Cultural Criticism: Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism

Preparing to read and write using the lens of Postcolonial and Multicultural Criticism:
Postcolonial Criticism examines and comments on texts produced in or about formerly colonized regions, noting the effects of colonization on both the colonizer and the colonized as well as the responses to colonization also by both colonizer and colonized.

It is currently being debated whether to include literature of minorities in the U.S. (and England) in Postcolonial literature. Many of the terms critics use when analyzing a text through a Postcolonial Criticism lens are similarly applicable when looking at literature of the U.S. through the lens of Multicultural Criticism. (Refer to the list of terms/concepts listed in the following pages.) When writing about texts of the U.S., instead of colonizer and colonized, we might use the terms oppressor and oppressed or dominant and minority/subjugated culture. Still, it is possible to argue that what happens in the U.S., traditionally referred to as assimilation or Americanization, is, in fact, a form of cultural colonization though no apparent political or military colonization preceded it. Consider the “politics” of the traditional metaphor of “the Melting Pot” for the assimilation/Americanization process as well as other (more recent) versions modifying or challenging it (“the Salad Bowl,” “Mosaic”).

You might also notice overlap with Gender, specifically Feminist, Criticism as well as Marxist Criticism given that all of these literary criticisms focus on the construction of social identity as well as access, relationships, and responses to power. The main difference is that the lens of Postcolonial and Multicultural Criticism focuses on cultural, racial, or ethnic identity, differences, and conflict (as opposed to those of gender and class).

It can be difficult to notice (the relevance of) postcolonialism or multiculturalism in literature that lacks evidence of colonization or minority representation. It is hard to “see” culture when there is no apparent cultural difference to provide a basis for comparison and questioning. However, we might use the tools of Deconstruction and Gender Criticism to see the culture as if from an outsider’s perspective, examining the ideologies, customs, and traditions (the cultural imperatives) those inside the culture take for granted as well as their conformity to and subtle questioning or challenging of those cultural imperatives. It is difficult but necessary to distinguish culture from gender and class norms and ideologies though gender and class norms and ideologies often do derive from or are dictated by culture.

As with the other literary criticisms, you need to use Postcolonial or Multicultural Criticism to focus your close reading/analysis of the text, and you need to prove your Postcolonial or Multicultural Criticism argument with that close reading/analysis.

Also, while research is not excluded from Postcolonial or Multicultural Criticism, the way it is from New Criticism and Deconstruction, it is not mandatory as it is in New Historicism. However, as with New Historicism, if you elect to do research, you are, nevertheless, expected to focus your argument on close reading/analysis of the text, using the research to support or deepen your argument and interpretation (not simply alongside or in place of your argument/interpretation). In addition, if you elect to do research, you are obligated to avoid plagiarism by following the conventions of MLA Style research when quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing primary and secondary sources and to select and evaluate secondary sources according to their validity and appropriateness so that they strengthen rather than weaken your argument and credibility.
Final note:
It is not enough to argue that a character or characters belong to a particular group
(colonizer/oppressor or colonized/oppressed) though proving the belonging as well as showing
the specific nature of that belonging is a necessary step. In addition, one must explain what
belonging to this group means or reveals (in terms of access to power, effects on identity, etc.) in
this particular text (what the author/text is saying about this belonging) as well as the author’s or
text’s purpose in revealing this meaning: to uphold, question, condemn, etc., it and the status
quo. As with any good claim, the claim of your Postcolonial Criticism response paper or essay
should focus on a single specific, unified argument.

Read over the following pages to gain a better understanding of the terms and concepts
associated with Postcolonial Criticism and how to apply it to your literary analysis:

Key Terms/Concepts

Excerpted from Philip Irving Mitchell’s “Key Terms in Post-Colonial Theory” (with some edits):

Colonialism: The imperialist expansion of Europe into the rest of the world during the last four
hundred years in which a dominant [nation] carried on a relationship of control and influence
over its margins or colonies. This relationship tended to extend to social, pedagogical, economic,
political, and... cultural[ ] exchanges often with a hierarchical European settler class and local,
educated elite class forming layers between the European “mother” nation and the various
indigenous peoples who were controlled. Such a system carried within it inherent notions of
racial inferiority and exotic otherness.

