Chapter 5

Writing about Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the concerns of scholars working with African American, ethnic, and postcolonial theories.
2. Apply various cultural theories to works of literature.
3. Review works of poetry and fiction that explore issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity.
4. Learn how to respectfully disagree with other scholars within an academic argument.
5. Draft and revise a critique of a work of literature based on racial, ethnic, or cultural issues within the work.

5.1 Literary Snapshot: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll, as we found out in previous chapters, is most famous for two books: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). These books follow the adventures of a seven-year-old, Alice, who tumbles down a rabbit hole (*Wonderland*) and enters a magic mirror (*Looking-Glass*), entering a nonsensical world of the imagination. If you have not already read these classic books—or wish to reread them—you can access them at the following links:

http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html

http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarGlas.html

In one of the most well-known scenes from *Wonderland*, Alice encounters a Caterpillar sitting on top of a mushroom, "with its arms folded, quietly smoking a long hookah, and taking not the smallest notice of her or of anything else."Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. With Forty-Two Illustrations by John Tenniel* (New York: D. Appleton, 1927; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1998), chap. 4, http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html. The two engage in an exchange typical of this novel: their conversation is long, confrontational, and convoluted, as each partner in the conversation fails to understand or be understood by the other:

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

"Who are *you*?" said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar sternly. "**Explain yourself!"**

"I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."

"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly," Alice replied very politely, "for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."

"It isn't," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet," said Alice; "but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?"

"Not a bit," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, perhaps your feelings may be different," said Alice; "all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*."

"You!" said the Caterpillar contemptuously. "Who are **you**?"

Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar's making such *very* short remarks, and she drew herself up and said, very gravely, "I think, you ought to tell me who *you* are, first."

"Why?" said the Caterpillar.

Here was another puzzling question; and as Alice could not think of any good reason, and as the Caterpillar seemed to be in a *very* unpleasant state of mind, she turned away.

"Come back!" the Caterpillar called after her. "I've something important to say!"

This sounded promising, certainly: Alice turned and came back again.

"Keep your temper," said the Caterpillar.

"Is that all?" said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could.

"No," said the Caterpillar.

Alice thought she might as well wait, as she had nothing else to do, and perhaps after all it might tell her something worth hearing. For some minutes it puffed away without speaking, but at last it unfolded its arms, took the hookah out of its mouth again, and said, "So you think you're changed, do you?" [bold added]Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. With Forty-Two Illustrations by John Tenniel* (New York: D. Appleton, 1927; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1998), chap. 5, http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html.

Many readers identify closely with Alice in these scenes. They're bewildered at the behavior of the creatures Alice encounters and, perhaps, become as frustrated as she does when the citizens of Wonderland talk in circles around her. The "puzzling questions" Alice encounters seem unanswerable, simply nonsense that Alice is right to dismiss.

However, if we think of *Wonderland* as a narrative of encounter—a story of different cultures colliding—we might draw more nuanced conclusions about these scenes. Could we, for instance, read such scenes from the perspective of the inhabitants of Wonderland? How might the Caterpillar think of Alice during their exchanges? Consider these paragraphs:

The Caterpillar was the first to speak.

"What size do you want to be?" it asked.

"Oh, I'm not particular as to size," Alice hastily replied; "only one doesn't like changing so often, you know."

"I *don't* know," said the Caterpillar.

Alice said nothing: she had never been so much contradicted in her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.

"Are you content now?" said the Caterpillar.

"Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, sir, if you wouldn't mind," said Alice: "three inches is such a wretched height to be."

"It is a very good height indeed!" said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).

> "But I'm not used to it!" pleaded poor Alice in a piteous tone. And she thought of herself, "I wish the creatures wouldn't be so easily offended!"
>
> "You'll get used to it in time," said the Caterpillar; and it put the hookah into its mouth and began smoking again.Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. With Forty-Two Illustrations by John Tenniel* (New York: D. Appleton, 1927; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1998), chap. 5, http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html.

The Caterpillar takes offense when Alice suggests that "three inches is such a wretched height to be." As the story points out, the Caterpillar is "exactly three inches high," and it is angered that Alice defines the best possible height as her own height, dismissing its body as "wretched" without even considering its feelings. When Alice thinks, "I wish the creatures wouldn't be so easily offended," she reveals a feeling of innate superiority over the beings she encounters. Though the Caterpillar speaks with her, it is a "creature" who shouldn't be "so easily offended" even though she directly insults it.

As we see in Chapter 4 "Writing about Gender and Sexuality: Applying Feminist and Gender Criticism", literary scholars are often interested in questions of identity in literary works. In that chapter we discuss identities drawn from gender and sexuality; in this chapter we look at identities drawn from race, ethnicity, and/or cultural background. For scholars interested in literary depictions of race and ethnicity, scenes such as the Caterpillar's in *Wonderland* can be read as demonstrating problematic attitudes toward minorities within Western cultures or toward people in non-Western societies. Such problematic attitudes are particularly disconcerting when found in widely read, **canonical**[1] stories such as *Wonderland*. Let's look for a minute at the way the Caterpillar is depicted in the text and in early illustrations of the novel.

1. The set of texts considered central to literary study: the books, poems, plays, and essays most frequently studied and taught. A canonical text, then, is a text that is frequently included in literary scholarship and in literature classes.

Illustration by Sir John Tenniel for Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865).

The Caterpillar is described as "quietly smoking a long hookah" and appears, from behind, almost like a thin man sitting cross-legged while smoking. Keep in mind that *Wonderland* was published in 1865, when the British Empire stretched around the world and was described as a "vast empire on which the sun never sets." The British Empire in 1865 controlled territories in the Mideast and Asia, including Hong Kong, India, and Singapore. The 1860s were also, as Jon Stratton points out in *Writing Sites: A Genealogy of the Postmodern World*, "the major period of British exploration and colonisation (sic) of Africa."Jon Stratton, *Writing Sites: A Genealogy of the Postmodern World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 168. You can see how far the British Empire expanded by looking at the red areas (British territories) on this map of the British Empire in 1886.

