

Political and Socio-Cultural Poetics of the Novel the Queen's Gambit by Walter Tevis: A New Historicist Perspective



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ABSTRACT: This paper intends to explicate the novel 'The Queen's Gambit' by Walter Tevis with a new historicist lens to explore the complex layers of politics of representation and power relations with a view to produce a close -reading of issues like contemporary (Mid-20th century, 1950s and 1960s) socio-political and cultural context of America, Cold War, Communism, Christianity, Capitalism, Atheism, critical racial issues, western concept of beauty as well as moral values and beliefs, considering not only the literary discourse but other non-literary cultural productions and forms like visual discourse (TV, movies) and sports, in this context, Chess. The paper has adopted new historicist theoretical framework to shed light also on the biographical, historical, socio-political and cultural contexts of when the novel was written and published (Mid-1970s and published in 1983). The temporal and spatial setting of the novel, mid-20th century and Kentucky, America have also been analyzed from the same theoretical framework. The objective of this paper is explorative and analytical in nature in its reading of the novel, by applying exegesis in the form of content analysis and textual analysis. The paper has also drawn substantially from cultural studies, research methods like close reading of visual materials and other non-literary cultural productions. Institutional analysis and ideology critique approach has been used to critically analyze how the orphanage (Methuen Home) has been portrayed and represented and what impressions it gives about the nature and operation of power dynamics and dominant ideologies within the orphanage and also in the larger context of America.

KEYWORDS: New Historicism, Mid-20th Century America, Close-Reading, The Queen's Gambit, Walter Tevis, 1950s & 1960s America

INTRODUCTION

Context and conditions of when Queen's Gambit was being written and later published in 1983

As new historicist approach primarily focuses on the historical, social and cultural contexts of a literary text of its time of production and circulation, it will be appropriate to first analyze the context and conditions when The Queen's Gambit was being written and published (it was published in 1983). Walter Tevis (1928-1985) was an American novelist and published Queen's Gambit just one year before he died in 1984. The time when he wrote and published Queen's Gambit was within the Cold War period of 1945-1991. Though there is debate about the exact time frame of the Cold War period, it is generally assumed that the cold war started in 12th March 1947 with Truman Doctrine and ended on 26th December 1991 with the dissolution of Soviet Union.

It can be carefully assumed that there will be textual traces and evidences of Cold War in the novel, as the novel, besides other aspects, is mainly about Chess, and Soviets were the best chess player in the world then in 1983 and also within the temporal setting of the novel- 1950s and 1960s. The cold war started almost immediately after the end of World War II in 1945 with the formation of NATO from USA side. As this war was mostly ideological and geopolitical in nature, this war ranged from sports rivalry to space technology between USA and USSR.

The impression and imprint of Cold War can be traced very vividly within the novel not only because final competition holds between Beth Harmon and Vasily Borgov, the Russian chess master but for the direct textual evidences and allusions to Communism and Soviet Union. There is a growing tension within the novel between Russian chess player and American chess player. The tension is not violent though but cold and silent.

The cold silence can be traced as one of the dominant themes of the novel. The novel starts with an epigraph with excerpt from a poem titled "Long-legged Fly" by WB Yeats. The excerpt that has been taken from this poem is about Helen of Troy implicating the inner working of a genius and beautiful woman in silence. In the same poem there are allusions to Julius Caesar and Michelangelo; Caesar contemplating silently on a spread out map before him and Michelangelo working on The Creation of Adam

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in silence. The main concern of the poem is the very concern of the novel 'The Queen's Gambit' -the inner working of a genius. During an interview with New York Times in 1983 Tevis himself informed that "the novel is a tribute to the brainy women."

This thematic and metaphoric silence, when a long-legged fly maintains while walking over a stream water, also signifies the silent and cold ideological war going on between USSR and USA. The poem does not only concern Helen but also Julius Caesar who is contemplating on a map to extend his territorial dominance, the imagery of which can easily remind the power dynamics of achieving geopolitical dominance on each other by USA and USSR. Though Tevis chose the part of the poem about Helen there has remained a great deal that has not been chosen and said, but can be traced metonymically.