Postcolonialism: A study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is concerned
with both how European nations conquered and controlled “Third World” cultures and how these
groups have since responded to and resisted those encroachments. Postcolonialism, as both a
body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through
three broad stages:
1. an initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by
   being in a colonized state
2. the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy
3. a growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

Ambivalence: the ambiguous way in which colonizer and colonized regard one another. The
colonizer often regards the colonized as both inferior yet exotically other, while the colonized
regards the colonizer as both enviable yet corrupt. In a context of hybridity, this often produces a
mixed sense of blessing and curse.

Alterity: "the state of being other or different"; the political, cultural, linguistic, or religious
other. The study of the ways in which one group makes themselves different from others.

Colonial education: the process by which a colonizing power assimilates either a subaltern
native elite or a larger population to its way of thinking and seeing the world.

Diaspora: the voluntary or enforced migration of peoples from their native homelands.
Diaspora literature is often concerned with questions of maintaining or altering identity,
language, and culture while in another culture or country.
**Essentialism**: the essence or "whatness" of something. In the context of race, ethnicity, or culture, essentialism suggests the practice of various groups deciding what is and isn’t a particular identity. As a practice, essentialism tends to overlook differences within groups often to maintain the status quo or obtain power. Essentialist claims can be used by a colonizing power but also by the colonized as a way of resisting what is claimed about them.

**Ethnicity**: a fusion of traits that belong to a group—shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviors, experiences, memories, and loyalties. Often deeply related to a person’s identity.

**Exoticism**: the process by which a cultural practice is made stimulating and exciting in its difference from the [colonizer]’s normal perspective. Ironically, as European groups educated local, indigenous cultures, schoolchildren often began to see their native lifeways, plants, and animals as exotic and the European counterparts as “normal” or “typical.”

**Hegemony**: the power of the [dominant] class [culture, or group] to convince other classes (cultures, or groups) that their interests are the interests of all, often not only through means of economic and political control but more subtly through the control of education and media.

**Hybridity**: new transcultural forms that arise from cross-cultural exchange. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, religious, etc. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive in its experience. Note the two related definitions:
- *catalysis*: the (specifically New World) experience of several ethnic groups interacting and mixing with each other often in a contentious environment that gives way to new forms of identity and experience.
- *creolization*: societies that arise from a mixture of ethnic and racial mixing to form a new material, psychological, and spiritual self-definition.

**Identity**: the way in which an individual and/or group defines itself. Identity is important to self-concept, social mores, and national understanding. It often involves both essentialism and othering.

**Ideology**: “a system of values, beliefs, or ideas shared by some social group and often taken for granted as natural or inherently true” (Bordwell & Thompson 494).

**Language**: In the context of colonialism and post-colonialism, language has often become a site for both colonization and resistance. In particular, a return to the original indigenous language is often advocated since the language was suppressed by colonizing forces. The use of European languages is a much debated issue among postcolonial authors.
- *abrogation*: a refusal to use the language of the colonizer in a correct or standard way.
- *appropriation*: “the process by which the language is made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience.”

**Mapping**: the mapping of global space in the context of colonialism was as much prescriptive as it was descriptive. Maps were used to assist in the process of aggression, and they were also used to establish claims. Maps claim[] the boundaries of a nation, for example.

**Metanarrative**: (“grand narratives,” “master narratives”) a large cultural story that seeks to explain within its borders all the little, local narratives. A metanarrative claims to be a big truth concerning the world and the way it works. Some charge that all metanarratives are inherently oppressive because they decide whether other narratives are allowed or not.
Orientalism: the process (from the late eighteenth century to the present) by which “the Orient” was constructed as an exotic other by European studies and culture. Orientalism is not so much a true study of other cultures as it is broad Western generalization about Oriental, Islamic, and/or Asian cultures that tends to erode and ignore their substantial differences.

