

POSTCOLONIALISM

The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination.

Che Guevara, speech to the United Nations, December 11, 1964

The 1960s saw a revolutionary change in literary theory. Until this decade, New Criticism dominated literary theory and criticism, with its insistence that “the” one correct interpretation of a text could be discovered if critical readers follow the prescribed methodology asserted by the New Critics. Positing an autonomous text, New Critics paid little attention to a text’s historical context or to the feelings, beliefs, and ideas of a text’s readers. For New Critics, a text’s meaning is inextricably bound to ambiguity, irony, and paradox found within the structure of the text itself. By analyzing the text alone, New Critics believe that an astute critic can identify a text’s central paradox and explain how the text ultimately resolves that paradox while also supporting the text’s overarching theme.

Into this seemingly self-assured system of hermeneutics marches philosopher and literary critic Jacques Derrida along with similar-thinking scholar-critics in the late 1960s. Unlike the New Critics, Derrida, the chief spokesperson for deconstruction, disputes a text’s objective existence. Denying that a text is an autotelic artifact, he challenges the accepted definitions and assumptions of both the reading and the writing processes. In addition, he insists on questioning what parts not only the text but also the reader and the author play in the interpretive process. Because Derrida and other liked-minded critics chronologically come after modernity and the reign of structuralism in literary theory, they are referred to as postmoderns or poststructuralists. Recently the term **postist critics** is being used to denote these postmodern thinkers.

These philosopher critics—Jonathan Culler, J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson, and Michel Foucault, to name a few—also question the language of

texts and of literary analysis. Unlike the New Critics, who believe that the language of literature is somehow different from the language of science and everyday conversation, these postmodernists insist that the language of texts is not distinct from the language used to analyze such writings. For them, language is a discourse. In other words, the discourse or culturally bound language of ideas used in literary analysis helps shape and form the text being analyzed. We cannot separate, they maintain, the text and the language used to critique it. For these critics, language helps create and shape what we call “objective reality.”

Believing that objective reality can be created by language, many postmodernists assert that all reality is a social construct. From this point of view, no single or primary objective reality exists; instead, many realities exist. In disavowing a universal, objective reality, these critics believe that reality is perspectival, with each individual creating his or her subjective understanding of the nature of reality itself. How, then, do we come to agree upon public and social concerns, such as values, ethics, and the common good, if reality is different for each individual? The answer for these postmodern thinkers is that each society or culture contains within itself a dominant cultural group who determines that culture’s ideology or, using the Marxist term, its hegemony—that is, its dominant values, its sense of right and wrong, and its sense of personal self-worth. All people in a given culture are consciously and unconsciously asked to conform to the prescribed hegemony.

What happens, however, when one’s ideas, one’s thinking, or one’s personal background does not conform? What happens, for example, when the dominant culture consists of white, Anglo-Saxon males and one is a black female? Or how does one respond to a culture dominated by white males if one is a Native American? For people of color living in Africa or in the Americas, for Native Americans, for females, and for gays and lesbians, and a host of others, the traditional answer already has been articulated by the dominant class and its accompanying hegemony: *silence*. Live quietly, work quietly, think quietly. The message sent to these “Others” by the dominant culture has been clear and consistent—conform and be quiet; deny yourself, and all will be well.

But many have not been quiet. Writers and thinkers, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Judith Butler, to name a few, have dared to speak out and challenge the dominant cultures and the dictates these cultures decree. They continue to refuse silence and choose defiance, if necessary. They believe that an individual’s view of life, of values, and of ethics really matters. They assert a different perspective, a vantage point not of the dominant culture, but one from which to view the world and its peoples: They speak for not one culture, but many; not one cultural perspective, but a host; not one interpretation of life, but countless numbers.

Speaking for the oppressed, suppressed, and silenced, these critic-scholars—African, Australian, Native American, female, gay and lesbian,

among others—are making themselves heard among the cacophony of the insistent, dominant, and generally overpowering culture. Believing that they can affect cultural change, these writers refuse to conform to their culture's hegemony. In their struggle for empowerment, these critics are clearly articulating their beliefs at the contemporary literary table discussions concerning their understanding of reality, of society, and of personal self-worth.