Moreover, the game of chess is played with reasoning, knowledge of permutations and probabilities to move the pieces over 64 squares of chess board to spread and exude control and dominance. The chess itself has become a metaphor for the cold war between USA and Soviet Union.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoz Zizek (2008) elaborates drawing from Lacan and Althusser how ideology operates not only through abstract belief or fantasy but ideology also becomes social reality-"always materialized in our effective social reality and belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality" (Zizek,p.36). The ideology is manifested in the social reality through the form of commodity exchange, value, labor, architecture, pastime, leisure and even sports and other material objects. Through all modes of everyday life practices the ideology betrays itself. As Sue J. Kim (2009) puts forward in his book chapter on *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that "ideology is not only what people "think" or "know" but also—even primarily—what they do." Similarly, the game of chess and other material objects have the possibility to shed light on the contemporary dominant ideology prevailing at all stages of social and national life.

The novel 'The Queen's Gambit' is also sometimes considered a sports thriller besides psychological thriller, bildungsroman or coming of age novel. There are some biographical elements of Tevis in the novel as he was also a "Grade C" chess player and he devoted himself to game of chess discarding writing and getting himself addicted to alcoholism which have made the novel sort of semi-autobiographical or disguised autobiography. He started writing after sobering up from alcoholism after around 17 years and wrote 'The Queen's Gambit' eventually.

Later in the discussion section, there will follow an elaborate explication of the working and functioning of orphanage as an institution, the daily practices within, the intake of vitamin pills along with the tranquilizer, the church sermons, the Saturday and Sunday movie on morality, Christianity, personal development, the discipline and punish mechanism of Methuen Home, adoptability of the girls, have betrayed the underlying dominant ideologies, power relations, power dynamics, power operation of contemporary 1950s and 1960s America.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretical framework

John Brannigan (1996) suggests one of the best ways to start a new historicist reading is by taking into account "the depiction of a scene or piece of writing which yields a microcosmic image of what the critic seeks to elaborate in relation to the main text of discussion." Brannigan indicates that a single word, a sign, a passing commentary, a TV show, a movie, a medicine, a metaphor can work as a microcosmic cultural text which can give a macrocosmic understanding of politics of representation, power relations and power dynamics. As it will be discussed how seemingly disparate and separate comments from a third person narrative point of view of the novel on issue of communism and Christianity exposes not only the tension of belief system in God from liberal democratic and communist point of view of 1950s America but also portrays the relationship and tension between capitalism and communism.

Alike, many other cultural cues, texts, discursive materials both literary and non-literary have been explicated to place the novel in the larger political and social framework of contemporary America along with the time of the author himself and the time the book was published. New historicist approach thus gives a holistic and comprehensive picture of social, political and cultural context of both the novelistic time and authorial time.

New historicism as a school of critical thoughts came in the arena of literary and cultural theory during 1970s and early 1980s, primarily with the coinage and theorization of an American critic Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (1980). Peter Barry (2020) outlines a fundamental definition of this theoretical practice putting forward "it is a method based on the parallel reading of the literary text, and non-literary texts, usually of the some historical period" (Barry, p.116).

New historicism can be defined as a methodological approach which co-situates both literary and non-literary texts of the same historical period to remake a "parallel" reading of literary texts. Moreover, Barry (2018) further emphasizes that "literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other" (p.175).

The objective of New Historicist reading as Greenblatt himself indicates should deploy "an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts."

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The traces, signs, relevant “words on the page”, co-text, subtext -both implicit and explicit have been connected with the contemporary American socio-political and cultural context in the novel *The Queen's Gambit*. New Historicism which is post-structuralist and deconstructionist in approach, “accepts Derrida’s view that there is nothing outside text, in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to us in textualized form” (Barry, 2018, p.178)

Jean Howard has suggested that with the inception of New Historicism the apathy for history has morphed into a keen interest for history. Howard has also connected New Historicism to a larger critical movement in the post-structuralist era suggesting the New Historicism’s power to re-historicize the literary studies. Edward Petcher views New Historicist approach as the text going back to the context from which it was generated. Petcher also argues that new historicization of literary studies is also a new politicization. (Barry, p.292)

Michael Warner puts it very precisely that “a text will always be historical and history would be enclosed in texts” (p.5). Revisiting the idea of Warner, Richter (2006) highlights the importance of the context of a text suggesting that “the text cannot be anything beyond context, but can only be perceived within it”. The same identical view can also be found on an online research library “questia.com” that indicates that “New historicism tends to be willing to perform more textual analysis” in the form of grounding it on background and “potential bias of the text.”