Map of the world by Captain J.C.R. Colomb and Maclure & Co. Published as a supplement for The Graphic, as the "Imperial Federation" (July, 1886).

To its original British readers, then, the Caterpillar would have evoked romanticized images of these "exotic" civilizations, smoking with a device that originated in the Middle East and would have been familiar to British citizens because of their presence in India. By contrast, Alice is drawn as the ideal of a nineteenth-century English girl, with white skin and blonde hair, knowledge of diverse academic subjects such as biology and poetry, and a heightened sense of manners and propriety.

For Stratton, *Wonderland* can be read as a "fantasy of civilising [*sic*] the natives" as Alice enters "an Other world where people behave differently," to which she "brings her own standards and manners to bear without any reference to the local set."Jon Stratton, *Writing Sites: A Genealogy of the Postmodern World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 170. Because Alice believes that her rules and standards are universal and should be obvious to all the people she encounters in Wonderland, she can be seen as a symbol of the British Empire, which worked to impose British standards of education, manners, religion, and politics on the people whose countries they controlled. "Were Alice to lose her place as the arbiter of meaning," Stratton claims, "she would lose her privileged position in Wonderland," a place where "colonial Otherness threatens the fixity of meaning by offering

alternatives."Jon Stratton, *Writing Sites: A Genealogy of the Postmodern World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 172. Like the female image of Britannia in the center of the map shown, Alice is surrounded by exotic "natives" who she expects will look to her as a model of civilization.

The Caterpillar disrupts Alice's presumption of her own authority in Wonderland. He demands to know "Who are *you*?" and the question confuses and disturbs Alice. She insists, "I think, you ought to tell me who *you* are, first," but when the Caterpillar asks her "Why?" she "could not think of any good reason." Alice maintains a belief in her own superiority—a belief that she should be able to demand answers of the Caterpillar but not the other way around—but her experiences in Wonderland unsettle those beliefs. Though Alice insists that the citizens of Wonderland are strange or foreign, for the citizens of Wonderland, Alice is the stranger unfairly judging their society and its customs based on her own cultural biases and assumptions.

Interestingly, the **colonial**[2] ideas that are implicit in Carroll's original *Wonderland* become explicit in the latest film adaptation of the novel, Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). At the end of that film, Alice (who is nineteen in Burton's version) decides that she will help her father expand his business to China. As Kevin Slaten points out, this means that Alice will likely be involved in British-Chinese relations during the time of the Opium Wars, a pair of conflicts that decimated many areas along China's coast and led to what Chinese historians deemed a "century of humiliation" for the nation.Kevin Slaten, "Who Else Might Be Mad at Alice? China," *Real Clear World*, March 12, 2010, http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2010/03/12/who_else_might_be_mad_at_alice_china_98853.html. In other words, Burton places Alice in China during a period of colonial aggression, perhaps signaling that Alice's insistence on her authority over the denizens of Wonderland has prepared her to enact such authority on behalf of British trade interests in the "real world." Tim Burton's ending to *Alice in Wonderland* can be seen as a **postcolonial**[3] interpretation of Lewis Carroll's novel: a critique of the politics underlying what seems to be a simple children's story.

2. The process by which a state conquers and governs a geographic area or another nation. In literary studies, "colonial," "colonialist," and related terms often describe texts that are produced during a period of colonization, either by the colonizers or by the people under colonial rule.

3. Postcolonial theories attempt to understand and explain the cultural, intellectual, and societal legacies of colonial rule.

YOUR PROCESS

1. What are some other scenes in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that might read differently if you considered the other characters' perspectives rather than just Alice's?
2. What are some literary works that you think of as "ethnic" or "cultural"—that seem different or foreign to your own experience? Create a list in your notes. Then create a list of works that seem "normal," or familiar to your own experience. Compare your two lists. How is your experience of literature shaped by your own cultural, ethnic, or racial background?

5.2 Postcolonial, Racial, and Ethnic Theory: An Overview

As you've seen throughout this textbook, the field of English or literary studies has changed significantly through the years. At one time, to study English meant to study only literature from England. In fact, it meant to study, almost exclusively, poetry from England. As we see in Chapter 4 "Writing about Gender and Sexuality: Applying Feminist and Gender Criticism", the poetry that English students read for the majority of the field's history was almost exclusively written by men. It may not surprise you to learn that the majority of the men that English students read came from Western cultures and were white. The experiences of minorities (within Western culture) and non-Western people were largely excluded from the canon. When their experiences did appear in widely read books, poems, plays, and essays, their experiences were usually filtered through perspective of a white author.

Over the past decades, many literary scholars have begun working to change this reality. Drawing from a range of disciplines, including history, anthropology, and sociology, these scholars have demonstrated how the literary canon excludes the voices of minority and non-Western writers, thinkers, and subjects. They have exposed attitudes of prejudice within canonical works. They have also worked to recover and celebrate works by writers from previously ignored or denigrated racial and ethnic backgrounds. Though their subjects vary widely—from the African American experience in the United States to those of Indians living under British colonial rule—scholars interested in racial, ethnic, and postcolonial studies share a conviction that literature is not politically neutral. Instead, they argue that literature both reflects and shapes the values of the cultures that produce it and that literary critics have a duty to analyze and often critique the cultural values embedded in the texts we study.

Illustration by Edward Winsor Kemble for Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884).

Think, for instance, of the frequent debates that have arisen over Mark Twain's novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (you can read *Huck Finn*Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1912; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1995), http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html. in its entirety at http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html). For years, literary critics, scholars, students, and parents have debated whether the novel, written by a white American man, should be considered racist (and, if so, whether it should be taught in schools). These debates center on three major issues: (1) the novel's depiction of Jim, the runaway slave who is

simultaneously the novel's moral center and a frequent object of ridicule; (2) the novel's frequent use of the pejorative term "nigger" to describe its African American characters; and (3) the heavy dialect through which the speech of black Americans is presented in the book. Schools have frequently debated banning Twain's novel, often in response to the concerns of parents or students.See Gregory Roberts, "'Huck Finn' a Masterpiece—Or an Insult," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 25, 2003, http://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/Huck-Finn-a-masterpiece-or-an-insult-1130707.php. There is no easy solution to these debates. As literary critic Stephen Railton put it nearly thirty years ago: "Is *Huck Finn* racist? Yes and no; no and yes."Stephen Railton, "Jim and Mark Twain: What Do Dey Stan' For?" *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. http://www.vqronline.org/articles/1987/summerrailton-jim-mark/. However you feel about this novel, however, these debates illustrate the importance of literary critics considering issues of race, ethnicity, and culture as they read and interpret literature.

