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Power Structure and Socio-Political Milieu in Ellis's *The Forgotten Cottage*: A New Historical Study

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Abstract: This article analyses and evaluates the novel *The Forgotten Cottage* by Courtney Ellis, which focuses on the exploration of historical and socio-political issues. The research examines the impact of historical events, particularly World War I, on people's human psyches. Using the framework of New Historicism, the study demonstrates the power structure, socio-political problems and suppression of women during a specific time period. The purpose of this research is to investigate historical notions related to New Historicism and to highlight the cultural, political, and societal issues portrayed in the text. Additionally, the study explores the development of historical narratives and their influence on the characters throughout the novel. By employing a methodology of textual analysis based on the frameworks developed by Michael Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt, this article contributes to the field of New Historicism and extends to wider literary practices in general. The study is analytical, qualitative, and descriptive in nature.

Key Words: Power Structure, Historical, Socio-Political and Cultural Issues, Human psyche, Suppression of Women

Introduction

The present study explores the theme of interconnectedness of political, historical, and cultural elements through the lens of New Historicism. New historicism is an approach that emphasizes the study of literature and history together. It examines how a literary work is shaped by the time and circumstances in which it is written. Viewed from this innovative theoretical perspective combining insights from literately and historical studies, the article seeks to explore the ways how Courtney Ellis skillfully weaves together elements of family history, women's experiences, and historical events such as World War I in her notable works like *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022). These works aim to bridge disjointed historical events and unify them into a cohesive narrative. Courtney Ellis is known for writing emotionally charged historical fiction that delves into themes of family secrets, resilience, and the status of women in society. Her novels, including "At Summer's End" (2021), draw inspiration from her own family history, with a particular focus on the experiences of women during unsettled times like the World Wars. Through her writing, Ellis highlights the cultural stereotypes, misrepresentation, and socio-political and psychological challenges faced by individuals during these periods.

The Forgotten Cottage (2022) is a historical and fictional novel that alternates between the present day and World War I. It explores themes of family, love, loss, and sacrifice against the backdrop of the war. The novel is based on Ellis's family history, and it follows the story of Audrey, who inherits a cottage from her grandmother. As Audrey explores the secrets of the cottage, she uncovers hidden details about her great-grandmother Emilie's life during the war. The novel vividly portrays the English countryside and the importance of the cottage itself as a character with a rich history and secrets. Through a New Historicist lens, the novel can be analysed to understand the socio-political dynamics and power structures prevalent during World War I. The power dynamics between genders and social classes, as well as the impact of war on individuals' mental health, are explored in this study. The novel also reflects Greenblatt's concept of

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New Historicism by examining literature within political and social contexts while focusing on women's experiences, family dynamics, and the interplay of power structures.

A New Historicist reading of the novel allows for a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context in which it is set. The novel explores the social suppression of women during the era, their struggle for equality and independence and the difficulties of keeping relationships during times of war. Studying *The Forgotten Cottage* by Courtney Ellis (2022) closely within its historical context reveals valuable insights into the complex relationships between society and politics at that time. This understanding helps us comprehend how these factors influence the characters and their actions. The book highlights the significance of analysing history to better understand a story and its characters. Exploring the complex relationship between history, politics, and culture within the text allows us to see how the novel mirrors its historical milieu and sheds light on the socio-political concerns of the era. By employing a New Historicist approach, the narrative encourages readers to delve into the interconnected nature of historical, political, and cultural facets in literature and to gain a deeper understanding of history.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse how the novel *The Forgotten Cottage* develops historical narratives that depict the relationship between different characters.
2. To examine how the author, Ellis, portrays the power structure and socio-political suppression of women in dual timelines in her New Historical work.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Forgotten Cottage* depict the power structure and socio-political suppression of women during a specific time?
2. How does the narrative in *The Forgotten Cottage* highlight the characters' psychology and the traumatic influence of war on the minds of a generation?