Other: the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group. By declaring someone “Other,” someone, persons tend to stress what makes them dissimilar from or opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images.
- **Demonic other:** the view that those who are different from oneself are not only backward but also savage, even evil.
- **Exotic other:** the view that those who are different from oneself possess an inherent dignity and beauty, perhaps because of their more undeveloped, natural [i.e., primitive] state of being. [Note: The assumption of inferiority remains; the view is more romanticized but no less stereotypical.]

In addition: The term refers to colonized peoples. It carries with it the negative view of them held by their colonizers, who assume that those who are different form themselves are inferior beings. (Dobie)

Othering: the practice of viewing those who are different from oneself as inferior beings; othering is used to divide people and to justify hierarchies.

Race: the division and classification of human beings by physical and biological characteristics. Race often is used by various groups to either maintain power or to stress solidarity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was often used as a pretext by European colonial powers for slavery and/or the “white man’s burden.”

Semiotics: a system of signs by which one knows what something is. Cultural semiotics often provide the means by which a group defines itself or by which a colonializing power attempts to control and assimilate another group.

Space/Place: Space represents a geographic locale, one empty in not being designated. Place, on the other hand, is what happens when a space is made or owned. Place involves landscape, language, environment, culture, etc.

Subaltern: the lower or colonized classes who have little access to their own means of expression and are thus dependent upon the language and methods of the ruling class to express themselves. In addition: A person of inferior status. The subordinate position of subalterns may be based on gender, class, race, ethnicity or culture. Subaltern writers seek to make their marginalized cultures which are largely unrecognized by history known and valued for their past and present. (Dobie)

Worlding: the process by which a person, family, culture, or people is brought into the dominant Eurocentric/Western global society.

Excerpted from Ann Dobie’s “Glossary of Terms Used in Literary Criticism” in *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*:

**Culture:** the sum of the social patterns, traits, and products of a particular time or group of people. It includes the ideas, customs, skills, clothing, language, and arts that characterize the era or community.
Cultural colonization: the imposition of the beliefs and social practices of a dominant power on a subjugated one, resulting in loss or change of the native [or minority/subjugated] culture. Cultural colonization often follows political or military colonization.

Eurocentrism: the assumption that European ideals and experiences are the standard by which all other cultures are to be measured and judged inferior.

Mimicry: Imitation of the dress, manners, and language[,] etc.] of the dominant culture by an oppressed one.

Excerpted from Encyclopedia Brittanica:

Acculturation: the processes of change in artifacts, customs, and beliefs that result from the contact of two or more cultures. The term is also used to refer to the results of such changes. Two major types of acculturation, incorporation and directed change, may be distinguished on the basis of the conditions under which cultural contact and change take place.

Incorporation refers to the free borrowing and modification of cultural elements and occurs when people of different cultures maintain contact as well as political and social self-determination. It may involve syncretism, a process through which people create a new synthesis of phenomena that differs from either original culture; adoption, in which an entirely new phenomenon is added to a cultural repertoire; and adaptation, in which a new material or technology is applied to an extant phenomenon. Because incorporation is a product of free choice, the changes it engenders are often retained over the long term.

In contrast, directed change occurs when one group establishes dominance over another through military conquest or political control; thus, imperialism (colonialism/colonization) is the most common precursor to directed change. Like incorporation, directed change involves the selection and modification of cultural characteristics. However, these processes are more varied and the results more complex because they derive from the interference in one cultural system by members of another. The processes that operate under conditions of directed change include forced assimilation—the complete replacement of one culture by another—and resistance against aspects of the dominant culture. Because directed change is imposed upon the members of the recipient culture, often quite harshly, the changes it engenders are less likely to be maintained over the long term. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Brittanica)

Assimilation: the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. The process of assimilating involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society. As such, assimilation is the most extreme form of acculturation. Although assimilation may be compelled through force or undertaken voluntarily, it is rare for a minority group to replace its previous cultural practices completely; religion, food preferences, proxemics (e.g., the physical distance between people in a given social situation), and aesthetics are among the characteristics that tend to be most resistant to change. Assimilation does not denote "racial" or biological fusion, though such fusion may occur. (Elizabeth Prine Pauls)
The subject matter of postcolonial literature is marked by its concern for ambiguity or loss of identity. Written by culturally displaced people, it investigates the clash of cultures in which one deems itself to be superior and imposes its own practices on the less powerful one. Its writers examine their histories, question how they should respond to the changes they see around them, and wonder what their society will become. They recognize in themselves the old culture and the new, elements of the native one and the imposed one. The result is writing that is critical of the conquerors and promotional about its own ideologies.

