don’t forget to read Lacan either, or Marx on the conjuring trick.” In an essay on Freud’s “The Uncanny”—published the year before Greenblatt’s “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture”—Niel Hertz (1985) poses the issue of Freud’s repetitions in protocinematic terms, as a question of visibility: Where do we find the repetitions that structure uncanny? Hertz closes his essay by expressing dissatisfaction with a compound analogy he draws “between that which is repeated, coloring matter, and figurative language.” These analogies depend, Hertz says,

upon the notion of a real preexistent force (call it sheer repetition), the death instinct, or whatever that is merely rendered more discernible by that-which-is-repeated, or by the lurid colors of the erotic, or by some helpful figure of speech...rendering that force “visible.” But we know that the relation between figurative language and what it figures cannot be adequately grasped in metaphors of vision; and we might well doubt that forces of repetition can be isolated—even ideally—from that-which-is-repeated. (120–21)

What makes uncanny repetitions (especially in academic criticism) visible, as Hertz suggests, is a matter of paratexts and typography; thus, Hertz italicizes the word “discernible” and puts quotation marks around the word “visible.”

Here we arrive, I think, at the most directly cinematic metaphor in Greenblatt’s “Touch of the Real,” the “cut,” a metaphor that significantly is used only in the second version.26 Near the end of the essay as he finishes his discussion of Auerbach, Greenblatt asks “If one abandoned canonicity, what was there beyond a completely arbitrary cut?” and links this arbitrariness to
his own practice: “Arbitrariness, the randomness Auerbach noted in modernist novels, was indeed built into the new anecdotal practice” (46). I consider the “cut” to be a barely visible cinematic metaphor as well as a metaphorical wound in that it derives from cinema: a film is released as a cut, a book is not. For this extended discussion of Auerbach, mentioned once in the first part of both versions (1977b and 2000a), skips over, or cuts out on, Auerbach’s discussion of the novel and film in “The Brown Stocking,” the chapter of *Mimesis* Greenblatt finds to be weakest, the one in which Auerbach comes closest to acknowledging that [his practice] is a conjuring trick. The modern novel, Auerbach says, does not exploit film; on the contrary, film now does what the pre-film, premodernist novel did: film has greater freedom to condense “time and space than the novel itself” (546). When juxtaposed with Auerbach’s comments on film, Greenblatt’s metaphor of the “arbitrary cut” may be seen to (dis)engage with media technologies.

In the second, or “recut” version of the essay (2000a), Greenblatt cuts the self-defense he mounted at the end of the first version of “The Touch of the Real” against the charge that his own practice is arbitrary. The cut self-defense returns us to Greenblatt’s (1997b) rejection of “an irresponsi-

ble hermeneutical surrealism” (25) that I discussed in the first chapter. By giving up randomness, accident, and change in favor of some historical necessity in the first version beyond visibility and mimesis (eschewed in audial terms as a connection between an extraliterary text and a literary one it “sounded like”), Greenblatt (1997b) automatically, as it were, returns to the close proximity of voluntary and involuntary (mechanical) gestures: “It is no accident that the ghost made his appearance precisely at the moment the two men were talking over the story of his appearance. For though the appearance of a ghost may be as sudden and involuntary as a twitch, we are never in fact very far from winks, fake winks, burlesque fake-winks, and so forth” (27). Never very far from wakes and fake wakes either. The ghost, or more precisely, “ghosting” is the “strongest example” of the uncanny and “repetition automatism,” according to Freud. Much like Freud’s repetition compulsion, the return of the ghost is followed by a repetition that becomes a pathless loop divorced from the initial traumatic return and yet never very far from it.

In the second version, Greenblatt (2000a) accepts the arbitrariness of his practice, but now as a wound, and ends his essay considering how the New Historicism no longer seemed able to illuminate canonical literary works when the practice came to seem like a gimmicky mimetic matching of one text that “sounded like” (47, my emphasis), a phrase Greenblatt repeats twice in the same sentence. Greenblatt goes on to consider how Auerbach’s practice came to seem exhausted and “lose some of its force” (47), but cuts short discussion before considering whether the New Historicism’s practice of “revivification of a canonical work” (47–48) by way of a marginal anecdote has reached the same fate, a failed promise of “a new access to the real,” a formal procedure “curiously detached from anything real” (47). In
both versions, we arrive at the same outcome: there is no off-twitch, as it were, to the technology of the New Historicism.

No(te): End of Story

In the play of re-cutting resistances and repetitions that paratextually haunt the anec-notal histories and case histories of historicism and psychoanalysis, we may understand better how what I have called the “ab-errant,” “programmatic” aspects of both critical practices produce (un)yielding returns on our investments in them and in the haunted territory which “re-grounds” and recoups them. On the one hand, the historicist uncanny ends up being about writing from behind rather than writing from below, caving into a kind of a deadening dogmatic prescriptivism about a codifiable critical practice defined in retrospect (the practice now has a title, or grave marker, and reading is now a matter both of what “should” be read and how it “should” be read) in the name of revivifying canonical and extracanonical texts. Yet, on the other hand, precisely both because it is a writing machine connected to transportation networks that regulate mobility and (im)migration and because its (mechanical) repetitions and returns are so distinctive, the historicist uncanny continues to produce highly valuable, unusually estranging effects, even if they are unintentionally disquieting and have a kind of rare and unexpected value many academics might not want to collect and keep. A conjuring tic is perhaps more compelling than a conjuring trick.”