Significance of study

The significance of this study lies in the exploration of New Historicist analysis of the text *The Forgotten Cottage*. By applying a New Historicist lens to the text, this study sheds light on the power dynamics within a male-dominated society, exposing issues of class and the suppression of women during a specific time period. The findings of this research offer insight into the human psyche and help to further our understanding of the socio-political context of the dual timelines present in *The Forgotten Cottage*. Through a New Historicist perspective, readers are able to gain a deeper understanding and analysis of Ellis' novel. Furthermore, this study provides a framework for future research, encouraging readers to explore other novels from a New Historicist perspective and enrich their understanding of historical narratives.

Literature Review

The exploration of history through literature has been a constant presence throughout the ages, and both disciplines have influenced and helped each other. In his essay "History as Literature," Roosevelt (1913) discusses the ongoing debate regarding whether history should be considered a branch of science or literature. Geertz's (1973) essay "The Interpretation of Cultures" has significantly contributed to the development of New Historicism. The significance of comprehending the cultural framework in which a literary piece is embedded is underscored by his work. Wayne (1990) argues that New Historicism focuses on comprehending the meaning of a literary text by analysing its internal socio-political context. By considering the interplay between the text and socio-political background, New Historicism seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of the text's meaning and broader significance within the historical and cultural context. Veenstra (1995) reviews Greenblatt's contribution to New Historicism, noting that his ideas on the nature of text and the poetics of culture have had a significant impact. Greenblatt's focus on hermeneutics provided readers with a new way of reading and interpreting texts, emphasizing the interaction between the text and the reader.



Ozturk (2003) examines the New Historicist methodology in literature and argues that history is subjective and unreliable due to personal biases and prejudices. He asserts that history reflects political power and is transformed into fiction claimed to be true. The analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, illustrates the novel's historicity and exposes the false reliance on the Western perspective of history, revealing the subjectivity of history and the distinction between truth and manipulated history. Chandra and Tiwary (2009) utilize the principles of New Historicism to examine Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. They focus on the novel's cultural and historical context, exploring concepts such as circulation, containment, context, ideology, and hegemony. Changizi and Ghasemi (2012) employ Foucault's concept of the Archaeology of Knowledge in their analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. They explore how the novel uncovers hidden histories and challenges dominant narratives. The article argues that the novel portrays a true history, challenging the discourse created by white people and allowing the black community to reclaim their own narrative. Farahbakhsh and Ahmadi (2016) analyse George Eliot's *Silas Marner* using Foucault's theory of power and discourse, as well as New Historicism. It demonstrates how the power structure in the novel is shaped by the discourse of money.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article draws primarily from the concepts of New Historicism, as proposed by Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault's ideas on the power structure of history. New Historicism emphasizes the importance of understanding literature within historical, cultural, and political contexts. It views literature as a product of time and recognizes the ways in which society, institutions, and politics shape literary works. New Historicists argue that literature reflects and influences historical events, social conditions, and cultural practices. On the other hand, Michel Foucault's ideas on the power structure of history focus on the dynamic nature of power relations within society. Foucault argues that power is not held solely by a central authority, such as the state or government, but rather circulates throughout society in various forms and relationships. Power operates on both micro and macro levels and is exercised through institutions, rules, observation, and language. Foucault's concept of power challenges traditional notions of power and highlights the complexity of power dynamics and resistance.

By applying these theoretical perspectives to the analysis of literary texts, this article aims to uncover the historical and cultural meanings embedded in the text, reveal power structures at work, and explore the ways in which literature reflects and shapes cultural practices. The article examines the relevance of these theoretical frameworks in contemporary literary analysis and cultural studies. In relation to the specific analysis of the novel *The Forgotten Cottage*, a Foucauldian perspective is applied. This perspective will delve into the power relations depicted in the novel and explore how these relations operate and shape the characters' lives. This analysis examines how power circulates within the fictional world, explores the methods through which institutions exert their power, and delves into the various strategies employed by individuals to resist or challenge these power structures.

This article utilizes the theoretical frameworks of New Historicism and Foucault's power structures to analyse the cultural and historical context of literary texts and investigate the power dynamics at play within society and literature itself. By employing these frameworks, this article aims to help us better understand how literature reflects and influences the world around it and contributes to the ongoing discourse in literary analysis and cultural studies.

Main Tenets of New Historicism

New Historicism is a literary analysis methodology that examines texts within their external contexts. Stephen Greenblatt proposed this theory in the twentieth century, and its fundamental principle is the interpretation of literature within the context in which it emerged. Greenblatt (1982) identifies the following four tenets of New Historicism.