Postcolonial literary criticism, which began to attract widespread notice in the early 1990s, looks at the works of postcolonial writers but is not limited to them. Because its practitioners are interested in how the colonized came to accept the values of the more powerful culture and also to resist them, it looks at canonical texts as well as postcolonial ones. Attitudes toward the “other” are evident in works that may not, on the surface, seem to deal with colonialism at all. Helen Tiffin argues in “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse” that because a precolonial past cannot be regained and contemporary identity cannot be free of that past, the real job of postcolonial criticism is “to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained … colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world.” She suggests that the way to do so is to use “canonical counter-discourse,” a process in which one examines “a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils [colonialist] assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes.” By extension, the whole colonialist discourse in which that text participates is revealed.

In looking at Jane Eyre, for example, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle discover a strong racial theme in the novel. By bringing Bertha Mason, Rochester’s Creole wife (from the West Indies), to the center of the narrative, they make the allusions and images that refer to slavery and the slave trade, heretofore mostly ignored, important keys to prevailing social attitudes. Whereas traditional criticism has in large part overlooked Bertha, who lives as a madwoman locked in the attic, and has left the assumptions about her unexamined, Bennett and Royle uncover the ideology implicit in the unquestioned acceptance of her invisibility, imprisonment, and displacement from her homeland. Before their analysis, she was seen as a threat because of her madness. They make it possible to view her, instead, as a sufferer who has been driven mad. The roles of villain and victim are reversed, providing through this new perspective on a much-read novel additional insight into colonialist and anticolonialist thinking.

Basic Assumptions

The lack of total agreement about what postcolonialism is or whom it involves makes it difficult to set down its basic principles and purposes. Further complicating the situation is the fact that different cultures have responded to colonialization in different ways, making it impossible to subscribe to any single way of approaching postcolonial studies. With those reservations in mind, the following assumptions and generalizations are by and large accepted as important to postcolonial theory:

- Colonizers not only physically conquer territories but also practice cultural colonization by replacing the practices and beliefs of the native culture with their own values, governance, laws, and belief. The consequence is loss or modification of much of the precolonial culture.
- When their own culture is forbidden or devalued, natives come to see themselves as inferior to the conquerors. They abandon (or hide) their own cultural practices to adopt (imitate) those of the assumedly “superior” one.
- Colonial subjects practice mimicry—imitation of dress, language, behavior, even gestures—instead of resistance. In Black Skin, White Mask, published in 1952, Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist, reasoned that the inferiority complex created in black people who have accepted the culture of another country as their own will cause them to imitate the codes of their colonizers. As the colonized become better educated and able to live at their white counterparts, they become increasingly imitative. Homi Bhabha points out that the mimicry is never exact, however. It “is at once resemblance and menace.” The colonizer both wants and fears that the colonized will be like him because the imitation honors and, at the same time, undermines the “authoritative discourse” of colonialism.
- European colonizers believed that their ideals and experiences were universal. As a concept, universalism is evident in the characters and themes in European (and, later, American) literature.
- The European colonizers assumed the superiority of their own culture and the inferiority of the conquered ones. They thought of themselves as
civilized, even advanced, and of the colonists as backward, even savage. Using their own culture as the standard for what any culture should be, a practice known as Eurocentrism, the powerful justified the imposition of their own culture on those they deemed to be of lesser status, the subalterns.