The functioning and politics of representation holds a very important space in the New Historicist theoretical framework. As Greenblatt and Gallagher in one of their essays (*The Touch of Real*) from the book *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) puts forward, “new historicism is the anecdotal, fragmentary method, which rests on the principle of representation” (Greenblatt and Gallagher, p. 36). Richter (2006) referring to Foucault states that “we have access only to representations purporting to map the real” (Foucault, 1977).

It is very difficult to discuss and understand new historicist thoughts without bringing into account Michel Foucault. Greenblatt (2007) himself has expressed that “certainly, the presence of Michel Foucault on the Berkeley campus... has helped to shape my own literary critical practice” (Greenblatt, 2007, p.197). In 1980s Greenblatt developed New Historicism approach keeping in mind the Foucauldian binary concept of discourse/power to initiate a more objective way of treating history by analyzing literary and cultural productions of that era.

Again, Brannigan has drawn an interrelationship between the power relation and new historicist tenets: “New historicism is a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relation as the most important context for texts of all kinds” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 6).

Again, Greenblatt argues, the circulation of power must be sought in works of art since “the work of art is itself the product of a set of manipulations” (Greenblatt, 2007, p. 12).

The term “cultural poetics” was gaining currency through Greenblatt during the end of 1980s instead of the term New Historicism. Greenblatt kept using the term “the poetics of culture”. (Nayar, 2010, p.212).

“Cultural Poetics assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also feature prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the socio-historical situation” (Veenstra, 1995, p. 174).

Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of New Historicism is to sketch a less subjective history and to rewrite and equally appreciate history in accordance with the artistic works, a painting, a memoir, or a novel.

New historicism at its final view point purports to drape a more objective history with the possibility of rewriting it and in alignment with all cultural forms like TV, movies, magazines, sports, memoir, novel or even church sermons.

“What interests Greenblatt is the whole complex of minute transactions that takes place between literature, culture, and society at the level of the text” (Kaes, 1992, pp. 151-152).

As Nayar (2010, p.205) puts it “culture is a text, a system of difference, arbitrariness and ideology”. The new historicist school treat culture as a text, cultural texts. Under the light of new historicism all the prevailing cultural forms in a particular time and space becomes a text both literary and non-literary thus inviting intertextuality and also intratextual practice into the discursive regime and realm of representation, knowledge, power, truth and history.

The British counterpart of New Historicism, Cultural Materialism suggests that texts must be read as sites of power relations, but as they *connect with the present* (Nayar, p.201). It indicates that as texts being the sites of national, political and cultural demarcation, they should be contemporized in at least three levels-the contemporary time frame within a text like novel, the contemporary time when the text was written and the contemporary time when the critical analysis of the texts is taking place.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though the novel *The Queen's Gambit* has been used as the primary text for analysis, for literature review both the resources on the novel and literatures on the 2020 adaptation of the novel with eponymous name have been taken for review and discussions.

Sarah Miller (2020) of *New Yorker* finds Netflix’s adaptation of “*The Queen's Gambit*,” starring Anya Taylor-Joy, copying virtually everything from Walter Tevis’s novel. This commentary highlights not only the quality of screen adaptation but also on that, the

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various literature written on this mini-series of Netflix, released in 2020 can also be taken into consideration while writing about the novel, as this very recent adaptation has shown significant fidelity to the original text. For this reason, literature on the TV adaptation of the novel, which have been deemed appropriate for the scope of this paper, have also been taken into account. Miller has shed light on the representation of transformative process of Beth Harmon from an ugly girl to good looking adolescent and then adult from a critical point of view by analyzing the quality and appropriateness of cast selection for the mini-series. Taylor Joy who has played the character of Beth Harmon in the TV series did not appropriately play out the essence of Beth Harmon as Miller argues in this article.

Mónica Fernández Jiménez (2021) has rendered a feminist reading of 'The Queen's Gambit' arguing how Beth Harmon has acted as an change agent working against the gender stereotypes for game of chess has always been historically considered a game for the male. Jiménez has also discussed the predicament of Alma Wheatley, adoptive mother of Beth, who had playing piano as a dream but for the households conditions she could not pursue that dream or perhaps she was deemed not to have that inner capacity as Kant suggested regarding women- "lack of abstract thought" in females (Lloyd 1984, 76).

