

Chapter 1 : New Historicism - Wikipedia

New historicism has been a hugely influential approach to literature, especially in studies of William Shakespeare's works and literature of the Early Modern period. It began in earnest in and quickly supplanted New Criticism as the new orthodoxy in early modern studies. Despite many attacks.

Structuralism and Semiotics Structuralism Structuralism is a way of thinking about the world which is predominantly concerned with the perceptions and description of structures. At its simplest, structuralism claims that the nature of every element in any given situation has no significance by itself, and in fact is determined by all the other elements involved in that situation. The full significance of any entity cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part Hawkes, p. Structuralists believe that all human activity is constructed, not natural or "essential. Semiology Semiotics, simply put, is the science of signs. Semiology proposes that a great diversity of our human action and productions--our bodily postures and gestures, the the social rituals we perform, the clothes we wear, the meals we serve, the buildings we inhabit--all convey "shared" meanings to members of a particular culture, and so can be analyzed as signs which function in diverse kinds of signifying systems. Linguistics the study of verbal signs and structures is only one branch of semiotics but supplies the basic methods and terms which are used in the study of all other social sign systems Abrams, p. Binary Opposition - "pairs of mutually-exclusive signifiers in a paradigm set representing categories which are logically opposed and which together define a complete universe of discourse relevant ontological domain , e. In such oppositions each term necessarily implies its opposite and there is no middle term" Daniel Chandler. The distinction is important because Saussure contended that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary; the only way we can distinguish meaning is by difference one sign or word differs from another. Instead, meaning--the interpretation of a sign--can exist only in relationship with other signs. Selden and Widdowson use the sign system of traffic lights as an example. The color red, in that system, signifies "stop," even though "there is no natural bond between red and stop" Meaning is derived entirely through difference, "a system of opposites and contrasts," e. Northwestern UP, Hill and Wang, The Pleasure of the Text. Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature. U of California P, Jefferson, Anne and David Robey. Revolution in Poetic Language and Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. After the New Criticism. The Raw and the Cooked. John and Doreen Weighman. Semiotics of Poetry Peirce, Charles. Values in a Universe of Chance: Selected Writings of Charles S. The Morphology of the Folktale. U of Texas P, Course in General Linguistics. The Subject of Semiotics. A Survey of Semiotics. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.

Chapter 2 : New Historicism - Literary and Critical Theory - Oxford Bibliographies

A New Historicist interpretation of a text begins with identifying the literary and non-literary texts available and accessible to the public, at the time of its production, followed by reading and interpreting the text in the light of its co-text.

Hegelian[edit] G. Hegel – Hegel viewed the realization of human freedom as the ultimate purpose of history, which could only be achieved through the creation of the perfect state. And this progressive history would only occur through a dialectical process: However, because humans are often not aware of the goal of both humanity and history, the process of achieving freedom is necessarily one of self-discovery. Hegel also saw the progress toward freedom being conducted by the "spirit" Geist , a seemingly supernatural force that directed all human actions and interactions. Yet Hegel makes clear that the spirit is a mere abstraction, and only comes into existence "through the activity of finite agents. Popper referred to this "Hegelian" philosophy of history as Historicism. Consequently, their essence can be sought only by understanding said history. Hegel did not use these terms, although Johann Fichte did. Yet another contrasting model is the persistent metaphor of a social contract. Hegel considers the relationship between individuals and societies as organic, not atomic: It thus preserves the culture of the past in thousands of half-forgotten metaphors. To understand why a person is the way he is, you must examine that person in his society: The Zeitgeist , the "Spirit of the Age," is the concrete embodiment of the most important factors that are acting in human history at any given time. This contrasts with teleological theories of activity, which suppose that the end is the determining factor of activity, as well as those who believe in a tabula rasa , or blank slate, opinion, such that individuals are defined by their interactions. These ideas can be interpreted variously. Hegelian historicism is related to his ideas on the means by which human societies progress, specifically the dialectic and his conception of logic as representing the inner essential nature of reality. Hegel attributes the change to the "modern" need to interact with the world, whereas ancient philosophers were self-contained, and medieval philosophers were monks. In his History of Philosophy Hegel writes: In modern times things are very different; now we no longer see philosophic individuals who constitute a class by themselves. With the present day all difference has disappeared; philosophers are not monks, for we find them generally in connection with the world, participating with others in some common work or calling. They live, not independently, but in the relation of citizens, or they occupy public offices and take part in the life of the state. Certainly they may be private persons, but if so, their position as such does not in any way isolate them from their other relationship. They are involved in present conditions, in the world and its work and progress. Thus their philosophy is only by the way, a sort of luxury and superfluity. This difference is really to be found in the manner in which outward conditions have taken shape after the building up of the inward world of religion. In modern times, namely, on account of the reconciliation of the worldly principle with itself, the external world is at rest, is brought into order – worldly relationships, conditions, modes of life, have become constituted and organized in a manner which is conformable to nature and rational. We see a universal, comprehensible connection, and with that individuality likewise attains another character and nature, for it is no longer the plastic individuality of the ancients. This connection is of such power that every individuality is under its dominion, and yet at the same time can construct for itself an inward world. It would be considered by Nietzsche , John Dewey and Michel Foucault directly, as well as in the work of numerous artists and authors. The Romantic period emphasized the ability of individual genius to transcend time and place, and use the materials from their heritage to fashion works which were beyond determination. Post-structuralism would argue that since history is not present, but only the image of history, that while an individual era or power structure might emphasize a particular history, that the contradictions within the story would hinder the very purposes that the history was constructed to advance. Anthropological[edit] In the context of anthropology and other sciences which study the past, historicism has a different meaning. Anthropological historicism [6] is associated with the work of Franz Boas. His theory used the diffusionist concept that there were a few "cradles of civilization" which grew outwards, and merged it with the idea that societies would adapt to their circumstances, which is called historical particularism. The school of historicism grew in response to unilinear theories that social development represented adaptive

