



Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading

By Alan Sinfield

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If we come to consciousness within a language that is complicit with the social order, how can we conceive, let alone organize, resistance to that social order? This key question in the politics of reading and subcultural practice informs Alan Sinfield's book on writing in early-modern England.

New historicism has often shown people trapped in a web of language and culture. In lively discussions of writings by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Sidney, and Donne, Sinfield reassesses the scope of dissidence and control. The early-modern state, Christianity, and the cultural apparatus, despite an ideology of unity and explicit violence, could not but allow space to challenging voices. Sinfield shows that disruptions in concepts of hierarchy, nationality, gender, and sexuality force their way into literary texts.

Sinfield is often provocative. He "rewrites" *Julius Caesar* to produce a different politics, compares Sidney's idea of poetry to Leonid Brezhnev's, and reinstates the concept of character in the face of post-structuralist theory. He keeps the current politics of literary study in view, especially in a substantial chapter on Shakespeare in the U.S. Sinfield subjects interactions between class, ethnicity, sexuality, and the professional structures of the humanities to a detailed and hard-hitting critique, and argues for new commitments to collectivities and subcultures.

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Editorial Review

Review

'Sinfield is always lively and worth reading ... He is a historian yet very much a critic of the present moment, with strong gay and feminist interests, a spirited contempt for unexamined and conventional interpretations. What he says is for the most part controlled by considerable learning and, despite some excesses, by a residual caution ... engagingly lively book.' London Review of Books

'Sinfield's book is an enjoyable and original explanation of canonical literature.' Modern Review

'massively engulfing analysis ... It's exhilarating to meet such a buoyantly confident insistence on texts in real history' Times Higher Educational Supplement

'What, though, praiseworthily distinguishes Sinfield is the passion, the wit and, above all, the deliberate impudence with which he challenges the textualised impudences of power ... His repeated dismantlings of notoriously popular critical unities such as power, rule, ruling class, protestantism, are timely.' Times Higher Educational Supplement

'there is an infectious excitement about his writing, a running implication that something pertinent is being said' Eric Griffiths, Times Literary Supplement

'a rigorous and sophisticated critical practice which is as different from press myths of 'political correctness' in the academic world as our real selves are from the pooves and lezzies the tabloids see us as ... Sinfield is a persuasive advocate of reading as a means to dissident empowerment.' Gregory Woods, Gay Times, February 1993

'well-informed provocative book' Critical and Cultural Theory Catalogue No. 3

'Anyone interested in the political consequences for New Historicist or cultural materialist reading practices should profit from reading this book. What is perhaps most striking about Sinfield's writing is his interweaving of the personal and the political. It is...the extent of his knowledge of diverse material practices that enables Sinfield to consider and contest, as he says, 'the ideologies of gender and sexualities, ethnicity, the state, religion, and writing' Few contemporary writers could handle the scope of such a project, so for this reason alone Sinfield is worth consideration by a much broader audience than Renaissance scholars.'

Literature and History

From the Inside Flap

"A coherent and compelling politics of reading. . . . Sinfield is intervening in a cultural debate not merely about the meaning of the texts he considers but about the very nature of literary study itself. Though his reading of central Renaissance texts such as Sidney's *Defence*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Donne's lyrics are wonderfully agile and alert, the true stakes of his argument are the protocols of the institutions in which we read and study literature."—David Scott Kastan, author of *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*

"This is an important and urgently needed contribution to the field of culture criticism both in the U. K. and

in the U.S.A. Until fairly recently, culture criticism on both sides of the Atlantic has been dominated by the cultural apparatus of the New Right. Sinfield's energetic and courageous intervention helps to break the silence of dissident communities and it is therefore a welcome rejoinder to the neo-conservative chorus."—Michael D. Bristol, author of *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare*

From the Back Cover

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