Though it has happened more slowly than many cultural critics would like, the literary canon has shifted in the past decades to reflect a wider sense of who writes literature and what we should learn from it. The fact that we study American literature at all reflects an earlier shift away from a strict focus on English writing. Moreover, students in American literature classrooms today study more writers of color than did students even twenty years ago. Some African American writers are now studied so frequently they could be called canonical, including Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison. American literature classes often cover writing by Native American writers, such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdich, and Sherman Alexie, and by Hispanic, Chicano/a, or Latino/a American writers such as George Santayana, Isabel Allende, and Gary Soto. Moreover, British literature classrooms now routinely include works by authors from former British colonies, such as Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Jean Rhys (Dominica), Salman Rushdie (India), and Anita Desai (India). Finally, courses in world literature regularly teach minority and/or postcolonial writers who compose in languages other than English.

We recognize that these are incomplete lists. Indeed, even separating authors into these distinct categories can be problematic, as many writers span geographic regions, ethnic identities, or racial backgrounds. Nevertheless, these names can help get us started thinking about the diverse voices that literature classrooms now include. Of course, scholars working in these fields would point out that there is much work yet to be done to build a truly representative curriculum. Though minority and non-Western writers are now studied regularly, they still occupy relatively small places in most literature classrooms and curricula.

YOUR PROCESS

1. What minority or non-Western writers have been part of your literary education to this point? Jot down a few examples.
2. Now think about how those writers shaped your understanding of our literary inheritance. How did reading those writers change your ideas about literature, culture, or history? How would your literary education have been different with a textbook of thirty years ago that largely excluded nonwhite voices?
3. How does your cultural background shape your response to these questions?

Scholars working in these fields often seek to challenge **Eurocentrism**[4], which is a worldview that considers European societies (and those closely related to them, such as white American society) as the model to which other societies should aspire. Taking a slightly different focus, the critic Edward Said coined the term **Orientalism**[5], which refers to a set of false assumptions and stereotypes that Western cultures maintain about societies other than themselves.Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1994). These **Others**[6] are sometimes portrayed as excessively bad (demonic others) and sometimes as excessively beautiful (exotic others), but neither view actually builds a true picture of non-Western societies or people. In other words, literary critics are wary of texts in which a foreign society is portrayed as ideal, just as they are when a foreign society is portrayed as depraved.

Looking at literature through the lens of social and cultural identity often requires that critics read beyond the surface meanings of texts and think about the ethnic, cultural, and social implications of the words on the page. For instance, let's consider Phillis Wheatley's "On being brought from Africa to America," which was published in her 1773 collection, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*:

On Being Brought from Africa to America.

'TWAS mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,

Taught my benighted soul to understand

4. A worldview that considers European societies (and those closely related to them, such as white American society) as models to which other societies should aspire.

5. A set of false assumptions or stereotypes (either excessively idealistic or excessively negative) that Western societies perpetuate about societies other than themselves.

6. A term used by postcolonial theorists to describe groups of people who are denigrated and/or oppressed by those in positions of power. During colonial times, for instance, Indians were treated as Others by English colonizers, who saw their own culture as superior to Indian culture.

> That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
>
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
>
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
>
> "Their colour is a diabolic die."
>
> Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*,
>
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (Denver: W. H. Lawrence, 1887), 17.

Wheatley was a slave, brought to Boston on the slave ship *Phillis* in 1761 and owned by John and Susanna Wheatley, who gave her an education, which was uncommon for slaves at the time. On the surface, Wheatley's poem seems to praise the system of slavery that brought her to America, noting that it was "mercy" that "brought [her] from [her] *Pagan* land." With that latter phrase she seems to disown her heritage as simply pagan, a "benighted" contrast to the Christian education she has received in the United States. We might even accuse Wheatley of **mimicry**, or attempting to imitate the language and (as you can see in the following engraving) dress of the ruling class.

Portrait by Scipio Moorehead as a frontispiece to Phillis

However, scholars of African American literature might urge us to read the poem as a subtle critique of the American slave system. In her article "A Slave's Subtle War: Phillis Wheatley's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol," Sondra O'Neale begins by insisting that "any evaluation of Phillis Wheatley must consider her status as a slave." O'Neale notes that a slave who wanted to write during this time period "first had to acquire the requisite language skills." Then "appropriate whites had to authenticate the writer's mental and moral capacity, and then the slave's master had to agree that the slave could publish the work. Moreover, the slave's offering was carefully censored to ensure that it was in no way incendiary."Sondra O'Neale, "A Slave's Subtle War: Phillis Wheatley's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol," *Early American Literature* 21, no. 2 (1986): 144–45. In other words, Wheatley could not write a bald condemnation of

slavery; her owners held absolute sway over both her writing and her person, and to be published, she had to write within the constraints imposed on her by whites invested in keeping the slave system intact.

Wheatley's Poems on Various Subjects... (1773).

For O'Neale, Wheatley "challenged eighteenth-century evangelicals in their cherished religious arena by redeploying the same language and doctrine that whites had used to define the African, thereby undercutting conventional colonial assumptions about race and skin color."Sondra O'Neale, "A Slave's Subtle War: Phillis Wheatley's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol," *Early American Literature* 21, no. 2 (1986): 145. In the poem, Wheatley refers to "*Negros*, black as *Cain*." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many religious and political commentators taught that African people descended from the biblical Cain, who was cursed by God after murdering his brother, Abel. In the King James Bible, it says "the LORD set a mark upon Cain" to identify him to other people, and many white commentators argued that this mark was a dark skin tone.Gen. 4:15 (King James Version). By associating black people with Cain, whites implied that blacks were inferior people both physically and morally—marked as "other" than whites, whom they considered normal.