This divergent group of literary scholars and critics is under the umbrella of cultural studies and includes an analysis of gender studies, African-American studies, postcolonial studies, and others. All are presenting their ideas and assumptions in the midst of a discussion that has long been controlled by the dominant few. In Great Britain the terms **cultural criticism** and cultural studies are often used interchangeably. In North America cultural criticism primarily focuses on textual analysis or other artistic forms, whereas cultural studies refers to a much broader, interdisciplinary study of literary and artistic forms analyzed in their social, economic, or political contexts. In this chapter we will consider one of cultural studies' varying theories: postcolonialism. In Chapters 11, 12, and 13, we will then present three other theoretical stances: African-American criticism, gender studies, and ecocriticism, one of the latest but significant directions in literary studies. Each of these theories possesses unique concerns. Ecocriticism, for example, highlights the relationship between literature and the environment, while African-American criticism and gender studies emphasize that their individual and public histories do matter. They believe that their past and their present are intricately interwoven, and they declare that by denying and suppressing their past, they will be denying who they are. They desire to articulate their feelings, their concerns, and their assumptions about the nature of reality in their particular cultures without being treated as marginal, minor, or insignificant participants. Often referred to as **subaltern writers**—a term used by the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci to refer to those classes who are not in control of a culture's ideology (hegemony)—these theorists-authors-critics provide new ways to see and understand the cultural forces at work in society, in literature, and in ourselves. Although the literary theory and accompanying criticism of each cultural studies approach is ongoing, an overview of the central tenets of the first of this group—postcolonialism—will enable us to understand its distinctive visions of literature's purposes in today's ever-changing world.

POSTCOLONIALISM: "THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK"

Postcolonialism (or **post-colonialism**—either spelling is acceptable, but each represents slightly different theoretical assumptions) consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were or still are

colonies of other countries. For the most part, postcolonial studies excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by, but remained outside of, the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition. Referred to as “third-world literature” by Marxist critics and “Commonwealth literature” by others—terms many contemporary critics think pejorative—postcolonial theorists investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other.

Historical Development

Rooted in colonial power and prejudice, postcolonialism develops from a four-thousand-year history of strained cultural relations between colonies in Africa and Asia and the Western world. Throughout this long history, the West became the colonizers, and many African and Asian countries and their peoples became the colonized. During the nineteenth century, Great Britain emerged as the largest colonizer and imperial power, quickly gaining control of almost one quarter of the earth’s landmass. By the middle of the nineteenth century, terms such as *colonial interests* and the *British Empire* were widely used both in the media and in government policies and international politics. Many British people believed that Great Britain was destined to rule the world. Likewise, the assumption that Western Europeans and, in particular, the British people were biologically superior to any other race—a term for a class of people based on physical and/or cultural distinctions—remained relatively unquestioned.

Such beliefs directly affected the ways in which the colonizers treated the colonized. Using its political and economic strength, Great Britain, the chief imperialist power of the nineteenth century, dominated her colonies, making them produce then give up their countries’ raw materials in exchange for what material goods the colonized desired or were made to believe they desired by the colonizers. Forced labor of the colonized became the rule of the day, and thus the institution of slavery was commercialized. Often the colonizers justified their cruel treatment of the colonized by invoking European religious beliefs. From the perspective of many white Westerners, the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Asia were “heathens,” possessing pagan ways that must be Christianized. How one treats peoples who are so defined does not really matter, they maintained, because many Westerners subscribed to the colonialist ideology that all races other than white were inferior or subhuman. These subhumans or “savages” quickly became the inferior and equally “evil” Others, a philosophical concept called alterity whereby “the Others” are excluded from positions of power and viewed as both different and inferior.

By the early twentieth century, England's political, social, economic, and ideological domination of its colonies began to disappear, a process known as **decolonization**. By mid century, for example, India had gained her independence from British colonial rule. Many scholars believe that this event marks the beginning of postcolonialism or **third-world studies**, a term coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy. When India received her independence, the former British colony was divided into two nations, the India Union and Pakistan. This partitioning, what scholars dub the "Great Divide," led to ethnic conflict of enormous proportions between India, a new member of the British Commonwealth in 1947, and the mostly Muslim state of Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the struggle, igniting the outrage of a vast array of scholars, writers, and critics concerning the social, moral, political, and economic conditions of the aftereffects of colonialism in what were once called third-world countries.

