

**The Dialectics of the Scottish Predicament:  
A New Historicist Reading  
of Allan Massie**



A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MA in English Literature  
by  
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## Conclusion

The previous chapters presented an application of New Historicism to the novels of Allan Massie, a commentary on, and a critique of this critical practice. The conclusion will, therefore, discuss the potentials and limits of the strategies of New Historicism, pointing out the main findings and outcomes of the thesis.

New Historicism asserts that literature is not a medium for the expression of historical knowledge. It is an active part of a particular historical moment. The object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature in history. This is to see literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions and contradictions of history. That is why the thesis treated history not as a background context, as one possible frame of reference which might make the novels of Massie meaningful, but as a medium in which the novels are thoroughly involved.

The thesis tried to obliterate the demarcation lines between the novels and the social and historical contexts from which they issued and to show how Massie's novels are a thread in the dynamic web of discourses circulating in Scottish society. It demonstrated how the novels do not mirror a homogeneous, uniform and coherent spirit of an age, instead, they interact in different ways with their historical moments.

That is why the novels of Massie were dealt with as discourses that interact with other productions and appropriations of history to prove that ideological homogeneity is illusory. Chapter two, for instance, demonstrated how One Night in Winter embodies the complexities and contradictions of the discourses of Independence and Unionism that circulated at the time of the publication of the novel and how it represents one of those discourses. Similarly, chapter three tracked the social energy that circulated between the The Hanging Tree and the The Ragged Lion, on the one hand, and Scottish society, on the other, so that these novels could be fully grasped in relation to other texts. The novels were shown to be neither self-sufficient “verbal icons” nor texts that reflect the spirit of a particular age. Instead, they are texts that present a particular discourse that is different from other discourses. Along the same lines, chapter four demonstrated how The Last Peacock and These Enchanted Woods are enmeshed in the dialectical question of landownership and how they represent the discourse of the landed classes at a time when there is another discourse that calls for the abolition of concentrated landownership.

The thesis has come to the conclusion that reading the novels from this perspective has shed a new light on them and has underlined their dynamism and vitality. The New Historicist belief that society consists of a jostling and conflicting miscellany of practices has been validated by the cross-examination of the novels of Massie with other non-literary texts and

sources. This New Historicist technique has been a useful way of constructing exchanges between Massie's novels and other texts and has proved that his novels represent one point in the different power relations of the Scottish society.

The thesis has also found that the *historicist* of texts and the *textuality* of history are applicable to Massie's novels. First, Massie's novels are intertwined with the political, social and cultural dynamics of their time and this attests to the *historicist* of texts. Second, Massie's novels are distorted by the complex web of language, the ideology of the time they were produced in and the ideological agendas of Massie and this attests to the *textuality* of history.

The thesis has also concluded that the application of the mechanics of *negotiation* and *exchange* and *subversion* and *containment* in the second chapter, and *self-fashioning* in the fourth chapter has not yielded fruitful results. These New Historicist mechanics, which are closely related to constructing and maintaining power structures in the Scottish society, stem from the New Historicist belief that texts participate in shaping the historical situations from which they emerge and that literature plays an important role in making a view of the world plausible and making power relations acceptable. Nevertheless, the novels of Massie do not participate in making state power and ideology familiar and acceptable to the subjects of the

Scottish society and they are not a constitutive part of the way it orders and governs itself.

Chapter two demonstrated that although One Night in Winter seems to be subversive of Nationalism, the circulation (*negotiation and exchange*) of this political subversion is not influential, or rather negligible in the Scottish society. In the same vein, chapter four demonstrated how the New Historicist concept of *self-fashioning* is not suitable to the writings of Massie because his novels are not capable of fashioning or formulating the consciousness of the Scottish people as they are not dominant or mainstream works.

The central assumption of Greenblatt's work on power is that subversion is possible, but is always contained by state power and that literature will reflect the values, customs and norms of the dominant interests in its society and so is mobilized, mostly unconsciously, by the state as an ideological weapon, an army of metaphors which seek to persuade and manipulate. Therefore, Greenblatt's ideas on power are not applicable to Massie's novels because Greenblatt does not look for counter-representations or dissident subcultures.

The thesis, therefore, has come to the conclusion that the technique of cross-examining literary and non-literary texts is of paramount importance because it demonstrates how the Scottish society is made up of a miscellany of practices and institutions; it clearly highlights "the dialectics of the

Scottish predicament". The thesis has also proved the applicability of the *historicity of texts* and the *textuality of history* to Massie's novels. However, the validity of the concepts related to the operations of power (*subversion and containment*, and *self-fashioning*) has been rejected as far as Massie's works are concerned.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that this thesis has only offered one possible reading of the novels of Massie. This is by no means the only possible or acceptable reading of these texts. Like any historical criticism, this reading is circumscribed by many factors: the ideology, outlook and discursive practices of the time in which the text was produced, the outlook of Massie, the New Historicist approach, the particular way New Historicism has been applied by the researcher and finally the distorting web of language. This thesis is, after all, a textual construct of historical subjects. Moreover, even when New Historicists believe they are sticking to facts, the way they contextualise those facts (including which facts are deemed important enough to report and which are left out) determines what story those facts will tell. In addition, New Historicist readings always themselves constitute another remaking of the past as the text under discussion is juxtaposed with a chosen document, so that a new reality is formed. In this sense, the aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-situating the text.