fitness, and therefore existed on a continuum. While these theories were espoused by Charles Darwin and many of his students, their application as applied in social Darwinism and general evolution characterized in the theories of Herbert Spencer and Leslie White, historicism was neither anti-selection, nor anti-evolution, as Darwin never attempted nor offered an explanation for cultural evolution. However, it attacked the notion that there was one normative spectrum of development, instead emphasizing how local conditions would create adaptations to the local environment. Julian Steward refuted the viability of globally and universally applicable adaptive standards proposing that culture was honed adaptively in response to the idiosyncrasies of the local environment, the cultural ecology, by specific evolution. What was adaptive for one region might not be so for another. This conclusion has likewise been adopted by modern forms of biological evolutionary theory. The primary method of historicism was empirical, namely that there were so many requisite inputs into a society or event, that only by emphasizing the data available could a theory of the source be determined. In this opinion, grand theories are unprovable, and instead intensive field work would determine the most likely explanation and history of a culture, and hence it is named "historicism. New Historicism Since the s, when Jacques Lacan and Foucault argued that each epoch has its own knowledge system, within which individuals are inexorably entangled, many post-structuralists have used historicism to describe the opinion that all questions must be settled within the cultural and social context in which they are raised. Answers cannot be found by appeal to an external truth, but only within the confines of the norms and forms that phrase the question. This version of historicism holds that there are only the raw texts, markings and artifacts that exist in the present, and the conventions used to decode them. This school of thought is sometimes given the name of New Historicism. The same term, new historicism is also used for a school of literary scholarship which interprets a poem, drama, etc. Stephen Greenblatt is an example of this school. Modern[edit] Within the context of 20th-century philosophy, debates continue as to whether ahistorical and immanent methods were sufficient to understand meaning—that is to say, "what you see is what you get" positivism—or whether context, background and culture are important beyond the mere need to decode words, phrases and references. While post-structural historicism is relativist in its orientation, that is, it sees each culture as its own frame of reference, a large number of thinkers have embraced the need for historical context, not because culture is self-referential, but because there is no more compressed means of conveying all of the relevant information except through history. This opinion is often seen as deriving from the work of Benedetto Croce. Recent historians using this tradition include Thomas Kuhn.

Chapter 3 : Historicism - Wikipedia

New Historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through literature, and literature through its cultural context, which follows the field of history of ideas and refers to itself as a form of "Cultural Poetics".

Literary and Cultural Theory 1. What Is Literary Theory? Literary theory refers to any principles derived from internal analysis of literary texts or from knowledge external to the text that can be applied in multiple interpretive situations. All critical practice regarding literature depends on an underlying structure of ideas in at least two ways: Critics that explain the climactic drowning of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* as a suicide generally call upon a supporting architecture of feminist and gender theory. The structure of ideas that enables criticism of a literary work may or may not be acknowledged by the critic, and the status of literary theory within the academic discipline of literary studies continues to evolve. Literary theory and the formal practice of literary interpretation runs a parallel but less well known course with the history of philosophy and is evident in the historical record at least as far back as Plato. Modern literary theory gradually emerges in Europe during the nineteenth century. In one of the earliest developments of literary theory, German "higher criticism" subjected biblical texts to a radical historicizing that broke with traditional scriptural interpretation. This dispute was taken up anew by the French theorist Roland Barthes in his famous declaration of the "Death of the Author. Attention to the etymology of the term "theory," from the Greek "theoria," alerts us to the partial nature of theoretical approaches to literature. This is precisely what literary theory offers, though specific theories often claim to present a complete system for understanding literature. The current state of theory is such that there are many overlapping areas of influence, and older schools of theory, though no longer enjoying their previous eminence, continue to exert an influence on the whole. The once widely-held conviction an implicit theory that literature is a repository of all that is meaningful and ennobling in the human experience, a view championed by the Leavis School in Britain, may no longer be acknowledged by name but remains an essential justification for the current structure of American universities and liberal arts curricula. The moment of "Deconstruction" may have passed, but its emphasis on the indeterminacy of signs that we are unable to establish exclusively what a word means when used in a given situation and thus of texts, remains significant. Many critics may not embrace the label "feminist," but the premise that gender is a social construct, one of theoretical feminisms distinguishing insights, is now axiomatic in a number of theoretical perspectives. While literary theory has always implied or directly expressed a conception of the world outside the text, in the twentieth century three movements—"Marxist theory" of the Frankfurt School, "Feminism," and "Postmodernism"—have opened the field of literary studies into a broader area of inquiry. Marxist approaches to literature require an understanding of the primary economic and social bases of culture since Marxist aesthetic theory sees the work of art as a product, directly or indirectly, of the base structure of society. Feminist thought and practice analyzes the production of literature and literary representation within the framework that includes all social and cultural formations as they pertain to the role of women in history. Postmodern thought consists of both aesthetic and epistemological strands. Postmodernism in art has included a move toward non-referential, non-linear, abstract forms; a heightened degree of self-referentiality; and the collapse of categories and conventions that had traditionally governed art. Postmodern thought has led to the serious questioning of the so-called metanarratives of history, science, philosophy, and economic and sexual reproduction. Under postmodernity, all knowledge comes to be seen as "constructed" within historical self-contained systems of understanding. Marxist, feminist, and postmodern thought have brought about the incorporation of all human discourses that is, interlocking fields of language and knowledge as a subject matter for analysis by the literary theorist. Using the various poststructuralist and postmodern theories that often draw on disciplines other than the literary—linguistic, anthropological, psychoanalytic, and philosophical—for their primary insights, literary theory has become an interdisciplinary body of cultural theory. Taking as its premise that human societies and knowledge consist of texts in one form or another, cultural theory for better or worse is now applied to the varieties of texts, ambitiously undertaking to become