The beginnings of postcolonialism's theoretical and social concerns can be traced to the 1950s. Along with India's independence, this decade witnessed the ending of France's long involvement in Indochina; the parting of the ways between the two leading figures in existential theory, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, over their differing views about Algeria; Fidel Castro's now-famous "History Shall Absolve Me" speech; and the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

The following decades witnessed the publication of additional key texts that articulated the social, political, and economic conditions of various subaltern groups. In 1960 the Caribbean writer George Lamming published *The Pleasures of Exile*, a text in which Lamming critiques William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* from a postcolonial perspective. The next year Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a work that highlights the tensions or binary oppositions of white versus black, good versus evil, and rich versus poor, to cite a few. Other writers, philosophers, and critics such as Albert Memmi continued publishing texts such as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965, English version) that would soon become the cornerstone of postcolonial theory and writings. In particular, postcolonialism gained the attention of the West with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's monumental text *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989). With the publication of these two texts, the voices and the concerns of many subaltern cultures would soon be heard in both academic and social arenas.

The terms *postcolonial* and *postcolonialism* first appear in scholarly journals in the mid-1980s and as subtitles in texts such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's previously mentioned powerful work and in 1990 in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin's *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. By the early and mid-1990s, both terms had become firmly established in academic and popular discourse.

Similar to deconstruction and other postmodern approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism refers to a heterogeneous field of study in which even its spelling provides several alternatives: *post-colonialism*, *postcolonialism*, or *post/colonial*. When spelled with a hyphen (*post-colonialism*), the term implies a chronological order—that is, a change from a colonial to a post-colonial state. When spelled without the hyphen (*postcolonialism*), the term refers “to writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives,” both before and after the period of colonization. According to some critics, the nonhyphenated spelling covers a wider critical field, including literature of former British colonies, than does the hyphenated spelling. The third orthographic variant of this term (*post/colonial*), argue some critics, is more relevant than the previous two spellings because it stresses the interrelatedness between an indeterminate number of literatures—be they Anglophone or not—that share a similar situation: the “entangled condition” that exists between colonial and post/colonial discourse and between coloniality and post/coloniality. Today the most common spelling of the three variants is *postcolonialism*.

Many of postcolonialism’s adherents suggest there are two branches. The first views postcolonialism as a set of diverse methodologies that possess no unitary quality, as argued by Homi K. Bhabha and Arun P. Murkherjee. The second branch includes those critics such as Edward Said, Barbara Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who view postcolonialism as a set of cultural strategies “centered in history.” This latter group can also be subdivided into those who believe postcolonialism refers to that period after the colonized countries have gained their independence as opposed to those who regard postcolonialism as referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of colonization to the present moment.

Postcolonialism’s concerns become evident when we examine the various topics discussed in one of its most prominent texts, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), edited by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Its subjects include universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation and resistance, ethnicity, feminism, language, education, history, place, and production. As diverse as these topics are, they draw attention to postcolonialism’s major concern: the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. As postcolonial critics point out, to be colonized is “to be removed from history.” In its interaction with the conquering culture, the colonized or indigenous culture is forced to go underground or to be obliterated.

Only after colonization occurs and the colonized people have had time to think and to write about their oppression and loss of cultural identity does postcolonial theory come into existence. Postcolonial theory is born out of the colonized peoples’ frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own identities. How the colonized respond to changes in language, curricular matters in education, race differences,

economic issues, morals, ethics, and a host of other concerns, including the act of writing itself, becomes the context for the evolving theories and practice of postcolonialism.

Assumptions

Because different cultures that have been subverted, conquered, and often removed from history respond to the conquering culture in diverse ways, no single approach to postcolonial theory and practice is possible or even preferable. As Nicholas Harrison asserts in *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003), “Postcolonial theory is not an identifiable ‘type’ of theory in the same sense as deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis or feminism.” Like many critical theorists, Harrison “sees no point in talking as if consensus about what postcolonial studies ‘is’ might eventually emerge.” We can, however, highlight postcolonialism’s major concerns. All postcolonialist critics believe the following:

- European colonialism did occur.
- The British Empire was at the center of this colonialism.
- The conquerors dominated not only the physical land but also the hegemony or ideology of the colonized peoples.
- The social, political, and economic effects of such colonization are still being felt today.

At the center of postcolonial theory exists an inherent tension among three categories of postcolonialists: (1) those who have been academically trained and are living in the West, (2) those who were raised in non-Western cultures but now reside in the West, and (3) those subaltern writers living and writing in non-Western cultures. For example, on the one hand, critics such as Fredric Jameson and Georg M. Gugelberger come from a European and American cultural, literary, and scholarly background. Another group that includes Spivak, Said, and Bhabha were raised in non-Western cultures but have or now reside, study, and write in the West. And still another group includes writers such as Aijaz Ahmad who live and work in subaltern cultures. Differing theoretical and practical criticism developed among these three groups. Out of this underlying tension among the groups, postcolonial theorists and critics have and will continue to discover problematic topics for exploration and debate.