Wheatley's poem reappropriates these ideas into a critique of Christians who refuse to acknowledge the brotherhood of African people: "Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*." First, the terms "Christian," "Negroes," and "black as Cain" are presented in a close sequence, as Wheatley conflates her presumably white readers ("*Christians*") with herself and her people ("*Negros*, black as *Cain*"). In the next line she insists that black Americans "May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train," where they would, presumably, stand shoulder-to-shoulder with white Christians. Wheatley notes, "Some view our sable race with scornful eye," and say "Their colour is a diabolic die," but she refuses this mischaracterization of her people. They are not "diabolic"—a "demonic other"—but instead equal in potential to white Americans. Though she cannot directly condemn slavery, Wheatley's poem simultaneously evokes and calls into the question prejudiced ideas about African Americans. By writing such refined poetry, Wheatley embodies the mental equality of blacks and whites, and in these final lines she insists on that equality. If her readers grant this last concession, however—if they agree that blacks and whites can indeed join the same "angelic train"—then the systems of denigration and oppression they support will be exposed as resting on false pretenses. In other words, we can read Wheatley's mimicry as subversive. She is an African American writer working within the strict limitations of the slave system to write and distribute poetry that subtly undermines that very system.

YOUR PROCESS

1. Read the following Wheatley poem, "To the University of Cambridge, in New-England." As you read, consider what underlying messages Wheatley might seek to convey, as in the poem we discussed previously. Jot down your ideas.

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,

The muses promise to assist my pen;

'Twas not long since I left my native shore

The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom:

Father of mercy, 'twas thy gracious hand

Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis giv'n to scan the heights

Above, to traverse the ethereal space,

And mark the systems of revolving worlds.

Still more, ye sons of science ye receive

The blissful news by messengers from heav'n,

How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.

See him with hands out-stretcht upon the cross;

Immense compassion in his bosom glows;

He hears revilers, nor resents their scorn:

What matchless mercy in the Son of God!

When the whole human race by sin had fall'n,

He deign'd to die that they might rise again,

And share with him in the sublimest skies,

Life without death, and glory without end.

Improve your privileges while they stay,

Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears

Or good or bad report of you to heav'n.

Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,

By you be shun'd, nor once remit your guard;

Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.

Ye blooming plants of human race divine,

An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe;

Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,

And in immense perdition sinks the soul.

Wheatley is an interesting example because her work speaks to the concerns of scholars interested in the African American literary tradition and scholars interested in issues of conquest and colonialism. Wheatley wrote, after all, when Massachusetts was a British colony, and she came to Massachusetts after being forcibly seized from her home in either Senegal or Gambia, in West Africa. Next we'll look at another text that can help us understand the concerns of postcolonial critics. Nearly 150 years after Wheatley was captured, Joseph Conrad published one of the most famous works ever written about the African continent, *Heart of*

Darkness (1899).Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902; University of Virginia Electronic Text Center, 1993), http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ConDark.html.

YOUR PROCESS

1. As we've suggested throughout this text, these process papers will make more sense if you are familiar with the literary work under discussion. For this section, you should read Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, which you can find in full as an e-text provided by the University of Virginia (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ConDark.html).
2. As you read, pay particular attention to the way that Conrad portrays relationships between European and African characters in the text.

Though *Heart of Darkness* was written, in part, as a critique of Belgian colonialism and commerce in the Congo, many postcolonialist critics have pointed out that the novella perpetuates attitudes of racism and Eurocentrism through its portrayal of Africans.

Most famously, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe wrote in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" that the novella "projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality."Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor, 2012). Achebe notes that few Africans are allowed to speak in Conrad's text. Through most of the novella, he notes, the African characters simply make noises—grunts and babble and sounds. Only two African characters speak: one to express cannibal propensities and another to announce the death of the white enigma, Mr. Kurtz. Achebe insists, despite the stylistic merits of Conrad's work (which he admits are considerable), that "the real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot."Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor, 2012). In other words, Achebe insists that the text's aesthetic qualities cannot and should not redeem its cultural and racial attitudes. Such a commitment to the political and social implications of literature characterizes much ethnic criticism.

If that attitude seems extreme, consider the following excerpt from a 2003 article in the British newspaper *The Guardian*. It's written by Caryl Phillips, who initially met with Achebe to defend Joseph Conrad's writing against Achebe's critiques, but their conversation took another turn:

"I am an African. What interests me is what I learn in Conrad about myself. To use me as a symbol may be bright or clever, but if it reduces my humanity by the smallest fraction I don't like it."

"Conrad does present Africans as having 'rudimentary' souls."

Achebe draws himself upright.

"Yes, you will notice that the European traders have 'tainted' souls, Marlow has a 'pure' soul, but I am to accept that mine is 'rudimentary'?" He shakes his head. "Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a very short-lived period of ambivalence about the certainty of this colonising mission, and Heart of Darkness falls into this period. But you cannot compromise my humanity in order that you explore your own ambiguity. I cannot accept that. My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems."

The realisation hits me with force. I am not an African. Were I an African I suspect I would feel the same way as my host. But I was raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the stereotypically reductive images of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilisation. I feel momentarily ashamed that I might have become caught up with this theme and subsequently overlooked how offensive this novel might be to a man such as Chinua Achebe and to millions of other Africans. Achebe is right; to the African reader the price of Conrad's eloquent denunciation of colonisation is the recycling of racist notions of the "dark" continent and her people. Those of us who are not from Africa may be prepared to pay this price, but this price is far too high for Achebe. However lofty Conrad's mission, he has, in keeping with times past and present, compromised African humanity in order to examine the European psyche.Caryl Phillips, "Out of Africa," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe.

Phillips begins to understand that he shares, to some degree, Conrad's Eurocentric perspective and thus has not to this point understood Achebe's African perspective. When Phillips begins to see how Conrad's focus on the novella's European characters leads him to disregard its African characters, Phillips also begins to accept Achebe's postcolonial critique of the novel.