the preeminent model of inquiry into the human condition. Literary theory is a site of theories: The other schools of literary theory, to varying degrees, embrace a postmodern view of language and reality that calls into serious question the objective referent of literary studies. The following categories are certainly not exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive, but they represent the major trends in literary theory of this century. Traditional Literary Criticism Academic literary criticism prior to the rise of "New Criticism" in the United States tended to practice traditional literary history: Literary biography was and still is an important interpretive method in and out of the academy; versions of moral criticism, not unlike the Leavis School in Britain, and aesthetic e. Perhaps the key unifying feature of traditional literary criticism was the consensus within the academy as to the both the literary canon that is, the books all educated persons should read and the aims and purposes of literature. What literature was, and why we read literature, and what we read, were questions that subsequent movements in literary theory were to raise. Formalism and New Criticism "Formalism" is, as the name implies, an interpretive approach that emphasizes literary form and the study of literary devices within the text. The work of the Formalists had a general impact on later developments in "Structuralism" and other theories of narrative. The Formalists placed great importance on the literariness of texts, those qualities that distinguished the literary from other kinds of writing. Neither author nor context was essential for the Formalists; it was the narrative that spoke, the "hero-function," for example, that had meaning. Form was the content. A plot device or narrative strategy was examined for how it functioned and compared to how it had functioned in other literary works. The Formalist adage that the purpose of literature was "to make the stones stonier" nicely expresses their notion of literariness. Literary language, partly by calling attention to itself as language, estranged the reader from the familiar and made fresh the experience of daily life. The "New Criticism," so designated as to indicate a break with traditional methods, was a product of the American university in the 30s and 40s. Eliot, though not explicitly associated with the movement, expressed a similar critical-aesthetic philosophy in his essays on John Donne and the metaphysical poets, writers who Eliot believed experienced a complete integration of thought and feeling. Wimsatt placed a similar focus on the metaphysical poets and poetry in general, a genre well suited to New Critical practice. Perhaps the enduring legacy of "New Criticism" can be found in the college classroom, in which the verbal texture of the poem on the page remains a primary object of literary study. Marxism and Critical Theory Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature. Marxist theorists use traditional techniques of literary analysis but subordinate aesthetic concerns to the final social and political meanings of literature. Marxist theorist often champion authors sympathetic to the working classes and authors whose work challenges economic equalities found in capitalist societies. In keeping with the totalizing spirit of Marxism, literary theories arising from the Marxist paradigm have not only sought new ways of understanding the relationship between economic production and literature, but all cultural production as well. Marxist analyses of society and history have had a profound effect on literary theory and practical criticism, most notably in the development of "New Historicism" and "Cultural Materialism. Walter Benjamin broke new ground in his work in his study of aesthetics and the reproduction of the work of art. The Frankfurt School of philosophers, including most notably Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse"after their emigration to the United States"played a key role in introducing Marxist assessments of culture into the mainstream of American academic life. These thinkers became associated with what is known as "Critical theory," one of the constituent components of which was a critique of the instrumental use of reason in advanced capitalist culture. Eagleton is known both as a Marxist theorist and as a popularizer of theory by means of his widely read overview, *Literary Theory*. Lentricchia likewise became influential through his account of trends in theory, *After the New Criticism*. Jameson is a more diverse theorist, known both for his impact on Marxist theories of culture and for his position as one of the leading figures in theoretical postmodernism. Structuralism and Poststructuralism Like the "New Criticism," "Structuralism" sought to bring to literary studies a set of objective criteria for analysis and a new intellectual rigor. Like Plato, Saussure regarded the signifier words, marks, symbols as arbitrary and unrelated to the concept, the signified, to which it referred. Within the way a particular society uses language and signs, meaning was constituted by a system of