Jiménez has also referred to the reviews of "the Enlightened tradition with a special emphasis on the writings of Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, and Schopenhauer that universalized the female inability for abstract reasoning in terms of the two sexes being complementary" conducted by Genevieve Lloyd (Lloyd 1984, 76). Each time Beth expressed her love and passion for chess, Mrs. Wheatley seemed to disapprove it considering the chess as something a masculine space which required abstract reasoning and thinking that Beth as a female might lack.

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt (1983) in an article of New York Times compared Queen's Gambit with Nabokov's "Defense" suggesting the novel should be read as a psychological thriller where a contest has been portrayed "pitting human rationality against the self's unconscious urge to wipe out thought."

Michael Dirda (2021), a book critic for Washington Post has elaborated in his article about the biographical elements of Walter Tevis in the novel along with the reviews of Tevis's major books starting with the debut *The Hustler* (1959), *The Color of Money*, *Far From Home*, a short story collection, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1963), *Mocking Bird* (1983), *The Steps to The Sun* (1983) and *The Queen's Gambit* (1983). Dirda has also highlighted a thematic analogy among the works of Camus (*The stranger*) and Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) in terms of the treatment of the themes like morality and existential crisis in Tevis's novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

Sara Kay Smullens (2020) has reviewed the Queen's Gambit from a social worker's point of view. In her article she has reflected on the issue of resilience after experiencing trauma and loss from a psychological perspective. Smullens points that "research in ours (social works) and related fields points persistently to how impossible it may be for rejected, abandoned, abused kids to make fulfilling lives...a familiar psychological trajectory." Beth struggles with the devastating and traumatic loss of both of her biological parents.

John Anderson (2020) in his review article published in the Wall Street Journal called the Queen's Gambit as a winning Cold War chess thriller suggesting the Cold War period in the mid -20th century of 1950s and 1960s after the end of World War II. Anderson has indicated Beth as the representation of a savant chess player as a "propaganda tool in this novelistic cold war tale." Anderson by drawing a metaphor between chess and Swiss Army Knife, has commented on 'The Queen's Gambit': "a tale of obsession, addiction, adoption and the solitude of genius" and Beth becomes a reluctant propagandist tool for Cold War between US and Soviet Union.

Lucy Mangan (2020) in her review article has indicated towards the 1960s social context of American as portrayed by Tevis where Beth rises to the fame of world chess virtually without any friction- facing not that much sexism let alone any predatory behavior in the male dominated world of 60s chess except her own inner battle with self-sabotaging alcoholism and tranquilizer intake.

Sara Stewart (2020) in her opinion piece published in CNN has remarked the Queen's Gambit as a literal and functional escapism relating to Beth Harmon who escapes from the external world to her inner world of cerebral thinking, control and reasoning of world of chess. Stewart has also remarked on the paradox of how popular the Queen's Gambit series has become among Americans for who chess is hardly a pastime.

Edwards & Clark (2017) wrote an abstract for their exhibition outlining how Beth Harmon can be portrayed for the screenplay. "The invitation to make a portrait imposes a loose framework for artists to work amongst and perhaps suggests a different approach to making. It could be a small detail from the text that provides the impetus: a metaphor of a polished diamond, a vivid creme de menthe green, a sample from the West Side Story soundtrack or a piece of clothing Beth might wear.(Edwards & Clark, 2017)

From the foregoing reviewed literature it is apparently clear that there is very little literature on *The Queen's Gambit* novel that has analyzed it from theoretical frameworks except for some feminist reading and other literature in the form of reviews and opinions. It can also be assumed that there was even fewer reviews and opinions about the novel before the TV adaptation in 2020. There comes a proliferation of reviews and commentaries after the release of this screen adaptation. The same pattern can be noticed regarding Tevis's other novels like 'The Hustler' and 'The Color of Money,' when they received Hollywood adaptations.

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Literature regarding the screen adaptation of the novel *Queen's Gambit* has been taken into consideration along with the scholarly articles on the novel, because together these interdisciplinary literature can provide a better and fuller understanding of the novel. Besides, as some cultural studies tools have been used within the scope of this paper, alternative cultural form of the novel like movies or TV series, has been found helpful in reading the novel from New Historicist perspectives. This interdisciplinary exchange of literature has shed brighter light on the spectrum of this paper.