- The practice of othering, viewing those who are different from oneself as inferior beings, divides people and justifies hierarchies. Sometimes the dominant culture sees the "other" as evil, in which case it is known as the demonic other.
- On other occasions, the "other" is deemed to have a natural beauty, to be the exotic other.
- Colonizers also become the colonized. In this two-way process, the Europeans, too, were affected by their contact with other cultures.
- The effects of past colonialism are still evident today, and a new form of colonialism is currently effected by international corporations operating in developing nations.
- The interaction of cultures creates blended ones, mixtures of the native and colonial, a process called hybridity or syncretism. Characterized by tensions and change, this process is dynamic, interactive, and creative. As Bhabha explained in an interview with Gary Olson and Lynn Womah, "For me, hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorisation, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions."

## Reading as a Postcolonialist

A postcolonial analysis begins with the assumption that examining the relationship between a text and its context will illuminate not only the given work but also the culture that produced and consumed it. In the end, you may not agree with everything you find in either of them, but you will emerge with a deeper understanding of how and why a text is meaningful. In turn, the process gives greater validity to your judgments about a body of literature and the community associated with it. The postcolonial reader will generally be alert and sensitive to the presence of the elements that recur in the literature, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

## Presentation of Colonialism

The central question of postcolonial criticism addresses the stance of the text toward the mixed colonial culture that it depicts or that produced it. What attitudes does the text reflect regarding the colonizers and the colonized? A wide range of viewpoints is possible, for the historical development of a culture, the relationships between its cultural groups, and the daily stresses of mixing people of different backgrounds make for a complex situation. The understanding of such matters will likely be expressed in fairly subtle ways, and there may be no single unconflicted attitude because the question of how the conquered and the conqueror can live comfortably with each other, even after years of trying, is not easily answered.

### You can begin to examine the attitudes toward colonialism that exist in a work by asking the following questions:

- Is the work critical of colonialism, approving of it, or ambivalent about its value?
- Does the narrator speak as an observer or a participant in the story's cultural setting?
- What traditions and practices serve to maintain the cultural hierarchy in the work?

#### Treatment of Characters

It is in the portrayals of colonizers and the colonized that the larger picture becomes evident. The reader can begin by asking whether the depictions are positive or negative. Whose deeds are celebrated and whose reprobated? The assumptions about characters, both spoken and unspoken, will indicate whether the work supports or resists the ideology and practices of colonialism.

- Insight into the attitudes of the characters can come from asking the following questions:
  - What descriptive terms characterize the depiction of the characters who are the colonizers?
  - What descriptive terms characterize the depiction of the colonized characters?
  - What is the relationship between the colonized and the colonizers in the narrative?

#### Validity of the Narrative

It is important to establish whether the events are exaggerated. Is political and cultural domination presented explicitly or allegorically? Is the whole story being told? Are some elements contrary to what actually happened? Are the rationalizations believable? Knowing something about the author, including his or her background, opinions, and purposes, can sometimes be helpful in this regard.

Because *The Road from Coorain* is autobiographical, and the writer has validity in the eyes of the reader, the narrative is straightforward and rings true. The writer does not indulge in exaggeration or even satire, except for an occasional comic look at human foibles. If you are interested in testing the validity of a narrative, the questions posed in the previous paragraph can be applied to any piece of postcolonial literature.

#### Expressions of Nationalism (Nationalism)

Out of a desire to resuscitate the precolonial culture, some postcolonial writers consciously use elements of native culture and expunge elements of the imposed one. It is one way to rediscover native identity and declare its worth. Several problems lie in this approach, however. When writers publish works written in their own language, for instance, they usually meet a limited reading audience because too few people are likely to be proficient at comprehending it. Some people also argue that the attempt is inherently flawed because all cultures change; even without the intervention of an outside oppressor, what once was, even if one could find it out, would no longer be. Finally, postcolonial cultures are hybrid ones, and any attempt to go back to a "pure" culture is unrealistic.
Conway, writing as a native-born Australian but not as a member of the indigenous population, makes no attempt to disavow her British heritage. Instead, she writes from the postcolonial perspective of a hybrid culture that combines both the native one and the dominating one. Sometimes the contrasts she experiences make for illogical or amusing situations. For example, the requirement at Abbotsleigh that the girls wear uniforms designed for an English climate leaves them in summer in “starched green linen dresses with cream collars, the same [green flannel] blazer, beige socks, a cream panama hat, and the same brown gloves.” She continues, “Woe betide the student caught shedding the blazer or the gloves in public, even when the thermometer was over 100 degrees. . . . No one paused to think that gloves and blazers had a function in damp English springs which they lacked entirely in our blazing summers.” Such irrational practices left the girls, as Conway says, “only partially at home in our environment.”