"differences" between units of the language. Particular meanings were of less interest than the underlying structures of signification that made meaning itself possible, often expressed as an emphasis on "langue" rather than "parole. Greimas, Gerard Genette, and Barthes. The philosopher Roland Barthes proved to be a key figure on the divide between "Structuralism" and "Poststructuralism. The most important theorist of "Deconstruction," Jacques Derrida, has asserted, "There is no getting outside text," indicating a kind of free play of signification in which no fixed, stable meaning is possible. Other tendencies in the moment after "Deconstruction" that share some of the intellectual tendencies of "Poststructuralism" would included the "Reader response" theories of Stanley Fish, Jane Tompkins, and Wolfgang Iser. Lacanian psychoanalysis, an updating of the work of Sigmund Freud, extends "Postructuralism" to the human subject with further consequences for literary theory. According to Lacan, the fixed, stable self is a Romantic fiction; like the text in "Deconstruction," the self is a decentered mass of traces left by our encounter with signs, visual symbols, language, etc. Barthes applies these currents of thought in his famous declaration of the "death" of the Author: Foucault played a critical role in the development of the postmodern perspective that knowledge is constructed in concrete historical situations in the form of discourse; knowledge is not communicated by discourse but is discourse itself, can only be encountered textually. Following Nietzsche, Foucault performs what he calls "genealogies," attempts at deconstructing the unacknowledged operation of power and knowledge to reveal the ideologies that make domination of one group by another seem "natural. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism "New Historicism," a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt, designates a body of theoretical and interpretive practices that began largely with the study of early modern literature in the United States. According to "New Historicism," the circulation of literary and non-literary texts produces relations of social power within a culture. New Historicist thought differs from traditional historicism in literary studies in several crucial ways. According to "New Historicism," we can only know the textual history of the past because it is "embedded," a key term, in the textuality of the present and its concerns. Text and context are less clearly distinct in New Historicist practice. Traditional separations of literary and non-literary texts, "great" literature and popular literature, are also fundamentally challenged. For the "New Historicist," all acts of expression are embedded in the material conditions of a culture. Texts are examined with an eye for how they reveal the economic and social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion. Louis Montrose, another major innovator and exponent of "New Historicism," describes a fundamental axiom of the movement as an intellectual belief in "the textuality of history and the historicity of texts. The translation of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival coincided with the rise of the "New Historicism" and "Cultural Materialism" and left a legacy in work of other theorists of influence like Peter Stallybrass and Jonathan Dollimore. In its period of ascendancy during the s, "New Historicism" drew criticism from the political left for its depiction of counter-cultural expression as always co-opted by the dominant discourses. However, "New Historicism" continues to exercise a major influence in the humanities and in the extended conception of literary studies. Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Criticism "Ethnic Studies," sometimes referred to as "Minority Studies," has an obvious historical relationship with "Postcolonial Criticism" in that Euro-American imperialism and colonization in the last four centuries, whether external empire or internal slavery has been directed at recognizable ethnic groups: Though the two fields are increasingly finding points of intersectionâ€”the work of bell hooks, for exampleâ€”and are both activist intellectual enterprises, "Ethnic Studies and "Postcolonial Criticism" have significant differences in their history and ideas. Dubois, we find an early attempt to theorize the position of African-Americans within dominant white culture through his concept of "double consciousness," a dual identity including both "American" and "Negro. Afro-Caribbean and African writersâ€”Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebeâ€”have made significant early contributions to the theory and practice of ethnic criticism that explores the traditions, sometimes suppressed or underground, of ethnic literary activity while providing a critique of representations of ethnic identity as found within the majority culture. Ethnic and minority literary theory emphasizes the relationship of cultural identity to individual identity in historical circumstances of overt racial oppression. More recently, scholars and writers such as Henry Louis Gates, Toni Morrison, and Kwame Anthony Appiah have brought attention to the problems inherent in applying theoretical models derived from

Euro-centric paradigms that is, structures of thought to minority works of literature while at the same time exploring new interpretive strategies for understanding the vernacular common speech traditions of racial groups that have been historically marginalized by dominant cultures. Said argues that the concept of "the Orient" was produced by the "imaginative geography" of Western scholarship and has been instrumental in the colonization and domination of non-Western societies. Moreover, theorists like Homi K. The work of Gayatri C. Spivak has focused attention on the question of who speaks for the colonial "Other" and the relation of the ownership of discourse and representation to the development of the postcolonial subjectivity. Like feminist and ethnic theory, "Postcolonial Criticism" pursues not merely the inclusion of the marginalized literature of colonial peoples into the dominant canon and discourse. In this respect, "Postcolonial Criticism" is activist and adversarial in its basic aims. Postcolonial theory has brought fresh perspectives to the role of colonial peoples—their wealth, labor, and culture—in the development of modern European nation states. While "Postcolonial Criticism" emerged in the historical moment following the collapse of the modern colonial empires, the increasing globalization of culture, including the neo-colonialism of multinational capitalism, suggests a continued relevance for this field of inquiry. Gender Studies and Queer Theory Gender theory came to the forefront of the theoretical scene first as feminist theory but has subsequently come to include the investigation of all gender and sexual categories and identities. Feminist gender theory followed slightly behind the reemergence of political feminism in the United States and Western Europe during the s. These causes converged with early literary feminist practice, characterized by Elaine Showalter as "gynocriticism," which emphasized the study and canonical inclusion of works by female authors as well as the depiction of women in male-authored canonical texts. Feminist gender theory is postmodern in that it challenges the paradigms and intellectual premises of western thought, but also takes an activist stance by proposing frequent interventions and alternative epistemological positions meant to change the social order.