Historically one of the earliest postcolonial theorists is Frantz Fanon (1925–1961). Born in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon fought with the French in World War II, remaining in France after the war to study medicine and psychiatry. Throughout his rather short career and life, Fanon provides postcolonialism with two influential texts: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and

The Wretched of the Earth (1961). In these and other works, Fanon uses psychoanalytic theory to examine the condition of blacks under French colonial rule. As a result of colonialism, Fanon asserts that both the colonized (e.g., the Other—that is, any person defined as “different from”) and the colonizer suffer “psychic warping,” oftentimes causing what Fanon describes as “a collapse of the ego.” Fanon believes that as soon as the colonized (the blacks living in Martinique) were forced to speak the language of the colonizer (French), the colonized either accepted or were coerced into accepting the collective consciousness of the French, thereby identifying blackness with evil and sin and whiteness with purity and righteousness.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that an entirely new world must come into being to overcome the binary system in which black is evil and white is good. Fanon develops a Marxist-influenced postcolonial theory in which he calls for violent revolution, a type of revolution in which Fanon himself was involved when he became a participant and a spokesperson for the Algerian revolutionaries against France. He also develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* one of his major concerns: the problem of the “native bourgeoisie” who assume power after the colonial powers have either departed or been driven out. When such a situation occurs, the native proletariat, “the wretched of the earth,” are left on their own, often in a worse situation than before the conquerors arrived. Throughout his writings, Fanon articulates key postcolonial concerns such as the “Otherness,” subject formation, and an emphasis on linguistic and psychoanalytic frameworks on which postcolonialism will develop in the decades to follow.

The key text in the establishment of postcolonial theory is *Orientalism* (1978), authored by Edward Wadie Said (1935–2003). A Palestinian-American theorist and critic, Said was born in Jerusalem, where he lived with his family until the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, at which time his family became refugees in Egypt then Lebanon. Educated at Princeton and Harvard Universities, Said taught at Johns Hopkins University, where, as a professor, he authored a variety of texts, including *Orientalism*, his most influential. In this work Said chastises the literary world for not investigating and taking seriously the study of colonization or imperialism. He then develops several concepts that are central to postcolonial theory. According to Said, nineteenth-century Europeans tried to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called **Orientalism**: the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested so-called Orientals were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. The European conquerors, Said notes, believed that they were accurately describing the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in “the East.” What they failed to realize, argues Said, is that all human knowledge can be viewed only through one’s political, cultural, and ideological framework. No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. In effect, what the colonizers were revealing was their unconscious desires for power, wealth, and domination, not the nature of the colonized subjects.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said captures the basic thought behind colonization and imperialism: “‘They’re not like us,’ and for that reason deserve to be ruled.” The colonized, Said maintains, becomes the Other, the not me. Hence, the established binary opposition of “the West”/“the Other” must be abolished along with its intricate web of racial and religious prejudices. What must be rejected, Said declares, is the “vision” mentality of writers who want to describe the Orient from a panoramic view. This erroneous view of humanity creates a simplistic interpretation of human experience. It must be replaced by one based on “narrative,” a historical view that emphasizes the variety of human experiences in all cultures. This narrative view does not deny differences, but presents them in an objective way. Scholarship, asserts Said, must be derived from firsthand experience of a particular region, giving voice and presence to the critics who live and write in these regions, not scholarship from “afar” or secondhand representation. Although such ideas helped shape the central issues of postcolonial theory, it was Said’s use of French “high theory” along with Marxist ideology as a methodology to deconstruct and historically examine the roots of Orientalism that attracted the attention of the academic world and helped inspire a new direction in postcolonial thought.

