Post-colonial theory

The ‘other’

Generally speaking, this term means different. It is used by post – colonial theorists to describe the way in which people within a dominant colonial discourse, say Europeans, produce the idea that people from the Orient are ‘the other’. This can also be called ‘othering’. Europe because it was colonially powerful, asserted its control over the means of communication and interpretation, especially in literary works. The resulted in colonial people being stereotyped as being different and sometimes threatening to the dominant discourse. E.g. the wily Asian, the golliwog.

Macey, David (2001)The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Theory, Penguin, London

"essentialism" a negatively connotated term, to describe stereotypical ideas of race.

Eurocentric – way of describing literature which is written from a white, middle-class British point of view.

Literature, whether it be a novel, a play, a short story or a poem, emanates from the perspective and the biases of its author. Further, the author's biases are the product of his/her cultural and social environments. As literature often mirrors the cultural and social mindset of the author's "civilization", literary criticism has become an important tool in understanding how the history of the author's "civilization" has been shaped, and how that history has shaped literature. ………….postcolonial critics………..seek to reveal the imperialistic ideals fostered by much of the literature in the colonialist period…..

Postcolonialism begins its critical process by defying the New Critic’s idea that Western Civilization's literature is universal, transcending time and place by "representing the unquestioned norm, so that the situations depicted can stand for all possible forms of human interaction" (Barry 192)

This subordination of indigenous experiences is mirrored in the way the history of a colonized people is presented to the world, and it is the goal of postcolonial critics to examine the manner in which other cultures are represented in Western Literature. For, as Peter Barry points out in his article entitled, "Postcolonial Criticism," children of all races have been "taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans" (Barry 192).

Dragone, Nikki (1996) Postcolonial Criticism