Chapter 4 : What are some basic tenets of the literary theory of known as "new historicism"? | eNotes

New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the text.

It emerged as a mode of literary criticism in North America in the late 1970s and 1980s with an early focus on Renaissance studies. From More to Shakespeare Miller looked for patterns of power and subversion evident within literature and interrelated historical texts. New historicists argue that works of literature do not independently transcend their time, as the New Criticism claimed, but are instead always socially and politically implicated within their historical context. New historicists suggest that all texts, including literature, are complicit in mediating historical, political, social and cultural anxieties whether these anxieties are explicitly discussed or not. Moreover, new historicists promote the idea that history is not closed or final, as traditional historians would claim, but is found in acts of interpretation that can negotiate new readings of the textual traces of the past. New historicists give equal critical weight to analysing the ways in which literature and historical texts negotiate social and political power. The literary text is not prioritized in any new historicist essay. Critics might examine the life of the author and look at traditional historical sources like newspaper reports, letters or journal accounts or cast their net more widely to look at medical or penal records, advertisements or other more obscure documentary sources. Analysing this variety of texts alongside literature enables new historicists to find evidence of widespread power structures operating in society. They then identify potential patterns of subversion that expose networks of power operating across texts. Practitioners of new historicism established a pattern for analysis that often begins by citing a single documentary anecdote. The anecdote might initially appear far removed from the concerns of the literary text in question, but by analysing connections across the diverse texts, critics are able to actively expose similar social concerns and power relations in evidence in both. New readings of history and literature allow critics to demonstrate the ways in which pervasive power structures operate in different types of text within a particular society at a particular time. The examination of diverse texts can uncover the extent to which power relations organize and promote accepted social thought and behaviours through discourse – language that signifies a conventional and authoritative way of thinking acceptable to society at a particular time. New historicists argue that dominant discourses organize society in ways that make any challenge to endorsed patterns of thinking appear deviant. Greenblatt suggests that even ideas of selfhood are formed as a result of the power-based relations that are embedded in social discourse. He calls this self-fashioning and explains that subjectivity becomes less an act of autonomous self-creation and more the shaping of self to comply with an authoritative social power. In new historicist terms, subjectivity itself becomes a type of performance, with identities produced or fashioned to conform to mechanisms of social discipline that serve dominant cultural needs. New historicism is influenced by cultural anthropology. Geertz explains this practice with an example of two boys winking. On the other hand, a thick description will suggest that the wink is deliberate behaviour that could be sending a message or code understood by the two boys. New historicists would decode the message with closer examination and contextual analysis to produce a thick description that incorporates a commentary and interpretation of the act and its power relations. New historicism is primarily concerned with the ways in which social power relations are embedded in language. Recognizing the textuality of history, critics agree that a range of texts, including literature, may generate subversive insights. However, they maintain that any potential for real subversion will be undercut and contained by the text itself. This significant principle of new historicist thinking emphasizes that ultimately there is no space in literature for effective resistance to authoritative social power. All texts will eventually contain and undermine their potential for subversion by submitting to and reinforcing the dominant social thinking of the day. Such customary pessimism for new historicist thinking has been the target of criticism, but practitioners nevertheless maintain that texts may point towards subversion, but they will surrender to the practice they expose. A new historicist approach to literary analysis will therefore illustrate the ways in which ideological practices always short-circuit any real challenge to prevailing power relations in society.

Chapter 5 : New Historical Criticism

Home ° *Literary Criticism* ° *Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism. Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism By Nasrullah Mambrol on November 16, 2017 (0). While he was teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, Greenblatt helped to found a journal called Representations, in which some of the earlier important New Historicist criticism appeared.*