She is referring to the sense of unhomelessness, of being caught between two cultures and not entirely at home in either of them. Another way of describing her situation is to say that she is experiencing double consciousness, for she has an awareness of being part of both the colonized and the colonizing cultures and thus of being the recipient of all the conflicts and contrasts that exist between them.

The following are some questions that can help the reader examine the elements of nativism in a story:

- Does the story refer only to native elements of the culture, or does it depict a hybrid culture?
- Which characters experience unhomelessness?
- Where do you find instances of double consciousness?

Recurring Subjects and Themes Some postcolonial texts look to the past, rehearsing the pains of othering and the humiliations of mimicry. They retell the stories of the initial colonization and trace changes in the native culture. Others record the sense of double consciousness and unhomelessness experienced by those who belong to both past and present and to neither. Still other texts look to the future, reaching for a definition of the new hybrid identity (both personal and communal) and an ideology that will serve its needs. In all cases, postcolonial texts reveal the complexity of cultural identity in a colonized world.

As already noted, The Road from Coonain is the story of Conway’s double consciousness and unhomelessness as it evolves into a personal identity. It also points to the practice of mimicry as one of the chief ways by which the colonizer’s presence was maintained. Nowhere is that more evident than at Abbotsleigh, where Eurocentrism reigned. The school administration made it clear by social rules, curriculum, and the example of its leaders that England was the standard by which all people and practices were to be measured. In the formality of the dinner table (where the girls, wearing green velvet dresses, were seated in descending order of age and class), in the absence of references to Australian art and literature in their classes, and in virtually all practices at Abbotsleigh, it was British culture that was imitated and admired. For example, Conway notes that in the study of literature, she and her classmates “might have been in Sussex” because their reading consisted of Shakespeare and Shelley, not of the writers of their own country. Australia, then, was defined by default, by what it was not. The girls were left to conclude that because its countryside did not look like the Cotswolds and the Lake Country, it must be ugly; and because its paintings were not mentioned, there must not be any. History pointed out that people of any importance lived somewhere else. The teachers dutifully corrected the girls’ speech so that it would conform to standard British pronunciation, unmarred by Australian patterns. In short, “The best standards were derived from Great Britain, and should be emulated unquestioningly.” And just in case the message was not clear, geography lessons featured maps with the holdings of the British Empire colored bright red. Obviously, the closest an Australian could come to being judged superior was by mimicry, by being British, even if only partly so.

The subjects and themes of postcolonial literature can be found by asking the following questions:

- Does the narrative look to the past, examine the present, or hypothesize a possible future?
- Where is imitation of the cultural standard depicted, and what is the effect of mimicry on those who are expected to practice it?
- How do specific characters struggle to develop a personal identity by reconciling the two cultures in which they live?

Context Every work has a context, and studying context lies at the heart of postcolonial literary study. Whereas interpreters of a culture sometimes derive insights about it by reading its literature, a postcolonial critic will look to almost every aspect of a culture to illuminate a text. Significant elements may be social or material; they may be drawn from the culture that produced the text or the culture of its interpreters. For the reader interested in deepening his or her understanding of a work, the process means examining the interaction of the two, which can be a time-consuming business if for no other reason than that it is difficult to know when one has done enough. The complex relationship between text and context, each a product and creator of the other, is called negotiation.

