

**CHAPTER II****THEORETICAL BACKGROUND****A. NEW HISTORICISM**

New Historicism is adopted in 1982 by Stephen Greenblatt in a special issue of *Genre* to describe a new kind of historically based criticism, especially in Renaissance studies, *new historicism* has since been used to describe critical approaches as theoretically diverse as *FEMINISM*, *DISCOURSE* theory, Marxism, and even some *DECONSTRUCTION*.

It is said that new historicism differs from old or traditional historicism in several ways. Following Foucault, it argues that “man” is a construct of social and historical circumstances and not an autonomous agent of historical change. Objective history is therefore an impossibility; every account is just that – another text, and like any novel, play, or poem, it is open to the same kind of critical interpretive scrutiny (The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary & Cultural Criticism 207).

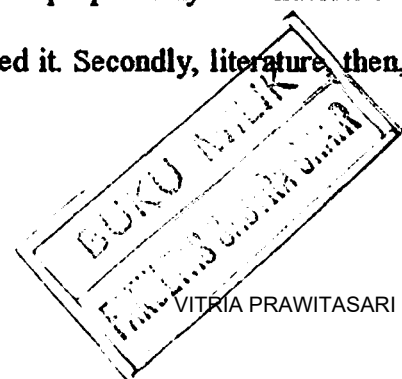
In “The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism,” it is said that no longer does history act as the background to literary texts, and no longer are historical accounts considered reliable and unproblematic representations of what really went on during particular time (207).

According to Myers’ essay entitled “The New Historicism in Literary Study,” he says that the “New Historicism” is unified by its disdain for literary formalism (1). Specifically, leaders of the movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances (commonly known as the “context”) from the

interpretation of literary works; they are impatient with the settled view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevant (1). It has been a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study – not by actual poems, novels, plays – but by the institutional situation in which young scholars now find themselves (1).

Myers also says that when younger critics were having to resort to a tandem operation, using deconstruction or some other variant of poststructuralist method to clear the ground on which an assortment of radical political notions were carted in to raise a new interpretation. But such a procedure left critics anxious lest their interpretation fail to go beyond the already familiar readings of the text. It was in this situation that the New Historicism emerged. It appears to offer a distinctive approach, a rigorous method, along “with the opportunity to salvage one’s political commitments. Indeed, at times the New Historicism seemed almost designed to methodize the political interpretation of literature. Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contributes to the making of individuals; it acts as form of social control.

Further, Myers continues, that the principles – or what Greenblatt calls the “enabling presumptions” – behind the New Historicist method are the movement establishes itself upon four main contentions. Firstly, literature is historical, which means that a literary work is not primarily the record of one’s mind attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Secondly, literature, then, is



not a distinct category of human activity. It must be assimilated to history, which mean a particular vision of history. Thirdly, like work of literature, man himself is a social construct, the sloppy composition of social and political forces – there is no such thing as a human nature that transcend history. Renaissance man belongs inescapably and irretrievably to the Renaissance. There is no continuity between him and us; history is a series of “ruptures” between ages and men. Fourthly, as a consequence, the historian/critic is trapped in his own “historicity.” No one can rise above his own social formation, his ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it (2).

In “The New Historicism in Literary Study” it is said that in New Historicist interpretation history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. History is no longer conceived, as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as thing wholly prior, a process which completes itself at the appearance of the work. For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior (Myers 3).

“The whole point” of the new Historicist enterprise, says Jean E. Howard, is to grasp the terms of the discourse which made it possible to [for contemporaries] to see the ‘fact’ of [of their own time] in a particular way – indeed, made it possible to see certain phenomena *as facts at all*” (The New Historicism in Literary Study 4).

According to Gillespie, Fonseca, and Sanger in their book entitled “Literature Across Culture” it is said that New Historicists also affirm the reciprocity between the text and the world, which they attempt to rewrite by showing how sociopolitical practices

and institutions such as the theatre can shape and transform cultural meaning. When considering the relation between text and reader, the New Historicists advocate the reciprocity between these two elements, viewing them as dynamic forces interacting with and responding to each other (981).

## **B. CULTURE**

According to Stephen Greenblatt in his essay entitled "Culture" the term "culture" taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (225).

Cultural analysis, in "Critical Terms for Literary Study," has much to learn from scrupulous formal analysis of literary texts because those texts are not merely cultural by virtue of reference to the world beyond themselves; they are cultural by virtue of social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed ( Greenblatt 227).