However, in adopting the Foucauldian notion of epistemic rupture between ages and civilizations, which makes understanding the text in the terms in which it was produced impossible, New Historicism has been criticized for reducing the importance of literature as a work of art and turning it into just another historical artifact. Background New Historicism arose in the late twentieth century as a result to the ahistorical hermeneutics of much of structuralism and post-structuralism. The label of "New Historicism" came from its adoption of a Historicist sensibility, much as had occurred within historical scholarship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but coupled with the approach of the so-called "New History. It is also widely used in diverse disciplines to designate an approach from a historical perspective. Historicism appeared in Europe, primarily in Germany ; it challenged the progressive view of history that interpreted history as a linear, uniform process that operated according to universal laws, a view widely held by thinkers from the Enlightenment era forward. Historicism stressed the unique diversity of historical contexts and stressed the importance of developing specific methods and theories appropriate to each unique historical context. Historicism also often challenged the concept of truth and the notion of rationality in modernity. Modern thinkers held that reason was a universal faculty of the mind that is free of interpretation, that can grasp universal and unchanging truth. Historicism questioned this notion of rationality and truth, and argued for the historical context of knowledge and reason; historicism is an explicit formulation of the historicity of knowledge. The earlier formulation of historicism was made by Vico and Herder ° Vico criticized the concept that truth transcends history and argued that truth is conditioned by human history. Herder rejected central ideas of the Enlightenment, such as the concept of universal rationality, and belief in the progress of human history according to the development of reason. These ideas of the Enlightenment were built upon the presuppositions that there was only one kind of rationality applicable to all people and cultures and that human history is a linear process of progress whose pattern of development was the same for all. Herder, a leading advocate of Romanticism , argued that each historical period and culture contains a unique value system, and he conceived history as the aggregate of diverse, unique histories. Herder stressed the importance of understanding the unique context of each historical period in order to make an authentic interpretation of the past. Major nineteenth century historical theorists include Leopold von Ranke ° , Johann Gustav Droysen ° , and Friedrich Meinecke ° They responded to the rise of Hegelianism as the final and most well-developed Idealist and speculative interpretation of history, the culmination of the Enlightenment view of history as the history of reason. They argued that there were diverse and unique characteristics to each region and people, which were irreducible to abstract uniform patterns based upon abstract speculative ideas in philosophy. Wilhelm Dilthey ° attempted to establish a conceptual formulation of historicism in philosophy. Dilthey challenged the concept of reason as free of interpretation, neutral, and an a-historical faculty. This concept of rationality can be traced back to the ideals of the Enlightenment. Dilthey argued that events in history are unique and cannot be repeated. Hermeneutics is art of interpreting the historical contexts of events in human life. For Dilthey, experience is essentially interpretive and rationality is also socially and historically contextualized and conditioned. New History New Historicism differs from the old Historicism in large measure not based on the approach but rather on changes in historical methodology, the rise of the so-called New history. The term new history was indebted to the French term nouvelle histoire, itself associated particularly with the historian Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, members of the third generation of the Annales School, which appeared in the s. Foucault and Lacan Since the s, when Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault argued that each epoch has its own knowledge system, which individuals are inexorably entangled with, many post-structuralists have used historicism to describe the view that all questions must be settled

within the cultural and social context in which they are raised, answers cannot be found by appeal to an external truth, but only within the confines of the norms and forms that phrase the question. This version of historicism holds that there are only the raw texts, markings and artifacts that exist in the present, and the conventions used to decode them. The study New Historicist scholars begin their analysis of literary texts by attempting to look at other texts—both literary and non-literary—to which a literate public had access at the time of writing, and what the author of the original text himself might have read. The purpose of this research, however, is not to derive the direct sources of a text, as the New Critics did, but to understand the relationship between a text and the political, social, and economic circumstances in which it originated. Since Stephen Greenblatt, a Renaissance Shakespeare scholar, played a pivotal role in the rise of New Historicism, the school developed largely in Shakespeare and English Renaissance Theatre studies. A major focus of those New Historicist critics led by Moskowitz and Stephen Orgel has been on understanding Shakespeare less as a genius than as a clue to the conjunction of the world of English Renaissance theatre and the complex social politics of the time. The focus of new historical analysis is to bring to the foreground the context and give it greater emphasis than previously recognized. The movement establishes itself upon four main contentions. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of 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. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. Given this fact, the best a modern historicist approach to literature can hope to accomplish, according to Catherine Belsey, is "to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology. Yet, it also owes a debt to post-structuralism as well. Similarly, the New Historicist effort to assimilate the literary text to history is guaranteed by the poststructuralist doctrine of textuality, which states that the text is not aloof from the surrounding context, that there is a contiguity, an ebb and flow, between text and whatever might once have been seen as "outside" it. However, New Historicists tend to exhibit less skepticism than postmodernists, and show something in common with the "traditional" tasks of literary criticism: That is, explaining the text in its context, and trying to show what it "meant" to its first readers, but they have been influenced by Postmodernism in this sense: They reject the notion that there is any recoverable meaning that extends across the "epistemic" break between time and civilizations. The modern reader of Shakespeare does not understand the text the way contemporaries did. So, the New Historicist critic uses the text as part of a series of facts from the era in an attempt to reconstruct the prevailing ideology. It is also a response to an earlier historicism, practiced by early twentieth century critics such as John Livingston Lowes, which sought to de-mythologize the creative process by reexamining the lives and times of canonical writers. But New Historicism differs from both of these trends in its emphasis on ideology: The political disposition, unknown to an author himself, that governs his work. Clearly, in its historicism and in its political interpretations, New Historicism has some affinity with Marxism. But whereas Marxism at least in its cruder forms tends to see literature as part of a "superstructure" in which the economic "base" that is, material relations of production manifests itself, New Historicist thinkers tend to take a more nuanced Foucauldian view of power, seeing it not exclusively as class-related but extending throughout society. New Historicism also shares many of the same theories as with what is often called Cultural Studies, but cultural critics are even more likely to put emphasis on the present implications of their study and to position themselves in disagreement to current power structures, working to give power to traditionally disadvantaged groups. Cultural critics also downplay the distinction between "high" and "low" culture and often focus predominantly on the productions of "popular culture. New historicism denies the claim that society has entered a "post-modern" or "post-historical" phase and allegedly ignited the "culture wars" of the s. As Carl Rapp states: It has also been said that it does not pay attention to the antiquate details involved with analyzing literature. New Historicism simply states historical issues that literature may make connections with without explain why it has done this, lacking in-depth knowledge to literature and its structures. Further reading Foucault, Michel. Translation of Surveiller et Punir. U Chicago P, General introduction to New Historicism. Retrieved August 20, The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary. Oxford University Press, Bedford Books, St Martins, The New Historicism in literary study. The Critique of

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Chapter 6 : What is New Historicism?