The context of Conway’s story and the context of its telling are not the same. That is, it is told from the distance of another country, personal independence, and intellectual growth. She has written it from the perspective of one who has moved far enough away from a place and a personal history to achieve insight that is not often found while immersed in them. It is interesting to speculate, for example, whether Conway would have been moved to write about growing up entrenched in colonialist mentality if she had not left it behind. Then, too, the changing social attitudes of the 1960s and later must have influenced her, as they did others, to question the traditional ways of evaluating what is good and what should be, a process that is important to her story. The times and her changing place have allowed her to see her past with greater clarity, and her remembrances shed light on the times, past and present.
The text and its contexts can be examined by asking the following questions:

- Are the context of the story and the context of its telling the same or different? If different, how do they affect each other?
- Where do you observe negotiation—that is, the impact of the context on the text and of the text on its context?
- What significant public events in the writer's life can be said to have contributed to his or her views?

**Minor Characters** As in the analysis of *Jane Eyre* mentioned earlier, previously unnoticed assumptions in a work can sometimes be detected by paying attention to the characters who do not hold center stage. By noting their treatment and the language used to describe them, attitudes about colonizers and colonized peoples that have gone unnoticed, especially in canonical works, may become evident.

Conway's classmates at the public school she briefly attended are never mentioned by name, and perhaps they were never even known as individuals. In the full scope of the autobiography, they play bit parts. Nevertheless, her brief encounter with them speaks volumes about the class structure of postwar Australia. For example, the superior attitude that the naturally assumed toward them, on the basis of the stereotypes and judgments given to her by her family and their friends, is symptomatic of the elitism common to her class. The jeering schoolmates are well aware of the social gulf between them, and they reflect an authentic Australian culture that is scorned by those who have assumed the colonizers' consciousness of class.

Minor characters can become significant when a reader asks the following questions:

- Which minor characters typify major cultural attitudes?
- How does the principal character view specific minor characters?
- Where do minor characters embody cultural conflict?

**Political Statement and Innuendo** The question here is whether and how a work promotes resistance to colonialism. Does the text make ideological statements or support a particular course of political, economic, or social action? Does it take up the case for or against a particular group of people? Or does it attempt to present the complexity of the situation without taking a stand on it?

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Great Britain. Her escape from such smallness of vision came with her move to the United States for graduate study and her subsequent marriage to a Canadian. Her cultural identity has continued to grow—in one sense, making for greater complexity of definition, but in another making for deeper understanding of what it means to reject the colonial mentality as one works out an individual identity. In the end, her own liberation from colonialist boundaries and definitions and her assumption of an identity that has been enriched by numerous cultures make her a model of what citizens of a shrinking world are likely to become. In that way, her autobiography provides a quiet but powerful ideological statement.

The political stance of a literary work may be obvious or subtle. The reader can identify it by asking the following questions:

- Does the text make overt political statements? Does it openly promote a particular social or economic agenda?
- Does it admire characters who stand for a stated cause?
- Does it criticize those who represent a specific ideology?

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**U.S. Multiculturalism**

Since the 1960s, U.S. society has undergone radical changes in how it conceives of social structures. School desegregation, new laws barring discrimination, and the demise of old laws that promoted discrimination have opened the door to opportunity for people who had traditionally been shut out. Within such marginalized groups, the renaissance of valued traditions that differ from those of the dominant group has served to enhance self-esteem and reassert distinct identities. In turn, the richness of cultures that had heretofore been ignored or reviled has come to the attention not only of those who belong to them but of a wider public as well. The arts, crafts, rituals, and religion of American Indians, Hispanics, African Americans, and other historically overlooked groups are now generating increasing interest in the many strands that make up U.S. society, allowing people to be less confined by a single way of seeing their lives. Of all such groups, African American culture, burdened with problems from the moment of its introduction to the New World, has probably received more attention than any other. For that reason, it will be discussed here as a model of how cultural studies of other marginalized groups can be made.
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Sample Response Paper: Applying Postcolonial/Multicultural Criticism to "The Lottery"
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Man's Humanity to Man

Robert Burns claimed in 1784 in his poem "Man Was Made to Mourn: A Dirge" that "Man's inhumanity to man / Makes countless thousands mourn" (lines 55-6), ironically characterizing cruelty as an inhuman and primitive trait despite the human tendency to be cruel, which his poem so clearly acknowledged and illustrated. Shirley Jackson, author of the short story "The Lottery," would disagree with the assumption that cruelty is inhuman. She had no such illusions or expectations of humanity's essential benevolence. The lens of Multicultural Criticism reveals Jackson's implicit cynicism. Indeed, her story "The Lottery" paints a picture of humanity as inherently, naturally cruel and condemns humanity as ultimately irredeemably savage.