Homi K. Bhabha (1949–), one of the leading postcolonial theorists and critics, builds on Said’s concept of the Other and Orientalism. Born into a Parsi family in Mumbai, India, Bhabha received his undergraduate degree in India and his master’s and doctoral degrees from Oxford University. Having taught at several prestigious universities, including Princeton, Dartmouth, and the University of Chicago, Bhabha is currently a professor at Harvard University. In works such as *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha emphasizes the concerns of the colonized. What of the individual who has been colonized? On the one hand, the colonized observes two somewhat distinct views of the world: that of the colonizer (the conqueror) and that of himself or herself, the colonized (the one who has been conquered). To what culture does this person belong? Seemingly, neither culture feels like home. This feeling of homelessness, of being caught between two clashing cultures, Bhabha calls **unhomeliness**, a concept referred to as **double consciousness** by some postcolonial theorists. This feeling or perception of abandonment by both cultures causes the colonial subject (the colonized) to become a psychological refugee. Because each psychological refugee uniquely blends his or her two cultures, no two writers who have been colonial subjects will interpret their culture(s) exactly alike. Hence, Bhabha argues against the tendency to essentialize third-world countries into a homogenous identity.

One of Bhabha’s major contributions to postcolonial studies is his belief that there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. When two cultures commingle, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture changes each of the cultures. This dynamic, interactive, and tension-packed process Bhabha names **hybridity**. Bhabha himself says that

“hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It’s a social process. It’s not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions. As a result, says Bhabha, a feeling of unhomeliness develops in the colonized.

For the colonized writer in such a commingled culture, Bhabha’s answer to this sense of unhomeliness is that the colonized writer must create a new discourse by rejecting all the established transcendental signifieds created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth and no metatheory of history exist. To accomplish such goals, Bhabha consistently uses the tools of deconstruction theory to expose cultural metaphors and discourse.

Although Fanon, Said, and Bhabha lay much of the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, many others have joined them in continuing the dialogue between what Bhabha calls “the Occident” and “the Orient.” Concentrating on what some critics call the “flows of culture,” postcolonialism divides into smaller theoretical schools identified by their choice of theoretical background and methodology. Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, African-American, and psychoanalytic criticism (usually of the Lacanian variety) all influence postcolonial theory. For example, Gayatri Spivak, the publisher of the English translation of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1976), is a feminist, postcolonial critic who applies deconstructive interpretations of imperialism while simultaneously questioning the premises of the Marxism, feminism, and Derridean deconstruction that she espouses.

Postcolonialism is a varied approach to textual analysis assumes that literature, culture, and history all affect each other in significant ways. Postcolonial critics also believe in the unavoidability of subjective and political interpretations in literary studies, arguing that criticism and theory must be relevant to society as it really is. As such, these critics assert that colonialism was and is a cause of suffering and oppression, a cause that is inherently unjust. Furthermore, colonialism is not a thing of the past, but continues today—howbeit in subtler and less open ways—as a form of oppression and as such, must be opposed. As the contemporary critic Sam Durrant writes in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2003), “Post-colonialism as a praxis is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal entailing a simple respect for human suffering and a fundamental revolt against it.” Suffering and enslavement, maintain postcolonialists, are elements of oppression and are “simply wrong.”

Methodology

Like many schools of criticism, postcolonialism uses a variety of approaches to textual analysis. Deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, reader-oriented

criticism, African-American criticism, and cultural studies employ postcolonial theories in their critical methodologies. Some critics, however, identify two major approaches or “strains” of postcolonial criticism: postcolonial criticism and postcolonial theory. Those who engage in **postcolonial criticism** investigate ways in which texts bear the traces of colonialism’s ideology and interpret such texts as challenging or promoting the colonizer’s purposes and hegemony. More frequently than not, those who engage in this type of criticism analyze canonical texts from colonizing countries. **Postcolonial theory**, on the other hand, moves beyond the bounds of traditional literary studies and investigates social, political, and economic concerns of the colonized and the colonizer. No matter which methodology a postcolonial critic may choose, it matters greatly whether or not the theorist/critic has been a colonial subject. Those who have been the subjects of colonization ask themselves a somewhat different set of questions than those postcolonialists who have not.

The person living and writing in a colonized culture poses three significant questions:

1. Who am I?
2. How did I develop into the person I am?
3. To what country or countries or to what cultures am I forever linked?

In asking and answering the first question, the colonized author is connecting himself or herself to historical roots. By asking and answering the second question, the writer is admitting a tension between these historical roots and the new culture or hegemony imposed on the writer by the conquerors. By asking and answering the third question, the writer confronts the fact that he or she is both an individual and a social construct created and shaped primarily by the dominant culture. The written works penned by these authors will be personal and always political and ideological. Furthermore, both the creation of a text and its reading may be painful and disturbing but also enlightening. Whatever the result, the text will certainly be a message sent back to the empire, telling the imperialists the efforts of their colonization and how their Western hegemony has damaged and suppressed the ideologies of those who were conquered.