Introduction to Literature Michael Delahoyde. New Historicism. Historical Criticism insisted that to understand a literary piece, we need to understand the author's biography and social background, ideas circulating at the time, and the cultural milieu.

What is new historicism? New historicism basically takes into account that literary work or rather any literature work has time, place and thus a historical event as its key components and that these key elements can actually be deciphered from the literary text following keen analysis of the text even if these elements are not clearly depicted by a writer in his or her work. New historicism deals with textuality of history, that is, the fact that history is built and fictionalized and the history of the literary text is without a doubt found within the socio-cultural and political conditions surrounding its conception and interpretation as stated by Louis Montrose. New historicism despite its opposition to the ideas put forth by poststructuralism, it is basically similar to poststructuralist since it also defies the of a common human nature shared by the author, literary characters and readers and instead takes into account the view that these key players surrounding a text have diverse identities. Each act that is expressed is as a result of a network of material practices. Every act of uncovering, analyzing and opposition actually uses ways that it condemns and hence may conform to that which it exposes. Literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably. There is no social boundary whether imagined or archived that gives access to universally unalterable truths nor portrays the unchangeable nature of human. An analytical or rather critical means and a language good enough to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy is described. Despite the numerous attacks by feminist, traditional scholars and even cultural materialists, new historicism still developed its roots and slowly become a prominent study tool for the modern literature works in the The word new historicism was coined by Stephen Greenblatt, a critic and English professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Stephen coined the word when he put together a bunch of essays and with some form of desperation to bring out the introduction, Stephen said that the essays presented a phenomenon which he referred to as the new historicism. Greenblatt is well known for his books studies of the Renaissance which made him one of the key players in the establishment of new historicism. He inspired a great number of scholars who were particularly interested in Renaissance studies and the anecdotal approach of literature. This, in turn, led to understanding Shakespeare less as a great author than as a way of reestablishing the cultural milieu renaissance theatre and the very complex political scenario of that time. Other prominent players in the conception of new historicism include; Lynn Hunt and Michel Foucault, who also taught at UC Berkeley as it rose as a postmodern approach to history. Michael Foucault is a key figure in the new historicism. His interest in issues such as ideologies, power, epistemology and subjectivity have gone a long way in influencing critics not only in literal studies but also in other disciplines. His readiness to evaluate and openly discuss somewhat controversial disciplines such as medicine, criminology, sexuality and governance coupled with his questioning of the principle of specialization has led to other critics examining interdisciplinary connections even where the disciplines have never been taught to be connected and as a consequence never really examined together. This interesting approach to literature analysis taking a keen interest in the finer details especially with regards to the cultural, social and a little bit of the political scenes influencing the context of the text under study caught the attention of many historical critics and scholars working at the time of its production. Thus, its spread like wildfire transcending socio-cultural and historical boundaries. This has been mostly applied in understanding Jewish and Christian writings from old, that is, the Bible together with other forms of religious books. Historical criticism majorly aims at uncovering the primitive meaning of the literature in its original historical context. Moreover, it also seeks to recreate the historical scene of the writer and audience of the text. Historical criticism seeks to comprehend the social and cultural dynamics that surround literature work by answering questions such as: The time that the text was written. The person who wrote the literature. The events that happened at the time the literature was being written. How the literature has evolved with time to the form in which it is present today. What message did it carry to the very first audience of the literature and what did it

mean to the readers. This describes what the author intended for the text to mean at his or her time and place. Historical criticism started in the 17th century and became widespread in the 19th and 20th century. It was majorly focused on the historical investigation of the texts, but in some instances, this was not available leading to the adoption of philosophical and theological comprehension of the book. Historical criticism has its roots in the Protestant Reformation since its view to religious studies was free from any ounce of traditional interpretation and also the European Enlightenment. Whereas the Protestant Reformation brought about the use of new tools to focus attention on the literal or rather the plain meaning of the literature, Enlightenment went a long way in questioning the traditional beliefs while bringing in a new focus on human intellect and scientific objectivity. Source citation- as the name suggests, this methodology particularly aims at identifying the original source of the text. It can be attributed to Richard Simon, a French priest in the 17th century. This methodology questions if the text resulted from a single source, author or historical context and aims at uncovering sources within any literary work. A common instance is in the Gospel books Mathew, Mark and Luke which share the similar texts and hence a historical critic will analyze these Biblical texts to identify the actual source of the text. Form criticism- this methodology breaks down the Bible or literature work into sections, that is, periscopes or stories which are further analyzed and subdivided into genres which include: Essentially it aims to decipher what the text is meant to portray by analyzing the linguistic patterns used to bring out the text. Redaction criticism- in this case, the critic focuses on analyzing how the writer brought together the various traditions and culture into one whole comprehensible text. It may also be done by analyzing the collection, arrangement, modification and alteration of the original source into the form that the text is in hence the name redaction. It is mostly used to reestablish the community and intention of the writer of the text. Tradition criticism- this is an aspect of form criticism where the critics focus on finding the means through which the periscopes became part of the larger texts and most importantly how the oral were changed to writing. This methodology is however considered obsolete due to questionable stability, detectability and priority of oral traditions. Some elements that are worth noting about historicist include: Their keen interest in recovering lost histories, which is a characteristic shared by new historicist and cultural materialists. Unlike cultural materialists, new historicists tend to shift their attention to the high class or rather those individuals up the social hierarchy. Have a key interest in governance, culture, past and present events among other institutions. Hold the perception that each and every cultural event is key in making history and should be considered for historical analysis. New historicists goal is to simultaneously comprehend literature through its historical and cultural context while analyzing the cultural and intellectual history portrayed by the literature. Have an interest in questions of economy which include; circulation, negotiation, profit and exchange and how some of the activities, in and including literary work, which appears to be above the market are in fact driven and wholly influenced by the forces of demand and supply determinants of market value. In conclusion, New Historicism is generally a literature analysis tool which focuses on interpreting the social, cultural and political factors which affected the author thus influencing the context in which the writer wrote the text. These factors are distinct to a specific time and place hence the overall and strong influence of history in literature and vice versa.