YOUR PROCESS

1. Listen to Chinua Achebe's 2009 interview with NPR about *Heart of Darkness* (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113835207).Robert Siegel, "Chinua Achebe: 'Heart of Darkness' Is Inappropriate," *All Things Considered*, NPR, audio, October 15, 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113835207. Can you understand why Achebe, as an African, takes such umbrage at the portrayal of Africans in this canonical novel? Should such concerns shape what we read in literature classrooms?
2. You can read Caryl Phillips's full article about his discussion with Achebe at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe. How does Phillips's epiphany square with your own thoughts about Achebe and Conrad?
3. To learn more about postcolonial writers and critics, visit the Postcolonial Web (http://www.postcolonialweb.org/misc/authors.html) or read Deepika Bahri's "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies" (http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Intro.html).George P. Landlow, "Home Page," The Postcolonial Web, http://www.postcolonialweb.org/; Deepika Bahri, "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies," Dept. of Postcolonial Studies, Emory University, http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Intro.html.

To sum up, when you want to read with an eye toward racial, ethnic, or postcolonial issues, you should consider the following questions:

1. How does this work represent different groups of people? Does it valorize one particular culture at the expense of another? Are characters from particular groups portrayed positively or negatively? Does the work employ stereotypes or broad generalizations?
2. How does this work present political power and/or domination? Are there clear lines drawn between conquerors and conquered people in the work? Does the work seem to argue that these lines are appropriate, or does it challenge the divisions between colonizer and colonized?
3. What is the historical or cultural context of the work? Is the story set during a time of conflict or peace? Is the story set in a location where one culture colonized another? Does the story unfold before the colonial period, during the colonial period, or after the colonial period?

4. Can you discern any particular political agendas at work in the text? That is, does the novel, story, poem, play, or essay seem to make an argument about racial relations, ethnic identity, or political oppression?

The theories we outline in this chapter share many concerns but can be applied in many different ways. To that end, we provided three sample papers in this chapter. Each uses a slightly different lens to investigate a given literary text. Please review all the papers since they will prepare you for the chapter's conclusion, which will synthesize the insights of all three papers.

5.3 Writing about Race, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity: A Process Approach

To review, race, ethnic, and cultural identity theory provides us with a particular lens to use when we read and interpret works of literature. Such reading and interpreting, however, never happens after just a first reading; in fact, all critics reread works multiple times before venturing an interpretation. You can see, then, the connection between reading and writing: as Chapter 1 "Introduction: What Is Literary Theory and Why Should I Care?" indicates, writers create multiple drafts before settling for a finished product. The writing process, in turn, is dependent on the multiple rereadings you have performed to gather evidence for your essay. It's important that you integrate the reading and writing process together. As a model, use the following ten-step plan as you write using race, ethnic, and cultural identity theory:

1. Carefully *read the work* you will analyze.
2. *Formulate a general question* after your initial reading that identifies a problem—a tension—related to a historical or cultural issue.
3. *Reread the work*, paying particular attention to the question you posed. Take notes, which should be focused on your central question. *Write an exploratory journal entry* or *blog post* that allows you to play with ideas.
4. *Construct a working thesis* that makes a claim about the work and accounts for the following:
    a. What does the work mean?
    b. How does the work demonstrate the theme you've identified using a new historical approach?
    c. "So what" is significant about the work? That is, why is it important for you to write about this work? What will readers learn from reading your interpretation? How does the theory you apply illuminate the work's meaning?
5. *Reread the text to gather textual evidence* for support.
6. *Construct an informal outline* that demonstrates how you will support your interpretation.
7. *Write a first draft.*
8. *Receive feedback* from peers and your instructor via *peer review* and *conferencing* with your instructor (if possible).
9. *Revise the paper*, which will include revising your original thesis statement and restructuring your paper to best support the thesis. Note: You probably will revise many times, so it is important to receive feedback at every draft stage if possible.

10. *Edit and proofread* for correctness, clarity, and style.

We recommend that you follow this process for every paper that you write from this textbook. Of course, these steps can be modified to fit your writing process, but the plan does ensure that you will engage in a thorough reading of the text as you work through the writing process, which demands that you allow plenty of time for reading, reflecting, writing, reviewing, and revising.

Peer Reviewing

A central stage in the writing process is the feedback stage, in which you receive revision suggestions from classmates and your instructor. By receiving feedback on your paper, you will be able to make more intelligent revision decisions. Furthermore, by reading and responding to your peers' papers, you become a more astute reader, which will help when you revise your own papers. In Chapter 10 "Appendix A: Peer Review Sheets", you will find peer-review sheets for each chapter.

5.4 Student Writer at Work: Ashley Eckhardt's Postcolonial Paper in Action

In her Introduction to Literature class, Ashley read *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's "An Image of Africa." She was intrigued by Achebe's argument, and wanted to delve deeper into the postcolonial implications of Conrad's novella. As you read Ashley's paper, take note of the different kinds of sources she uses and how she incorporates these sources into her argument. In ethnic and postcolonial critiques, scholars often use both **primary sources**[7] (which include historical documents as well as literary works) and **secondary sources**[8] (texts written by scholars about a particular literary work, time period, or other topic). With this in mind, let's begin reading Ashley's paper.

7. A literary or nonliterary text from the period under study. In literary studies, primary sources include novels, stories, poems, and plays, as well as other historical documents such as letters, essays, sermons, and autobiographies.

8. A text—such as a book or an article—written by a scholar about a particular literary work, historical period, or other academic topic.

Ashley Eckhardt

Professor John Pennington

ENGL 150: Introduction to Literature

April 20, 20–

The Convergence of Races: 19th Century Imperialism and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Europe in the 19th century experienced a rash of imperialistic sentiment as nations competed to gain political and economic control of the African continent while supposedly civilizing the African people. The scientific developments of the time contributed to the concept of white supremacy as social Darwinism grabbed hold of the European population and turned the colonizers into saviors and reformers of inferior and backward barbarians. Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899, explores the effects this mad rush to conquer Africa had on the African natives and the land itself as colonizers enslaved the natives and depleted their natural resources which they so valued. This "Scramble for Africa" caused European society to deteriorate as well, as nations became embittered against one another in their pursuit of more territory and economic success in Africa, resulting in brutality towards one another and the native populations within Africa and the European continent. Conrad portrays how the colonizers' original philanthropic intentions turned to brutality and exploitation through the character of Kurtz, who creates a monopoly on the ivory trade in the Congo and subjugates the native tribes in his region through fear and violence.

