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ABSTRACT

New Historicism is a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds. It is a critical practice that treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible. While considering Elizabethan theatre and its relationship to the state, the visibility of power is an important concept of New Historicism. The term 'new historicism' was coined by the American critic, Stephen Greenblatt in the book, *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. It is a method of based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts that is of the same historical period. "This 'equal weighting' is suggested in the definition of new historicism offered by the American critic Louis Montrose: he defines it as a combine interest in "the textuality of history, the historicity of texts" (Barry 166). New Historicism begins with a reaction against new criticism as new criticism emphasized on reaction against historical and biographical methods of literary criticism. New Historicism opposed the autonomous entity of text in new critics. While new historicism see literature and history as a part of dynamic exchange. It is based on the production of literary work from time, place and circumstances of its composition. Therefore, new historicist rejects the autonomy of literary texts in new criticism, but it gives more importance on literary texts to interpret in the light of biographical, social and historical contexts.

KEYWORDS: New Historicism, Historicity, Textuality, Power and Parallel.

1. INTRODUCTION

New Historicism manifested with ideology and power. It combines the spirit of Marxism and deconstruction with the ideological orientation of power and history as set forth by Foucault. It reflects society in connection of texts relating to other texts without any fixed literary value above and beyond the way specific societies read them in a specific situations. New Historicism owes something to Postmodernism and exhibits less skepticism. "A formative study of new historicism was Claude Levi-Strauss's recognition that culture is self regulating system, just like language, and that a culture polices its own customs and practices in subtle and ideological ways. For new historicists this recognition has been extended to 'self', particularly in Stephen Greenblatt's early and seminal study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*" (Brannigan 7). The operation of power is complex as the self polices and regulates its own desires and repressions. This removes the need for power to be repressive. For the exercised of power, there is no need of deploying military or physical force because power operates with the dominant ideological system of self that is ideologically and linguistically constructed and reproduce hegemonic operations. Self group and culture exists in language or society because every language and society are self-policing and hegemonic systems. Subversion is always produce in new historicism. The 'production of subversion' was mentioned in Stephen Greenblatt's *Invisible Bullets*. Power needs to be subversion, otherwise it would be unable to justify and also unable to make itself visible as power. Power is pervasive and pervasiveness is a share assumption among new historicist critics. The power's pervasiveness is borrowed from Foucault. "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Brannigan, 8). New Historicism, though celebrates personal freedom and 'deviant' thinking, suggests that it is 'unthinkable' because power is enabled and maintained by institutions, such as the court, the church, the colonial administration, the patriarchal family – and also diffused in ideological structures of meaning, characteristic modes of expression, recurrent narrative patterns.

New Historicism has linked to Cultural Materialism though it has some differences. New Historicism is American in origin while Cultural Materialism is originated in Britain. Cultural Materialism is largely indebted to

British left-wing critic Raymond Williams. The term was first coined by Raymond William in 1977 in the book *Marxism and Literature*. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have been most useful to the discipline of literary studies in exploring the relationship between literature and history, and in demonstrating the ideological and political interests operating through literary texts. New Historicist critics used literary texts as equal sources with other texts in the attempt to describe and examine the linguistic, cultural, social and political fabric of the past in great detail. It is a mode of reading history, political and social forces in historical period in which it serves literary studies as a critical practice in placing literary texts in an unprivileged exchange with the historical forces in the time of their production. Like New Historicism, Cultural Materialism privileges power relations as the most important contexts for interpreting texts, but New Historicists deals with power relations of past societies, Cultural Materialists explore literary texts within the context of contemporary power relations. It is a way of analyzing the material existence of ideology, concentrated in the study of literary texts and its function through various institutions. Cultural Materialists enable us to examine literary texts as part of a wider context of cultural and political institutions. Shakespeare is regarded in the context of the prevalence of cultural icon and a master figure through the media of education, industry and heritage business. Critics like Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey are alert to the possibilities of making Shakespeare meaningful in the context of contemporary politics and culture. Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism deals with recovering the lost histories and in exploring the mechanism of repression and subjugation. New Historicism concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy that are church, monarchy and the upper classes. Cultural Materialism concentrate on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy that are the lower classes, women and other marginalized peoples. New Historicists draw on the disciplines of Political Science and Anthropology which focused in governments, institutions and cultures. Cultural Materialism depends on Economics and Sociology that focused in class, economics and commodification.

New Historicists and Cultural Materialists reject both the autonomy and individual genius of the author and the autonomy of the literary work and see literary texts as absolutely inseparable from the historical contexts. "In the opinion of Clifford Geertz, as quoted by Stephen Greenblatt in his famous essay *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, the literary text and the author are both 'Cultural artifacts'. He says there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture, complexes of concrete behavior patterns – customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters – but rather a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions... for the governing of behavior" (www.inflibnet.ac.in > ... > Tiwari). In the term *Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt depicts the Renaissance version of control mechanisms, the cultural system of meaning that create specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete embodiment. Greenblatt and his group of scholars suggest that literary text is always part and parcel of much wider cultural, political, social and economic dispensation. Though, historical moment being untouched, but it is directly involved in history. As it is involve with ideologies or discourses, it always shows the power struggle. Therefore, literature not only reflect relations of power, but actively participates in the construction of discourses and ideologies. Literature is not simply a product of history, rather it participates in making of history. In interpreting the texts, New Historicists situate in its context and recover the repressed and contradictory or unknown historical meanings of the texts and then examine the relationship between these historical and cultural meanings of the text and the situation of the reader in order to arouse the readers' cultural wonders at the resonance. New Historicists interpret the history in much broader sense in which they not only reflects the political events, but a type of discourse prevalent in the particular period. Williams and other emphasized the issue of class. While Greenblatt emphasized on the issue of social and cultural practices. Therefore, representation of literary text can be understand through history and cultural exchange.

New Historicism reflects the socio-cultural and socio-political situation of the particular period. Unlike New Criticism, New Historicism destabished the notion of autonomy of a text without historical, social and political elements. It juxtaposed both past and present from the perspective of marginalization and operation of power between different groups. It identifies different historical epistemes and the historical evolution of conception of the state, the individual, culture, family etc. One of the most problematic aspects for new historicism for historians is that its insistence on the pervasiveness and ineluctability of an overarching power, which pays scant attention as a result of the specificities and complexities of history.



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