The reading of the novel 'The Queen's Gambit' from the theoretical frameworks of New Historicism will contribute significantly to the existing knowledge and literature on the novel and also on the application and appropriation of the theory itself.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-cultural and political context of 1950s and 1960s America in terms of textual evidences

Tevis chose Elizabeth Harmon aka Beth, a female protagonist for his generic bildungsroman or coming of age novel which is also considered sometimes a historical fiction or Period novel as it sets in a particular spatial and temporal setting of 1950s and 1960s America. This choice for a female protagonist is not an apolitical act rather a political act when the Women's Movement of 1960s is taken into consideration. Tevis could have taken a male protagonist, as Bobby Fischer (Robert James Fischer, March 9, 1943 – January 17, 2008) who won the World Chess Championship in 1972 defeating Boris Spassky of the USSR (Soviet Union, now Russia). This championship between Fischer and Spassky was circulated as a Cold War confrontation between US and USSR (Wikipedia).

Fischer was also a child prodigy who at the age of 13 won a game that has been depicted as "the game of the century". In the author's note to the novel, Tevis has mentioned these two chess grandmaster Fischer and Spassky along with another grandmaster Anatoly Karpov. Tevis has omitted these grandmasters from the cast of characters to prevent contradiction in the novel disclaiming that *Queen's Gambit* is a work of fiction. But one can easily find biographical similarities between Fischer and Beth. These similarities inspire the reader to think that the character of Beth has been crafted taking inspiration from Fischer. The question of remodeling Fischer as Beth can be best explored by taking into the historical accounts of women's movement of 1960s which emphasized on resolving pay disparity faced by women in workplaces along with availing economic, political and social facilities so that women can contribute in all sectors.

Moreover The Civil Rights Movement of 1960s highlighted the discrimination and disparity experienced by African American, not to mention women, due to racial and cultural suppositions. This decade saw a very significant changes in almost every strata of social, political, economic and cultural life.

Bob Dylan released his "The Times They Are A changin'" in 1964 and this wave of change, in various forms, affected the American society as a whole. Tevis had taken definitely intentionally, Beth, a female protagonist for his novel as a chess child prodigy who eventually becomes international grandmaster instead of a male protagonist to accommodate one of the changes that was taking place slowly but steadily in the American society in terms of women empowerment and visibility. Tevis himself in an interview with New York Times in 1983 told that this novel is a "tribute to all the brainy women."

Moreover, Tevis once explained why he made the choice to portray a female chess champion—"sometimes I was really more wrapped up in the idea of intelligence in women, for which I have an enormous respect and a kind of awe, more wrapped up in that even than the game of chess itself." (Wartik, 2020)

As mentioned earlier silent tension of Cold War can also be explicitly traced within the novel. Cold War between US and USSR was mainly ideological and geopolitical as discussed before, and this ideological conflict and tension was primarily the tension between liberal democracy and communism; capitalism being the nexus of two. US took stance, after the end of World War II in favor of anti-communist states and against communist states. Vietnam War of 1960s is a manifested example of this rivalry. Then US president stood beside the anti-communist South Vietnam. The tension and conflict between democracy and communism or alternatively put capitalism and communism, was very apparent in American society and a widespread hatred and repulsion was circulated regarding Communism associating it with Atheism across America. An excerpt from the novel will shed clearer light in this regard.

The novel has been narrated from a third person omniscient point of view. The narrator describes:

"Beth had listened to some of Miss Lonsdale's (Sunday) chapel talks. They were about Christian service and about how bad dancing and communism were. (p. 71)"

Again the narrator depicts:

"Beth was able to handle it (setting out chairs in the chapel) easily enough, but listening to Miss Lonsdale talk about godless communism and the way it was spreading in the United States was pretty bad.Miss Lonsdale talk on in her deadly serious way about how we all had to be careful, that communism was like a disease and could infect you. It was not clear to Beth what communism was. Something wicked people believed in, in other countries, like being Nazis and torturing Jews by the millions." (p.74)

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The same thoughts can be found echoed and uttered when some Western Leaders after World War II “believed that the spread of communism anywhere threatened democracy and capitalism everywhere. As a result, communism needed to be “contained”—by diplomacy, by threats or by force. This idea shaped American foreign policy for decades.” (History editors.com, 2010)

During 1980s and specifically in 1980, like many other American leaders during the Cold War, President Reagan believed that the spread of communism anywhere threatened freedom everywhere.