Contemporary critics argue that Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* embraces the racist viewpoints of the 19th century through its use of derogatory descriptions of the African natives Marlow encounters in the Congo. The racism that ran rampant in 19th century Europe changed for some after Darwin's publication of his theory of natural selection in 1859. Some scientists and thinkers applied Darwin's ideas to society, in a movement known as social Darwinism, allowing people to justify their racism on the basis that certain races, like certain animals, were genetically designed to be superior to others. To the European mind-set, this meant that "white" Europeans were superior to

all other races, particularly the "yellow" Asians and "dark" Africans (de Gobineau 167–68). Through the use of these misdirected scientific developments, many Europeans regarded the imperialistic activity of their governments as either their natural right as the superior race or as a civilizing mission to save the inferior and backward populations of Asia and Africa. It was this mind-set that led to King Leopold of Belgium's mission to the Congo at the end of the 19th century to "improve the well-being' of the inhabitants of the Congo" (Hawkins 292). Conrad shows the hypocrisy of this mission in Heart of Darkness as much of Marlow's journey through Africa takes place in the Belgian-controlled region surrounding the Congo River. Marlow describes these "civilizing" Europeans as "they wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it" (Conrad 44). To Conrad, these European philanthropists were hiding their true greed and self-righteousness behind the mask of civilization and enlightenment, one of the most disgusting and hypocritical aspects of imperialism, yet Conrad himself had difficulty in detaching himself from the social practices of his time. Joseph Conrad's main purpose in writing his novella *Heart of Darkness* was to relate the atrocities of 19th century, but he unconsciously succumbed to his own inherent Eurocentrism, allowing the stereotypes propagated by social Darwinism and racism to become evident within his work.

Let's take a quick break from Ashley's paper to look more closely at how she's putting these ideas together.

ASHLEY'S PROCESS

1. Note how Ashley combined several ideas into her introductory paragraphs. In her class they discussed colonialism (the "scramble for Africa") and also the way that social Darwinism shaped social thought at the time. Ashley creates a new argument by bringing together different threads that she has not seen combined in the secondary sources she's read.

YOUR PROCESS

1. Does the idea of writing a "surprising" claim sometimes seem daunting? Rather than coming up with a world-changing, completely unique idea for your postcolonial paper, how might you bring together several ideas to create something new?
2. Create a list of different ideas you've discussed in class around the work you hope to write about (ideas like "social Darwinism" or "civilization," as Ashley discusses in her paper). Do you spot connections between these concepts? Feel free to draw arrows between them, group them in a separate note, or otherwise indicate the connections you see.

Now let's turn back to Ashley's paper.

Conrad explores the treatment of Africans by the colonists in *Heart of Darkness* in an attempt to relate the atrocities committed by the European colonizers to the populace in Europe. Conrad was agitated over the brutal treatment of the native populations under European control and determined that the entire 19th-century imperialist system was immoral and needed to be abolished. Conrad saw imperialism as a system that brutally exploits native populations for greed and national pride, and he believed that such systems should not have been allowed to remain a mainstay in the governments of apparently civilized and enlightened countries. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow witnesses this unjust system in action immediately upon stepping onto the African continent as he watches a chain gang coming toward him:

Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.... [T]hey were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea (Conrad 33).

Conrad, like Marlow, was greatly affected by this sight of imperial might and brutality and thus devoted himself to speaking out against the institution. His audience, however, was already imbued with racism against non-European cultures, making his task extremely difficult, as "Conrad's objection to imperialism on the grounds that it disrupted indigenous cultures was unusual in an era that failed to see the worth of those cultures" (Hawkins 294).

The population within Europe itself fully believed in the good intentions of their colonial missions, being equally saturated with the ideas of social Darwinism and the racism that followed from it. They gave their full support to these expeditions, as seen when Marlow's aunt commends him for his effort at "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (Conrad 28). Even Kurtz's original intention, when he first began his expedition in the Congo, was to enlighten the Africans. It was only after he had been within the continent for some time that the temptation of immense wealth and power overcame him and he transformed into the greedy and self-serving despot that Marlow discovered on his own journey through the Congo. Conrad took it upon himself to alert the European populace to the vulgarities of the imperialistic actions

they so admired. Conrad "came to believe that it was his task as a novelist to unmask society, to look below its surface to discern its essential character," and what he "discerned [was] a rapacious colonialism" (Raskin 120). With all the scientific justifications of imperialism, Conrad certainly had an arduous task before him, one that was made even more challenging by the numerous political and economic benefits acquired through this nefarious system.

ASHLEY'S PROCESS

1. Note how Ashley modifies the ideas of writers like Achebe. While Achebe simply calls Conrad "racist," Ashley attempts to navigate a middle ground. She acknowledges the deep racism of Conrad and his society but also recognizes that Conrad at least believed he was writing against imperialism.
2. When Ashley disagrees with the ideas of other scholars, she doesn't dismiss them outright. Instead, she incorporates the ideas she agrees with and respectfully counters those she sees as misguided, overstated, or incomplete. This kind of respectful disagreement is the foundation of most academic discourse.

YOUR PROCESS

1. It can be tempting to simply write arguments that agree with the secondary research you read. After all, the people writing those articles are likely professors, and you are just a student. However, English professors value students who are unafraid to counter the status quo, so long as they do so using good primary and secondary evidence.
2. Have you read any criticism that you feel didn't quite get the novel, story, poem, play, or essay you're writing about right? Perhaps you didn't disagree with the entire essay, but you did disagree with one or two points that it made. Jot down those areas of disagreement.