Art, also said by Greenblatt, is an important agent in the transmission of culture. It is one of the ways in which the roles by which men and women are expected to pattern their lives are communicated and passed from generation to generation (228).

Still according to Greenblatt a culture is a particular network of negotiations for the exchange of material goods, ideas, and people. Anthropologists are centrally concerned with a culture's kinship system – its conception of family relationships, its prohibitions of certain couplings – and with its narratives – its myths, folktales, and sacred stories. The two concerns are linked, for a culture's narratives, like its kinship arrangements, are crucial indices of the prevailing codes governing human mobility and

constraint. Great writers are precisely masters of these codes, specialist in cultural exchange. The works they create are structures for the accumulation, transformation, representation, and communication of social energies and practices (229).

The current structure of liberal arts education often places obstacles in the way of such an analysis by separating the study of history from the study of literature, as if the two were entirely distinct enterprises, but historians have become increasingly sensitive to the symbolic dimensions of social practice, while literary critics have in recent years turned with growing interest to the social and historical dimensions of symbolic practice (Greenblatt 230).

As Greenblatt explains further, great works of art are not neutral relay stations in the circulation of cultural materials. Something happens to objects, beliefs, and practices when they are represented, reimagined, and performed; something often unpredictable and disturbing. That “something” is the sign both of the power of art and of the embeddedness of culture in the contingencies of history (230).

### **C. MOVIE AS POPULAR CULTURE**

Raymond Williams, as said by Antony Easthope in his book entitled “Literary into Cultural Studies,” suggests that one of the three distinct uses of ‘popular’ is used to describe a culture ‘made by the people for themselves’ (76).

In the West from at least the 1890s popular culture and its distance from high culture became largely incorporated into the great contemporary media – newspapers, film, radio, television – whose condition of existence was modern technology, particularly in visual reproduction. In Britain the generation that learned to read because

of the 1870 Education Act began in the 1890s to but weekly and daily popular journals. Development of the popular press was followed by the cinema ownership together, made up America's fourth largest industry, after farming, steel, and transformation. Television transmission was introduced in 1936. After the start of so-called Independent (that is commercially owned) television in 1955 the number of sets increased quickly. the rise of television was matched by the decline of the mass audience for the cinema from 1950 onwards (Easthope 76-77).

Still according to Antony Easthope a movie is manifestly a collective production, involving producers, director, stars, camera operators, script-writers, sound and lighting engineers, set mechanics, and so on. The object of a cultural studies exhibits a shift from the author toward a decentred account of social production, displacing identification is the transcendent authority of self-creation with a necessarily more dispersed identification. A discourse of knowledge begins to develop which can make no such claims to authority and power but rather installs its subject as relative rather than transcendent, determined rather than sovereign (167).

According to John Fiske in his essay entitled "Popular Culture" movie is consider as popular culture because movie serves the interest of "the people." "The people" as John Fiske uses the term here, is not a class or social category, but rather a shifting set of social interests and positions that are defined by their subordinate relation to the dominant society (Critical Terms for Literary Study 322).

Further Fiske also says that popular culture is often excessive, and is frequently criticized by those who do not understand it for being "sensational." Excessiveness, sensationalism, and exaggeration are stylistic devices of contradiction, and, as he argued,

the contradiction is characteristic of popular culture. This excess meaning then becomes a resource that people can use to interrogate or contradict the normal, the excessive is meaning that has escape the control of the norm (328).

'A Note About Film and Videos' in "Literature Across Cultures" explains that throughout the history of film – which celebrated its centennial in 1995 – movies here served a number of purposes and assumed a number of roles in the development of twentieth-century culture. No history of this century, no serious consideration of the forces that have helped to shape it, could conceivably ignore the impact of movies (985).

Further it explains that from the birth of film, movies have documented events, personalities, and places, providing not only invaluable sources of information to scholar but a sense of how things looked and felt (985).

Along with the general population many people see more movies in the video/ VCD format than on theatre screen. Videos/ VCDs have also extended the life of many films and allowed them to become a part of the available culture – like literature and musical recording – that people can remain in touch with and quote from as freely as they might cite a phrase from a book or a lyric from a song. Consequently, the opportunity to see and re-see a movie on video/ VCD makes it possible to examine more closely and thoroughly the plot, narrative structure, characterization, theme, and genre elements (Literature Across Culture 991).



## **CHAPTER III**

**Luc Besson : His Biography, His Works, And His Note And The Messenger : The Story Of Joan Of Arc**