The manufacturing of consent for the principles of Christianity and against Communism and Atheism was significantly visible in the 1950s and 1960s America. The promotion of Christianity was not only propagated through chapel sermons but also through institutionalized form. In the novel (p.380), a missionary like body “Christian Crusade” has been mentioned from who Beth received a three page letter with an attempt to convince her to join their cause. They also offered financial support for Beth’s chess tournaments and tours.

“The three page letter that spoke of the need to promote international understanding through Christian principles and to annihilate communism for the advancement of those same principles...the letter was signed “yours in Christ”” by four people.” (p.380)

Again in the novel it is observed how communism has been co-posed with atheism and how Christianity can save the world from the godless communist.

Christian Crusade saw Beth as a possible Cold War propagandist tool.

The narrator of the novel has remarked Christian Crusade as a “Narrow fundamentalist organization” (p.388)

When Mrs. Blocker one of two women, another being Mrs. Dodge from Christian Crusade asked Beth to make her position public, Beth could not understand what position, then Mrs. Dodge said “the spread of communism is also the spread of atheism. (p.388)

Beth told I suppose so..and Mrs. Blocker said, “it’s a matter of fact. Of Marxist-Leninist fact. The holy word is anathema to the Kremlin and it is one of the major purposes of Christian Crusade to contest the Kremlin and the atheists who sit there.””(p.389)

The statement Beth was handed by the Christian Crusade, there were “some phrases in it underlined like the *atheist-communist* nexus and a *militant Christian endeavor*. But Beth replied “I am a chess player”.

Beth denied to be a part of this militant and ideological propagandist tool of the Christian Crusade showing her resistance.

The nomenclature of the orphanage as Methuen and how the word “orphanage” and “Methuen Home” has been used interchangeably within the novel indicates to the historical and cultural transformation of “orphanage” into home like care home, foster home funded by US government throughout 1950s and 1960s due to the US adoption policies and procedures and also for budding child protection laws.

The thoroughness and rigidity of the adoption process can be found reflected when Alma Wheatley, foster mother of Beth told her, after they brought Beth in their home from Methuen, about the thorough investigation the adoption authority made:

“They wanted to know everything about us. How much money Allston (Beth’s adoptive father) makes a month. Why we have no children of our own. They even inquired “if I had been in psychiatric care.” Can you imagine? Can you imagine? ”They are thorough,” Mrs. Wheatley said. “But, you know, I suppose they have to be.”(p.82) Mrs. Wheatley further added, “They looked in all my closets and even inspected the refrigerator” (p.81)

The authority also made an inspection visit after few months Beth got adopted.

The change and amendments in adoption policy, child protection laws and the rigorous process entailed by a single adoption during these decades in America have been reflected in the novel.

Moreover, the word “orphanage” has been used only 4 times (p.17, 55,69,361), whereas “Methuen Home” or “Methuen” alone has been used 23 times within the novel. This also indicates the qualitative change and transformation that was happening during these decades in the orphanage system of America. Organized orphanages started to flourish during 1800s in USA and at the turn of early 20th century, “reformers influenced by the Progressive Movement began questioning the orphanage system and laying the groundwork for a more modern child welfare system” (American Adoption website). And thus the care home and foster home replacing the old orphanage system were coming into existence with augmented social safety and protection for the children.

St. Ann’s Home, established as an orphanage in 1925 in Methuen, Massachusetts, USA has frequently been referred as the source of inspiration behind the naming of “Methuen Home” in the novel that is situated in Mount Sterling, Kentucky where Tevis himself used to live for a significant period of time.

The Civil Rights Movement and Black Power movement during 1950s and 1960s played an important role in shaping the characterization of Jolene in the novel. African American were facing discrimination and disparity in almost every sectors like education, workplace, and social life and so on. There were separate educational institutions for black and white children. However in 1954 the Supreme Court of USA declared that “separate educational facilities” for black children were “inherently unequal.” (History.com editors, 2010). After this declaration many white American parents admitted their children in “all white segregation academies.” The assassination of two leading figures, Malcolm X in 1965 and Rev. Martin Luther King in 1968, are worth taken into account as part of the African American struggle.

