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## **Investigation of Authenticity: A New Historic Approach to *between shades of gray* by Ruta Sepetys**

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### **Abstract**

New Historicism is a general term given to a wide variety of theories and methodologies that are historicist in orientation. Unlike prior forms of historicism, the New Historicism is strongly influenced by poststructuralist theories of language. It is a style of literary analysis developed mainly in the United States which challenges the dominance of deconstruction and the legacy of New Criticism by attempting to produce a cultural poetics and reintroducing a historical dimension to literary studies. As a Lithuanian-American writer, Ruta Sepetys gained popularity amidst all kinds of readers. Born in Michigan, she was raised in a family of artists, readers, and music lovers. She was awarded The Rockefeller Foundation's prestigious Bellagio Fellowship for her studies on human resilience. Her works include *between shades of gray* (2011), *Out of the Easy* (2013), *Salt to the Sea* (2016), *The Fountains of Silence* (2019). The main intent of this research paper is to uncloak the hidden history of the Soviet era where innocent people were tormented beyond our imagination.

**Keywords:** New Historicism, Deconstruction, New Criticism

History is always reliable on its authenticity. While tracing the paths of history we come across some fissures. In other words, history is not exactly what it seems to be. We are blind to the facts and open to someone's interpretations. The suppression of history is a fact that needs the attention of the public domain. The history of the involvement of respective leaders in World War I and II has been extremely concealed. They are part of the public but they never lend a clue about themselves. History is not an open book rather it tends to lie a lot.

As far as the novel is considered, it centers on Lina, a fifteen year old Lithuanian girl who paints, draws and loves her family. Things were normal until one night when Soviet Officers flounder into her home, snatching the good life they have been celebrating so far. Lina, her mother Elena and her younger brother Jonas are forced to follow Stalin's orders and are moved to a work camp in the coldest reaches of Siberia. Lina finds peace in her art which even helps her to document the events by drawing to serve as a hint for her father who is sent to the prison camp. The novel *between shades of gray* is an intricate labyrinth where life and death are the unexposed paths. The incidents in the novel are real as they are foregrounded in history. They are highly relatable to the issues of the political system of the society. Years may vary but the problem remains the same in every era. History is more about the way the fissures are filled than the way it is narrated.

The Baltic states of Lithuania are subjected to the torment of the Soviet Union. The knowledge about Hitler is something that the people happen to accumulate but the atrocities of the Soviet Union in the places unknown doesn't serve a chance to enter the minds of the people. There have been no solid proof to accuse the Soviets. The tendency to cross-examine is

completely restricted. The name given for the secret Soviet Police is NKVD. We all know the tribulations caused by Hitler and the Nazis but there is still a part of history to which we are strangers enough. The incidents in *between shades of gray* are based on the documentation provided by the survivors of the genocide of the Baltic people with a huge account of their wretched life under the Soviets. The reign of Joseph Stalin is a complete turn over in history. He killed over twenty million people with no evidence.

Sepetys's rummage of history gave her details embodied with blindsiding features. The characters of *between shades of gray* are fictional but they reflect the actual persons who lived through the annals of a bad era. There have been no proper records for the amount of persons died under the execution plan of Stalin. Among the listed names of the Anti-Soviets, there is the name of a woman who is about to give birth to her baby but as soon as the umbilical cord is cut, they were both harshly thrown into the truck. The baby is placed in an atmosphere of inappropriateness which eventually cause the death of the baby. The people are under the watch of the NKVD and they couldn't move a limb or act according to their will. Lina's lines explain their constrained situation well: "Every few minutes I heard their boots marching by. I couldn't sleep. I wondered if there was a moon out, and if so, what it looked like" (Sepetys 40).

We always speculate about history within an enclosed circle. The truth lies outside and we fail to notice them. We know that the people suffered whereas we don't know the tribulations they underwent to save the remaining part of their ill-fated life. Even if the NKVD use people for their own benefit, their way of treating them remains the same. This situation is same as the one faced by Lina's mother. They can't trust the NKVD at any cost. The conversation of Jonas and his mother Elena depicts the distrust of Elena:

If you worked for the NKVD, Mother, Would they give you food?" asked Jonas. "No, my dear. They would give me empty promises," she replied, "which is worse than an empty belly" (Sepetys 117).

The blatant truth of history is always ensconced from the eyesight of the public. We need a third eye to examine the parts of history which is constrained and confined into a single piece of information. What meets our eye is only a polished version of the past. As humans, we have the right to dig the buried part of our history with the shovel of inquisitiveness. By dogging every genealogy of the people of World War II, we derive a result mixed with pity and rage. Many people who deserve to be highlighted are removed from the pages of history. A deconstructionist view of history helps in acquiring a knowledge about certain ignored aspects. The people who survived with the will to live amidst horrible circumstances steal the spotlight while discussing the lost parts of history.

*between shades of gray* moves from New Criticism which claims a text to be autotelic and Deconstruction which claims reading of a text moving from center to margins to New Historicism which presses into service various disciplines – politics, linguistics, the operative power structure etc.

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