

Re-reading Classics Through Post-Colonial Lens

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Classic literary texts have long been regarded as timeless works that represent universal human experiences. Many of these texts were written during periods when European colonial powers dominated large parts of the world. Because of this specific historical context, scholars in Postcolonial Studies argue that classical literature largely illustrates the political and racial assumptions of the colonial era. Re-reading these classics through a post-colonial lens is therefore important because it unveils hidden colonial ideologies and restores a large chunk of marginalized voices. It also encourages a more critical and inclusive understanding of literature. One important reason for reinterpreting classics through a post-colonial perspective is that it

helps to uncover the colonial attitudes in many literary works. Writers who lived during the age of empire repeatedly viewed European culture as superior and represented non-European societies as primitive and uncivilized. These assumptions were time and again presented as normal and natural in literature. When readers approach such works with a post-colonial perspective, they can identify these biases and question the power structures behind them.

There is a famous English novel, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, which has traditionally been read as an adventurous survival story, but post-colonial critics point out that the relationship between Crusoe and Friday indicates a colonial hierarchy in which the European character claims authority over the non-European one. Another argument in favour of post-colonial readings is that they highlight the absence and marginalization of colonized voices. In many classic works, the narrative is controlled by the perspective of the colonizer, while the experiences of colonized people remain distorted. By examining these texts critically from post-colonialism, one can identify how certain groups were excluded or misrepresented. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad has been criticized by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe for presenting Africa as a mysterious and uncivilized place while deliberately denying African characters their own voice and certain complexities. Now, such critiques encourage readers to reconsider the authority of canonical texts and to recognize perspectives that were previously ignored.

Many classical and modern works like Robinson Crusoe, Heart of Darkness, Jane Eyre, The Tempest, A Passage to India, Things Fall Apart, Season of Migration to the North, The God of Small Things, Midnight's Children, and One Hundred Years of Solitude can be read through a postcolonial lens because they show how colonial power, cultural dominance, economic exploitation, and racial hierarchies affect people and societies. These works repeatedly disclose the struggles of the colonized and the shaping of identity under colonial influence.

Re-reading classics through a post-colonial lens also helps readers understand the historical relationship between literature and imperial power. Literature does not exist in isolation; it reflects the social and political realities of its time. During the period of European expansion, many writers were influenced by the dominant beliefs about race, civilization, identity, and cultural hierarchy. Post-colonial criticism inspects how these historical conditions shaped literary representation. By studying classics in this way, readers gain a deeper awareness of how cultural narratives were used to justify colonial rule.

This approach also promotes critical thinking and challenges the idea that classical literature is beyond questioning. Classics still remain valuable for their artistic and intellectual contributions, but post-colonial criticism encourages readers to examine them critically rather than accepting them as entirely objective. This process does not necessarily reject the literary value of these

works, but it places them within a broader historical and cultural framework. As a result, readers develop a more balanced understanding of literature and its relationship to power. It contributes to a more inclusive literary culture. By questioning colonial representations and acknowledging suppressed perspectives, scholars and readers can appreciate the diversity of human experiences more fully. This approach also opens space for writers from formerly colonized societies to reinterpret and respond to earlier literary works.