Tevis has also highlighted through the character portrayal of Beth the capability of women to perform abstract reasoning and thinking as during 1950s and 1960s the gender role for the women was mostly to do concrete household or other works as apparent from the

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predicament of Alma Wheatley who can play piano but is not encouraged by Mr. Wheatley. This issue has been foregrounded in literature review section in details. Through shedding light on the inner abstract working of reason and thinking, Tevis has also implied the increased employability of women in that time as the movement was also about employment and pay hike.

Nevertheless this tension and struggle of the Afro-American has also been reflected in the novel through the representation of Jolene DeWitt who is a colored child and with whom Beth develops a long-term friendship. Jolene was one of the oldest girls in the Methuen as she did not get adopted for the assumed reason of her being black. When Beth was getting adopted Beth said, "Jolene, I am sorry you didn't get adopted" (p.81). Jolene's Afro-American origin and racial identity determined her adoptability.

Beth got adopted when she was 13 and Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley was telling Beth how happy they are to have an older child and Beth wondered why didn't they adopt Jolene then as Jolene is even older than Beth. The narrator describes-

"In the car Mrs. Wheatley had said how glad they were to have an older child. Then why not adopt Jolene? Beth had thought. But she said nothing. She looked at Mr. Wheatley with his grim-set jaw and his two pale hands on the steering wheel and then at Mrs. Wheatley and she knew they would never have adopted Jolene." (p.86)

As reflected in the novel, it is not only the racial identity or color of the body that affects how fast one might get adopted but also the western concept of beauty plays a role in getting adopted. Beth was not good looking as it is found in the novel-

"You are the ugliest white girl ever," Jolene said, in a stage whisper.

"Your nose is ugly and your face is ugly and your skin is like sandpaper."

Beth said nothing, knowing that it was true. (p.31, 32)

But to Beth Jolene was beautiful-

"With the light coming from behind her and with her frizzy hair and her big, wide eyes, Jolene was beautiful. Beth felt ugly, sitting there on the bench beside her." (p.50)

Beth also felt herself not adoptable and considered herself as "Lifers" as she was not beautiful in the western beauty standards.

"Some children got adopted right off. A six-year-old named Alice had come in a month after Beth and was taken in three weeks by some nice-looking people with an accent... Other children had been there a long time and knew they would never leave. They called themselves "lifers." Beth wondered if she was a lifer." (p.11)

Phone conversation between Beth and Jolene revealed further about the racial topos of the novel-

"Oh my God, child," Jolene said, laughing. "It is so good to hear your voice. Are you still ugly?"

"Are you still black?"

"I am one black lady," Jolene said. "And you've lost your ugly." (p.367)

In western beauty standard both Beth and Jolene is considered either ugly or black.

However, when Beth meets Jolene almost after five years a whole new and transformed Jolene Beth sees in her.

"At first Beth didn't recognize her. The woman who came toward her table in what looked like a Coco Chanel suit and a full, bushy Afro was so tall that Beth could not believe it was Jolene. She looked like a movie star" (p.358).

Beth came to know Jolene was never adopted and she took Volleyball seriously, graduated and received a scholarship on physical education from the university. She has also got her bachelor degree and working as a gym coach. Jolene shared with Beth-

"I'm a black woman. I'm an orphan. I ought to be at Harvard. I ought to be getting my picture in Time magazine like you." (p.360)

Though Jolene did not get adopted but her advancement through the social ladder indicates the impact achieved through the Civil Rights and Feminine Movement during 1960s. Tevis while writing *Queen's Gambit* during mid-1970s reflected on these issues of racial segregation and concept of beauty very self-consciously and self-reflexively in the novel.

The dispensing of tranquilizers along with vitamin pills to the orphans, especially in the government funded orphanage or care home in America was very prevalent during the mid-20th century. This practice was not only exercised in USA but also in many other countries like Denmark, Russia, Romania and Ukrain. Moreover Librium, a generic of tranquilizer was very popular during the 1960s which was frequently prescribed for women with anxiety, insomnia, withdrawal symptoms, depression etc. Librium has been mentioned several times (p.249, 355,406,427) within the novel. Alma Wheatley is also found taking Librium frequently.

"She (Beth) wished she had risk taking a Librium. A little fuzz in her mind would be better than this" (p.427). The name of Mexican Librium has also surfaced in the novel pointing that no prescription is needed to buy Librium in Mexico.