- i. Literature is a product of historical context, and its written works are shaped by the prevailing social and cultural circumstances.
- ii. Literary works are considered a secondary form of history.
- iii. Texts are not separate from their society but are rather constructed or shaped by societal and political forces. The ideological values of the time period influenced the production of literature.

iv. History plays an essential role in the formation of any text, and thus, literature should be interpreted according to its historicity.

Historicism is a literary theory that emphasizes the importance of history and culture in the interpretation of literary works. It argues that literary texts are a reflection of the culture and politics of the era in which they were produced and that by analysing these texts, readers can gain insight into the social and political conditions of the time. New Historicism, a branch of historicism, takes this approach further by viewing literature as a shaping force in history. It rejects the idea that there is a distinction between history and literature, arguing that any such distinction is artificial and flawed. According to New Historicism, literature is both dependent on and a reflection of history, and the two are integral to one another. In the practice of New Historicism, the cultural contexts of literary works are taken into account. This includes considering the discourses and rhetorical structures that were prevalent during the time the text was written. The production, utilization, and ideology of the text's context are also key factors of interest to New Historicism.

The primary goal of New Historicism is to interpret texts in a way that contributes to, replicates, or challenges the discourse of the time period. By examining the historical and cultural contexts of a literary work, New Historicism seeks to understand how the text both influenced and was influenced by the social and political conditions of its era. New Historicism emphasizes the significance of history and culture in the interpretation of literary works. It views literature as a shaping force in history and rejects the distinction between history and literature. New Historicism takes into account the cultural contexts of literary works and aims to interpret texts in a way that contributes to our understanding of the discourses of the time period.

Analysis

This study analyses Courtney Ellis's novel *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022) using Foucauldian and Greenblatt perspectives, focusing on power structures, patriarchy, status, social and political complications, family dynamics, and the suppression of women. The novel provides a rich understanding of these concepts through its various characters and detailed situations. The researcher recognizes the significance of the novel's exploration of forgotten history and the truth about power structures. *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022) serves as an important reminder of the suffering people endured in the past. New Historicism is employed in this analysis to thoroughly examine the text on social, historical, and political levels, allowing for a deeper comprehension of its underlying meanings. The novel is divided into two timelines, with the present timeline exploring the historical information, mysteries of the cottage, and references to World War II. It also delves into the protagonist, Audrey's fascination with her grandmother's past. The second section of the novel provides a comprehensive account of events in France during 1915, offering detailed insights into the overall narrative. Through its exploration of these timelines, *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022) uncovers connections between past and present, shedding light on the complexities of history.

Power Structure

The representation of power in the novel is predominantly negative, as it depicts repression under societal status and patriarchal influence. Foucault's notion of power shifting and circulating is exemplified throughout the text. The power dynamics of class and status are determined by factors such as birth, wealth, education, and occupation, making it difficult to move up the social hierarchy. In this novel, the upper class occupies the top of the power structure, consisting of the nobility, landed gentry, and wealthy industrialists, and they exert control over the rest of society. Isaac, a member of the lower class, is hesitant to enter society because his birth alone taints his character, regardless of his education, fine clothing, and refined speech (Ellis, 2022, p. 57). Despite possessing some level of status and economic stability, Isaac's social standing does not compare to Emilie's. He is seen as an untitled man by the upper class, burdened by the sins of his mother, which has resulted in the extinction of his title. As a result, he does not have the right to marry an upper-class woman, as it would tarnish her reputation and status. Despite his education, attire, and good manners, Isaac's lower-class upbringing is the only aspect that matters to others. Isaac's hesitation to enter society highlights the exclusion that individuals from the lower class feel. He is well aware of the judgment he will face solely based on his birth, regardless of his education, clothing, or demeanour. The power structure of class and status dictates that one's position in society is determined



solely by one's birth rather than individual merit. Ultimately, this line emphasizes how society's judgment revolves around birth and title, highlighting the immense power it holds.