Ultimately, the ritual of the lottery is so ingrained in this community that it represents their master narrative. It defines who they are, their culture. The setting lets us know immediately the importance of the lottery as it's held centrally "in the square, between the post office and the bank" (Jackson 963), themselves significant social institutions, and in the middle of the workday, "people . . . gather[ing] . . . around ten o'clock in the morning . . . and . . . [getting] through in time . . . for noon dinner (963), the main meal. That they can eat and go on with their everyday lives immediately after the ritual killing also shows its integration into their society, how minimally disruptive it is. It is a cultural norm everyone in the village participates
in and expects to participate in. They know its rules down to the gathering and selection of stones. The boys early on integrate the stones into their games (963-4), and the women at the end are clearly aware both of the objective to kill the selected individual as well as each individual’s obligation to participate in the killing according to her abilities, so “Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands . . . [whereas] Mrs. Dunbar had stones in both hands” (969). They both also urge each other on, Mrs. Delacroix “turn[ing] to Mrs. Dunbar . . . and [saying,] ‘Hurry up,’” and Mrs. Dunbar responding, “gasping for breath: ‘I can’t run at all. You’ll have to go ahead and I’ll catch up with you’” (969). Here, too, we might notice that “someone [takes the time to give] Davy Hutchinson [Tessie Hutchinson’s young son] a few pebbles” (969); no one is exempt from the cultural tradition as no one can be exempt from the culture he or she belongs to. The conformity or assimilation to a common culture is signaled by the names, which are typically Anglo-Saxon in origin or, like Delacroix, have been Americanized. The story indicates that “the villagers pronounced this name ‘Dellacroy’” (964), suggesting that the village, not the family, made this decision, imposing the new pronunciation in order to assimilate the family and their name into the existing dominant culture, mirroring the way residents are folded into participation in the lottery. Belonging to this culture means adopting its cultural norms, its master narrative. One final indicator that the lottery is a cultural norm is the fact that the ritual has changed and grown with the community, so aspects, like the original black box, wood chips, “a perfunctory tuneless chant . . . and ritual salute” (965) performed by the lottery official, have been replaced by more modern paraphernalia, like the current black box, slips of paper, and the informal greeting of each person by Mr. Summers (964-5). There is also mention that other towns have either given up the lottery or discussed the possibility of doing so (966-7), suggesting that such a radical change is possible. However,
resistance to both the small and radical changes and nostalgia for what’s been lost are presented along with the mention of the changes themselves. Cultures, too, change slowly, organically, and reluctantly, often with nostalgia for a past believed to have been better and now lost. This slowness and reluctance to change as well as the accompanying nostalgia, given that the culture the villagers are perpetuating is human savagery, are the evidence that most strongly condemns humanity and best reveals Shirley Jackson’s cynicism about what it means to be human.

Shirley Jackson’s cynicism, reflected in the story’s unapologetic portrait of humanity as irrevocably savage, is deeply disturbing, and it’s understandable why audiences then and now have been both transfixed and outraged by her story. The horror it confronts us with may be a fiction, but that doesn’t negate its truth, especially the potential to recognize ourselves in the villagers. Haven’t we individually and collectively faced situations when we have been silent in the face of injustice, when we have clung to traditions that allowed the perpetuation of injustice, when we have chosen to protect ourselves and preserve our wellbeing by sacrificing other people and their wellbeing, sometimes without question or hesitation? When it comes down to it, their humanity is ours. If Tessie Hutchinson’s final outcry is an ironic protest against the human tendency to allow and perpetuate brutality, meant for us to hear as Jackson’s appeal to us, there seems to be little expectation that we will, in fact, hear it.