Behind the façade of a civilizing mission lay the real motivations for European imperialism in the 19th century: political and economic control of these territories. As nationalism grew within the countries themselves, the European nations became increasingly competitive with one another. The acquisition of colonies became a symbol of national pride as well as of superiority. Conrad, despite his opposition to imperialism, remained unconsciously influenced by this sense of nationalism; a concept espoused by Fredric Jameson in the "ideology of the form," in which a contradiction exists between the content of the writer's work and the social conventions of the writer's time (Jameson 1957). It became necessary to be in control of colonies somewhere within the world to be considered among the great nations of Europe, and those that held numerous, and especially large and lucrative territories, reigned supreme. Political leaders of the time stressed the importance of imperialism to ensure their nation's prosperity. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu shares these sentiments when he states that "a people which colonizes is a people which projects into the future the foundations of its grandeur and eventual supremacy" (178).

Marlow witnessed the extent these colonizers were willing to go to achieve political and economic dominance in Europe, as they subjected their colonies to devastation and virtual rape of resources in their attempt to become the wealthiest and most powerful nation in Europe. Kurtz reflects the selfish desires for wealth and power that was common to many of the imperialists; "he desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. 'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say" (Conrad 110). The colonizers not only stole the natural resources of the territories they conquered, but imposed their own culture and industry onto the existing populations. The chain gang that Marlow witnessed at the outset of his experiences in the Congo portrays how the legal system was used within Africa, condemning Africans, who were completely innocent within their own cultures, but were now branded as criminals by the European invaders. The attempt to build a railroad along the Congo to aid the Europeans in their desire to move goods from within the interior of Africa to the coast was not for the benefit of the African natives either, but rather to expedite the colonizers' shipments so they could become more prosperous more quickly. Greed and self-righteousness led to the devastating destruction of the virgin forests and rivers of Africa, which, in Conrad's opinion, was pointless and shameful; the construction of the railroad that Marlow observes is described as "objectless blasting," and seemed to be devoid of any purpose or progress whatsoever (Conrad 33).

The destruction of the native populations in Africa and Asia led to the similar destruction of European society as it became inundated with the immoral and selfish actions of the colonizers, justifying them through social Darwinism. Conrad wished to prevent this decline by preaching against the evils of imperialism through works like Heart of Darkness. He foresaw the negative effects imperialist actions would have, and were already beginning to have, on Europe itself. "The European conquerors sundered the tribes to make Africans serve alien material aims. In doing so, Conrad indicates, imperialism destroyed the cultural integrity not only of Africa but of Europe as well" (Hawkins 296). The competition between the nations often led to bitter resentment and even warfare. The Boer War in South Africa, for example, occurred between the Dutch and the British over territory and diamonds. The British were jealous that the Dutch occupied the land with the majority of the diamond deposits and were thus driven by greed and national pride to acquire portions of that land for themselves. Similar situations occurred between other European nations throughout Africa and Asia in the 19th century, although not all came to the extreme consequence of war.

Imperialism was also destroying individual Europeans psychologically, as many people blamed the brutal actions of the colonizers on their barbaric environment. To many Europeans, including Conrad himself, Africa epitomized the idea of savagery; consequently *Heart of Darkness* expresses "the fear of the Victorian English that if whites were to be isolated from their secure environment and its refinement, they would degenerate into abominable savagery and become beasts of unspeakable lust" (Okafor 19). Kurtz appears to be the victim of his environment as this originally moral and upright citizen succumbs to the animalistic nature of Africa, turning to a life of violence, greed, and gratification. Even Marlow feels his surroundings are changing him as he recollects the European doctor's desire to witness the mental changes of individuals during their sojourn in Africa and he determines that he is suddenly "becoming scientifically interesting" after being in the Congo for only a few weeks (Conrad 40). This portrayal of Africa as savage and subversive led many contemporary critics of *Heart of Darkness* to consider it racist and a reflection of Conrad's Eurocentrism.

ASHLEY'S PROCESS

1. As she read various secondary sources, Ashley noticed that most postcolonial criticism focused on the experience of the colonized. Ashley wanted to expand these ideas and to think about the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonizers. You can see those ideas developing here, as Ashley extends typical critiques of colonialism to discuss the novel's meaning for its European readers.

Conrad, despite his lofty ideal of persuading the European population to terminate their imperialistic activities, was unconsciously a product of the very system he was preaching against. Jameson claims that a "host of distinct generic messages" can be detected in a text, "some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory." As a result, *Heart of Darkness* suffers from Conrad's rejection of imperialism and yet his inability to fully eradicate his own personal racial biases (Jameson 1958). Many of his descriptions of Africa and its population were negative or derogatory, hindering the effect it had on his European audience. Africa is portrayed "as a land of savages who do not have any worthwhile culture or civilization," propagating this stereotype to an audience that fully accepts this perception of the continent and its people (Okafor 20). To this audience, it is Africa itself, in its wild and savage ways, that corrupts the white Europeans and makes them commit the atrocious acts that they did; inevitably they turn Conrad's message on its head, the Europeans only became brutal and selfish once they were within Africa and under the "heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw [one] to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (Conrad 106–07). As a result, Conrad's novella encouraged many of the stereotypes that propagated the imperialist movement within Europe in the 19th century. One particular example is the comparison between Kurtz's Intended and his African lover. Kurtz's Intended represents the chaste, moral, and flawless character that self-defined Europe at the time; "her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love" (Conrad 120). Kurtz's African lover, however, was "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her" (Conrad 99). Both women symbolize the stereotypes of races in the 19th century; the white race was considered perfect in morals while the "dark" races where considered animalistic and wild, with a sense of danger about them. Conrad was unable to avoid these stereotypes within his writing, flawing his ability to portray the evils of imperialism, as he was unable to free himself from the racism that fueled it.

ASHLEY'S PROCESS

1. In the following section, note how Ashley weaves extratextual primary sources (Conrad's letter to his cousin) and secondary sources (Parry's book) into her argument.