Emilie's mother believes that her friend's lower social class and untitled family are the reasons why men pursue her. According to her mother, a woman's physical appearance and her high-class father determine her value. This implies that Emilie is seen as a passive object of desire, with men interested in her based on her looks and social status rather than her intellect and personality. Emilie's mother emphasizes that men consider a woman's social status and family background when deciding whether to pursue a relationship. In essence, this emphasizes how elitist parents perceive lower-class individuals as seeking advantages from them instead of valuing their intellect.

Patriarchal Power

In *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022), the concept of cultural hegemony is evident through the reinforcement of patriarchal power and the gender binary. Male characters hold dominant positions in social and economic status, as seen with Emilie's brother Fletcher, who enjoys education, freedom, and a hereditary title. This highlights how power and privilege are primarily reserved for men, reinforcing a society where masculinity is equated with power. Emilie's parents also value her brother more than her, reflecting the common societal belief that boys are more important than girls. This creates an uneven power balance in families and society, where male children are favoured and receive more attention and opportunities. However, the text also shows how Emilie's mother finds ways to subvert patriarchal norms by giving her daughter undivided attention during dressing time. This suggests that women can challenge and navigate patriarchal values despite their subordinate positions.

The patriarchal power dynamics are further emphasized through the portrayal of fathers as the ultimate authority figures in the household. Despite the mother's role in planning and organizing, the final decision-making power lies with the father. This imbalance of power shows how men's perspectives and interests take priority over women, relegating women to domestic duties. The gender dynamics within the domestic sphere reveal how power relations are shaped by gender identities. Both *The Forgotten Cottage* and *The Color Purple* exemplify how patriarchal power structures reinforce gender binaries and limit women's agency. These texts shed light on the importance of understanding cultural hegemony and how it influences social practices and power relations. By examining gender dynamics in literature, we can gain insights into the ways in which power is distributed and maintained within societies.

Integration of History, Culture, and Politics

According to the principles of the new historicist approach, literary texts cannot be separated from their cultural, political, and societal contexts. These texts are not solely influenced by nothingness or abstract ideas but are influenced by the compulsory and significant aspects of society. Literature is closely intertwined with the life, culture, and society of the writer. In the novel *"The Forgotten Cottage"* (2022), the socio-political landscape is portrayed as a prominent character. Audrey, the protagonist, is driven to uncover the mysterious background of her grandmother's mother, Emilie. The novel unfolds through two timelines, with the present taking place in England and the past set in France. Through this narrative structure, the novel aims to reveal the historical significance inherent in the region and its connection to the characters' lives.

The novel *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022) offers a comprehensive portrayal of the social and political upheaval during the time of World War I, specifically focusing on the events of 1914. The story delves into historical facts about the war and explores the political tensions that arose in its aftermath. The main plot of the novel intricately weaves together the personal lives of its characters with the larger political and historical events of the time. Through the characters of Isaac, Lord Rays Bridgmond, and Fletcher, the novel delves into the socio-political issues of British society. The war serves as a backdrop for the events unfolding in the lives of these characters. They are all deeply concerned about the war and its impact on their lives. The male characters, in particular, are heavily involved in the war effort, which has profound effects on their mental state and even influences the women who have taken on new roles and responsibilities in their absence.

In the novel, the first male character introduced, Fletcher, volunteers to fight for his country, displaying his true love for his country and the courage to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the king and country. Lord Bridgmann, Fletcher, and Isaac are the three main characters in Emilie's life who are forced to leave her due to the war. Emilie, however, is not interested in engaging in discussions about the war at home. She tries to ignore the war talks as she can't bear to send her brother to war, but her father is willing to send him for the sake of the country. Emilie is unsure whether her indifference stems from ignorance or patriotism, but she eventually joins in the discussion.