Chapter 7 : New Historicism | Definition of New Historicism by Merriam-Webster

New Historicism is a super influential theoretical school. The fact of the matter is that the New Historicists transformed the way that literary criticism was done. They made it legit for literary critics to talk about politics and class and power, and to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature.

It began in earnest in and quickly supplanted New Criticism as the new orthodoxy in early modern studies. Despite many attacks from feminists, cultural materialists, and traditional scholars, it dominated the study of early modern literature in the s and s. At its core, new historicism insistsâ€”contra formalismâ€”that literature must be understood in its historical context. This is because it views literary texts as cultural products that are rooted in their time and place, not works of individual genius that transcend them. New-historicist essays are thus often marked by making seemingly unlikely linkages between various cultural products and literary texts. Tillyard, against which it defines itself. In its earliest iteration, new historicism was primarily a method of power analysis strongly influenced by the anthropological studies of Clifford Geertz, modes of torture and punishment described by Michel Foucault, and methods of ideological control outlined by Louis Althusser. This can be seen most visibly in new-historicist work of the early s. These works came to view the Tudor and early Stuart states as being almost insurmountable absolutist monarchies in which the scope of individual agency or political subversion appeared remote. This version of new historicism is frequently, and erroneously, taken to represent its entire enterprise. Stephen Greenblatt argued that power often produces its own subversive elements in order to contain itâ€”and so what appears to be subversion is actually the final victory of containment. This became known as the hard version of the containment thesis, and it was attacked and critiqued by many commentators as leaving too-little room for the possibility of real change or agency. This was the major departure point of the cultural materialists, who sought a more dynamic model of culture that afforded greater opportunities for dissidence. Later new-historicist studies sought to complicate the hard version of the containment thesis to facilitate a more flexible, heterogeneous, and dynamic view of culture.

General Overviews Owing to its success, there has been no shortage of textbooks and anthology entries on new historicism, but it has often had to share space with British cultural materialism, a school that, though related, has an entirely distinct theoretical and methodological genesis. The consequence of this dual treatment has resulted in a somewhat caricatured view of both approaches along the axis of subversion and containment, with new historicism representing the latter. While there is some truth to this shorthand account, any sustained engagement with new-historicist studies will reveal its limitations. Readers should be aware, therefore, that while accounts that contrast new historicism with cultural materialismâ€”for example, Dollimore , Wilson , and Brannigan â€”can be illuminating, they can also by the terms of that contrast tend to oversimplify. Be aware also that because new historicism has been a controversial development in the field, accounts are seldom entirely neutral. Mullaney , for example, was written by a new historicist, while Parvini was written by an author who has been strongly critical of the approach. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. New York and London: In doing so, however, it is perhaps guilty of oversimplification, especially as regards the new historicists, who, according to Brannigan, never progress beyond the hard version of the containment thesis. Edited by Stanley Wells, â€” Useful document of its time, but be aware of identifying new historicists too closely with the containment thesis it outlines, which became softer and more nuanced in later new-historicist work. Chapters on Michel Foucault and new historicism usefully view both subjects through this wider lens, although some of the nuances for example, the differences between new historicism and cultural materialism are lost along the way. By Jonathan Gil Harris, â€” Oxford University Press, Concise, if cursory, overview. Its focus on practice rather than theory renders it too specific to serve as a lone entry point, but useful introductory material if considered alongside other accounts. Edited by Terence Hawkes, 17â€” Argues that the view of new historicism become distorted through oversimplification. *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory*: Lucidly written, it features some incisive analysis and a comprehensive reading list to direct further study. Edited by Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton, 1â€” An excellent entry point to understanding new historicism and its concerns. A section contrasting cultural materialism with new

historicism closes the piece. Users without a subscription are not able to see the full content on this page. Please subscribe or login. How to Subscribe Oxford Bibliographies Online is available by subscription and perpetual access to institutions. For more information or to contact an Oxford Sales Representative click here.

Chapter 8 : Terms used by New Historicists

New Historicism is a theory in literary criticism that suggests literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. The theory arose in the 1980s, with Stephen Greenblatt as its main proponent, and became quite popular in the 1990s.

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New Historicism is also more specifically concerned with questions of power and culture (especially the messy commingling of the social and the cultural or of the supposedly autonomous self and the cultural/ political institutions that in fact produce that self).