"You don't need prescription to buy Librium in Mexico" the doctor said. (p.249)

This textual evidences and discussion about the use of tranquilizer in the novel makes a connection with the 1960s historical and social context of pharmaceutical productions, consumption and drug policy. Methuen stops giving tranquilizers to the children after few months, Beth had been in the orphanage due to a ban from Government on the use of sedatives for the children.

During the 1960s televisions (TVs) were getting very popular and held an important place in the day to day cultural practices of Americans. The mentions of TVs as a popular culture in the novel sheds light on the popular cultural context of 1950s and 1960s in America.

"In the 1950s, televisions became something the average family could afford, and by 1950 4.4 million U.S. families had one in their home" (History.com Editors, 2010). 1950s is called the golden age for television.

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The interest and excitement around this popular culture -TV and TV shows- have very explicitly been reflected in the novel.

“Six months before, Methuen had gotten a TV set for the lounge, and it was played for an hour every evening. Beth found that she preferred Ellen Forbes’s adventures to *I love Lucy* and *Gunsmoke*(p.78).

When Beth was getting adopted Jolene told Beth- “may be they will give you a TV in your room”. The term “TV Dinner” meaning frozen take away food got popular during these decades.

There are other popular cultural elements like the movies shown in Methuen home targeting to teach the girls lessons on table manner, Christian beliefs and so on. These cultural forms like TV shows and movies circulated a particular ideological message and Methuen chose carefully what to show to the girls during the movie time. The movies shown to the girls in Methuen were either “Christian Movie” or about personal improvement like learning table manners.

“They were watching the Saturday afternoon movie...it was a movie about table manners called “How to act at Dinner time (p.43). (The Saturday afternoon movie in the library was *The Robe*. It had Victor Mature in it and was spiritual (p.57)

All these ritualistic and routinized everyday life exercises were performed to posit the orphan girls in a subject position-the subject position of an adoptable orphan infused with morality, decency, Christian beliefs and values, sophistication and sociability. This sheds light on how dominant ideology operates through discursive regime, through various cultural productions, circulations and consumptions to make the intended subjecthood in the state. The Methuen Home can be viewed as a microcosmic America showing the power relations between the state and subjects and the tools, both ISA and RSA, the state use to make law abiding citizens. This power dynamics and power relations is not only present during mid- 20th century rather it’s the perpetuated mechanism that has been being used for control and dominance. The system does not only produce good results but also bad results. The addiction in Beth is one of the bad impacts. Methuen home was the origin of her addiction and also of her talent and genius.

When Ms. Helen Deardorff (Superintendent of Methuen Home) banned playing chess for Beth as punishment for stealing tranquilizers, Beth recalling that time during an interview told-

“Why would they punish you like that?”

Beth said, I think they were very cruel on principle. At least the director was. (p.439)

Through the “panopticonian” “discipline and punish” system the subjects are molded but the subjects also resist in the form of dissidence and they develop their own way of escaping the surveillance. Like Beth did. She played chess in the basement with Mr. Shaibel (the Janitor of Methuen Home) missing the class using the excuse of dusting the duster off in the basin.

The Methuen home works not only as a site of orphanage but also reflects the ideology and cultural context of whole of America.

CONCLUSION

The main paradigmatic dynamics the new historicist theoretical frameworks and tools provide is the spectrum of visiting and revisiting both at the microscopic and macroscopic textual level juxtaposing literary and non -literary texts. From the foregoing analysis and discussion it can be concluded that the close reading and exegesis of texts, subtexts and co-texts from a new historicist perspective at the microscopic level of the novel *The Queen’s Gambit* have rendered a larger, macroscopic contextual picture of America during the mid-20th century. Different socio-cultural and political issues at play during that time like Cold War, Communism, Atheism, Racism, Capitalism, Religion and other aspects of American society have been textualized not only in the literary forms but also in the non-literary forms through cultural productions, in this analysis, through novel, of that contemporary time. The new historicist approach of treating both literary and non-literary discursive forms by giving them equal weight have given a very holistic and comprehensive image of 1950s and 1960s America. The poetics of American life has been laid bare through the new historicist analysis of the novel by co-positing it with relevant historical, cultural, social, religious and political discourses.

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