Social Suppression of Women

The issue of suppressing women in literature is not a new or simple matter, as it has been extensively addressed throughout history. In the novel *The Forgotten Cottage* (2022), this recurring theme is explored in a timely and relevant manner. The impact of this suppression on the perception and portrayal of women in society cannot be overlooked. The narrative takes place in England, primarily during and after World War I, a period marked by rigid societal expectations that confined women to traditional gender roles, thus limiting their opportunities and personal freedoms. The novel explores the theme of women's suppression and sparks important discussions on the subject. In the present day, the protagonist, Audrey, constantly faces family pressure and unwanted opinions, which becomes a major source of struggle in her life. Audrey desires independence and longs to escape her family's overwhelming influence. She expresses her exhaustion and frustration, stating, "I had needed to get far away from my mess of life" (Ellis, 2022, p. 4). The weight of family pressure weighs heavily on her, as is evident from her desire to evade judgmental gazes from her sister, Beth. Audrey yearns to break free from the control and restrictions imposed by her sister and father, who continue to try and dominate her decisions. This struggle with family dynamics drives Audrey to find solace in alcohol as she copes with the stress caused by her family's expectations. Interestingly, the challenges faced by Audrey in 2014 mirror those confronted by her great-grandmother Emilie in 1940, highlighting the ongoing struggles and societal issues experienced by women. In both timelines, women face similar obstacles in their quest for self-identity, navigating family dynamics, and combating the oppression that women continue to endure.

Despite facing oppression from society, women are not only subjugated and suppressed by men but also by other women. They are denied access to education and face numerous hurdles. However, this does not dampen their spirits or lower their morale. In fact, they remain passionate and self-confident, with a strong determination to break free from the stereotypical roles imposed by society. One woman shared her story, saying, "My parents prohibited me from corresponding with him, but I chose to run away because I desired a life different from what my mother had planned for me. I yearned for independence, knowledge, and the freedom to experience love."

Mysterious Living History of *The Forgotten Cottage*

Throughout the novel's timeline, the significance of grandmother's Sparrow Cottage is consistently highlighted. The author artfully intertwines fictional details of the cottage's past and present, seamlessly blending the enigmatic family history with important historical events from previous decades. This interplay of fact and fiction, masterfully depicted, truly captivates the reader with its artistic beauty. The Sparrow Cottage holds within it a hidden and captivating tale layered with a complex history that has been forgotten over time.

Audrey inherits the cottage from her grandmother after diligently caring for her during her final days. In 2014, Audrey travelled from America to Yorkshire, England, where the current cottage is situated. Initially, her sole purpose is to sell the cottage urgently, which is driven by her pressing need for money. However, as events unfold, Audrey becomes aware that there are untold secrets waiting to be unveiled about her family's past. This revised version maintains the essence of the original paragraph while improving its clarity and coherence. The history of Sparrow Cottage is more than just a forgotten relic of the past; it is a vibrant and influential presence that continues to shape the present. Within its walls, one can sense remnants of the past or hear stories that have been handed down through generations. As Audrey reflects, "Whatever was inside would truly be the last of the Gran I had known" (Ellis, 2022, p. 22). Audrey is determined to uncover the truth about her grandmother's departure from the cottage and her



subsequent journey to America. She is intrigued by the cottage's ability to transport her back to the 1940s as if it were trapped in a time warp. Additionally, Audrey yearns to discover the secrets of her true family heritage, which leads her to delve into the mysteries of her great-grandmother's past. Despite the structural damages, Sparrow Cottage possesses an undeniable charm and allure. The final revelation comes in the form of a letter given to Bernard by Audrey. Although the letter is meant for Dorothy, she never finds out about it. It is in this letter that the truth is uncovered - Audrey discovers that her Grandmother had been living a life of deception and believes that her father had died when, in fact, he was alive. The mystery is solved when Audrey learns that Isaac, who had assumed the identity of Mr. Smith due to a war injury, intends to reveal to Dorothy that he is her father. However, tragically, the letter slips from Audrey's hand, and she leaves Sparrow's cottage without realizing its importance. In the end, Audrey unravels a series of long-hidden family secrets and uncovers a multitude of unanswered questions.

Conclusion

This research examines the contributions of Michael Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt in presenting new historicist perspectives in Courtney Ellis's novel, *The Forgotten Cottage*. Through their theoretical lenses, the study uncovers power structures, social-political issues, and historical narratives portrayed in the novel. The analysis delves into the suppression of women, political problems, war trauma, and the diverse backgrounds and ethnicities of the characters. These findings underscore the influence of power structures on individuals' lives and the control exerted by patriarchal societies. Moreover, the research highlights gender disparities, political suppression, and the long impact of war, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of societal inequalities and the necessity for societal progress.

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