Culture defined: "...a culture is a collection of interactive cultures, each of which is growing and changing, each of which is constituted at any given moment in time by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, occupation, and similar factors that contribute to the experience of its members" (294).

New Historical/Cultural Criticism and Literature

1. Literary texts help to shape the culture in which they are interpreted.

2. The goal of this criticism is for the reader "to make connections between the literary text, the culture in which it emerged, and the cultures in which it is interpreted" (295).

Questions New Historical/Cultural Critics ask about Literary Texts

1. How does the literary text function as part of a continuum with other historical/cultural texts from the same period, for example, penal codes, educational priorities, the treatment of children under the law, other art forms (including popular art forms), and the like? That is, taken as part of a "thick description" of a given culture at a given point in history, what does this literary work add to our tentative understanding of human experience in that particular time and place, including the ways in which individual identity shapes and is shaped by cultural institutions?

2. How does the text promote ideologies that support and/or undermine the prevailing power structures of the time and place in which it was written and/or interpreted?

3. What does the literary text add to our understanding of the ways in which literary and non-literary discourses (such as political, scientific, economic, and educational theories) have influenced, overlapped with, and competed with one another at specific historical moments?

4. What does the literary work suggest about the experience of groups of people who have been ignored, under-represented, or misrepresented by traditional history (for example, laborers, prisoners, women, people of color, children and so on)? Cultural critics focus on the intersection of the literary work with non-literary discourses prevalent in the culture in which the work emerged and/or in the cultures in which it has been interpreted and often focus on such issues as the circulation of power and the dynamics of personal and group identity.

5. How has the work's reception by literary critics and the reading public - including reception at its point of origin, changing responses to the work over time, and its possible future relationship with its audience - been shaped by and shaped the culture in which that reception occurred (past, present or future)?