Postcolonialists are quick to point out that they do indeed make value judgments about cultures, people, and texts. In turn, they ask us, their readers and critics, to examine carefully the standards against which we are making our value judgments. Said cautions us that “it is not necessary to regard every reading or interpretation of a text as the moral equivalent of war, but whatever else they are, works of literature are not merely texts.” Postcolonialists such as Said attempt to read a text in its fullest context, being careful not to frame their analyses solely in academic discourse. This diverse and oftentimes psychologically laden and complex theory highlights the

“writing back” of those who have experienced colonial oppression to the colonizers and to the world. Postcolonial critics give such texts a close reading, noting particularly the text’s language. Such analysis necessarily questions the taken-for-granted positions usually held by the Western mindset. For example, how truth is constructed must be examined rather than exposing errors of the colonizers. Because a variety of prejudices and attitudes can be found in all texts, postcolonial critics vary their approach for each text, letting the text itself establish its critical agenda. These critics also guard against ascribing their own cultural ideas onto postcolonial works, realizing that any attempt to understand completely a subaltern group is impossible and can lead to another form of repression. How postcolonial criticism is actually put into practice thus depends strongly on the critic’s individual theoretical commitments. But all postcolonial criticism is united in its opposition to colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies and its concern with the best way(s) to create a just and true decolonized culture and literature.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

When applying postcolonialist theory to a text, consider the following questions. After examining each question, ask yourself what questions can be appropriately applied to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Young Goodman Brown” so you can view this tale from a postcolonialist perspective.

- What happens in the text when the two cultures clash, when one sees itself as superior to another?
- Describe the two or more cultures exhibited in the text. What does each value? What does each reject?
- Who in the text is “the Other”?
- Describe the worldviews of each of the cultures.
- What are the forms of resistance against colonial control?
- How does the superior or privileged culture’s hegemony affect the colonized culture?
- How do the colonized people view themselves? Is there any change in this view by the end of the text?
- What are the characteristics of the language of the two cultures? How are they alike? Different?
- Is the language of the dominant culture used as a form of oppression? Suppression?
- In what ways is the colonized culture silenced?
- Are there any emergent forms of postcolonial identity after the departure of the colonizers?
- How do gender, race, or social class function in the colonial and postcolonial elements of the text?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSE

Like other approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism is not a homogeneous school of literary theory and criticism, but a loosely defined set of theories and methodologies that seeks to uncover and discover what happens to the colonized once they have been conquered by the colonizers. Postcolonialism chiefly deals with literature that has been written by the colonized in colonized countries. Its aim is to examine what has been missing from literary analyses by highlighting the interest of the colonized and the destructive forces of the colonizer's hegemony as forced on the colonized. As such, postcolonialism becomes, like deconstruction, more of a reading strategy than a codified school of literary criticism. In its methodology, it gives authority and presence to "the Other," the people who have become the separate ones and who stand apart from the dominant, colonizing culture. And its goal is to win back a place in history for the colonized, enabling all readers to value the many different kinds of cultures and peoples who inhabit the earth. Whether the postcolonial critic embraces the tenets of feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, or any other theoretical framework, such a critic emphasizes each person's humanity and right to personal freedom.

Some critics of postcolonialism point out that many of its most influential spokespersons have been and continue to be educated in the West and are, therefore, products of the Western mindset, not subaltern cultures. How can such "Western"-minded individuals speak for subaltern cultures? Other critics observe that postcolonial studies remains situated in academia, in the "upper classes" of society, having little or no effect on real people in real places. Can academic discussions, assert these critics, bring any change to subaltern cultures and their peoples? If postcolonialism seeks to help and to change the lives of colonized peoples, some of its critics argue that its reading strategies and methodologies must be performed by those who have been colonized, not by academics living in the West. Postcolonialism must, therefore, seek to empower those who have been stripped of power, dignity, and self-worth, maintain some critics, rather than continually marginalizing the colonized through discourse that can be understood by only the culturally elite. Perhaps, say these critics, postcolonialism is radical in only its words, not in life-changing power.

Like most theories and methodologies grouped under the heading of cultural studies, postcolonialism is becoming more and more diverse, including Caribbean, Latin American, and Pacific geographical regions, although some traditional postcolonial sites such as India remain important. By embracing a variety of theories and approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism has ensured its place in literary theory and practice for many decades to come.