Conrad also remained ambivalent about imperialism itself throughout his life, further detracting from his ability to persuade European society of its evils. He appeared to laud British imperialism, as he once wrote to his cousin about the Boer War, "that they—the Boers—are struggling in good faith for their independence cannot be doubted; but it is also a fact that they have no idea of liberty, which can only be found under the English flag all over the world" (Hawkins 293). This uncertainty about his own views regarding imperialism is found within Marlow as well. He is clearly agitated over Kurtz's conduct in the Congo, but still remains faithful to him and protects his reputation. Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended about his last words and his actions while in Africa; as a result, his failing to recognise the import of the real lie when he protects Kurtz's reputation in Europe with evasions and by deliberate deception abets the exalted fantasies of the Intended, is the fiction's means of showing up Marlow's capacity for self-delusion and the strength of a commitment to Europeanism which blinds him to the act as one that is a betrayal of his principles. (Parry 36)

Marlow, like Conrad, cannot completely eradicate his Eurocentrism, weakening his argument against the institution of imperialism within Europe in the 19th century.

Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* during the high point in European imperialism of the 19th century. His purpose in writing the novella was to speak out against the system of imperialism that he felt was corrupting both the colonized populations as well as Europe itself. Conrad lived in a period of rampant racism, justified by social Darwinism, which supported the "civilizing" expeditions to Africa and Asia, and later the brutal exploitation of the native people of those regions. The political and economic benefits that resulted from imperialistic endeavors also contributed to the popular support that surrounded the vicious system. As a result, Conrad's attempt to persuade the European people of the detriments of imperialism was hampered by his unconscious Eurocentrism, as seen in his savage descriptions of Africa and its people in relation to the purity of the Europeans. Despite this setback, however, Conrad's novella did much to enlighten his European audience to the true nature of imperialism and "inspired the reformers who eventually ended [King] Leopold's rule" (Hawkins 293). *Heart of Darkness* is still important one hundred years after it was written to portray the atrocities of 19th century imperialism to a contemporary audience.

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Ultimately, Ashley's paper extends the insights of postcolonial critique, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the novella's attitudes toward race while, for the most part, agreeing with postcolonial critics like Achebe that the text displays a deeply problematic racism. What's more, Ashley ties these postcolonial ideas to the

historical subtext of social Darwinism, which adds a new dimension to her postcolonial analysis.

5.5 Student Writer at Work: Stefanie Jochman's African American Studies Paper in Action

In her Introduction to African American Literature class, Stefanie read Charles Chesnutt's late nineteenth-century novel *The Marrow of Tradition*. Chesnutt was an African American writer born to free black parents during slavery. His writing focused on the aftermath of slavery at the turn of the twentieth century. *The Marrow of Tradition* fictionalized and commented on the 1898 race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina. The story explores the lives of both white and black characters, and Stefanie was interested in the ways these communities are represented in conflict and cooperation around the character of Dodie Cartaret, the infant son of a prominent white family in the novel's fictional town, who must be saved by Dr. Miller, a young black man.

YOUR PROCESS

1. As we've suggested throughout this text, these process papers will make more sense if you are familiar with the literary work under discussion. For this section, you should (ideally) read Charles Chesnutt's 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition*, which is available for free from the University of North Carolina's *Documenting the American South* project. A summary of the novel can be found at http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnuttmarrow/summary.html and the full text at http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnuttmarrow/chesmarrow.html.

Here is Stefanie's proposal. You can see that she's not yet developed a detailed claim about Dodie but is working with complex ideas that will lead her to a rich, debatable, and engaging claim later in her writing process.

Stefanie Jochman

Paper Proposal #2

EN309

Dr. Crowley

October 1, 20–

Paper Proposal #2

1. I am working on Chesnutt's use of Dodie Carteret as a symbolic character because I want to show how Dodie affects major points of the novel, especially those involving racial conflict and its possible resolutions, in order to prove that Dodie represents the opportunity for racial equality in America.
2. Evidence that will help to solve my "problem."

   The Carterets' love for Dodie instigates many instances of racial conflict.

   - Dr. Miller faces Maj. Carteret's bigotry when he comes to Dodie's aid (92).
   - When Dodie almost falls out of the window, Olivia blames Janet. "Twice within a few weeks her child had been in serious danger, and upon each occasion a member of the Miller family had been involved" (111).
   - Major Carteret assembles the Big Three in part to defend the property he believes Dodie should inherit and also to provide his son with a white-ruled Wellington.

   Dodie is, for the Carteret's, a reassurance of their superiority.
3. When Olivia finally gives birth to a child, she feels as though she is no longer threatened by her more fertile half-sister.

   Dodie's fever serves as an equalizer for Carteret and Dr. Miller.

    - "In the agony of his own predicament...for a moment the veil of race prejudice was rent in twain, and he saw things as they were, in their correct proportions and relations...Miller's refusal to go with him was pure, elemental justice...In Dr. Miller's place, he would have done the same thing" (241).
    - "It was his fault!" (242)

  In order to save Dodie or, in the symbolic case, American society, the Carteret's must appeal to the Millers.

4. The line "There's time enough, but none to spare," contextually refers to the time allowed to save Dodie's life. However, this statement also acts as Chesnutt's message to white Americans that they can help solve the problem of racial violence and inequality if they work with their black brothers and sisters rather than against them; such action must be taken quickly.
5. After examining *The Marrow of Tradition*, I have come to the conclusion that Theodore "Dodie" Carteret serves as a symbol of American society during the Reconstruction in that Dr. Miller's ability to heal him could initiate a peaceful union of black and white society. Not only is Dodie symbolic, his life also mirrors the life of Wellington itself; his birth coincides with the birth of a white supremacist movement, his fever reflects the heat of the riot, and his undetermined fate represents the malleability of Wellington after the race riot with its biggest supremacist enlisting the aid of a black doctor. By giving a white infant so much significance in the story, Chesnutt is inferring that the race "problem" must be solved by whites as well as blacks.

As Stefanie develops her paper in response to her instructor's comments, she hones in on precisely what Dodie symbolizes and how he "affects major points of the novel." Eventually she develops that vague idea into a well-honed introduction with a specific, debatable claim:

At first glance, it may seem that Dodie, an infant, has little to say about racism in American society. However, as a baby, Dodie is symbolic of the potential for a new birth in American racial relations. Once readers pay attention to Dodie's presence in the novel, they can recognize how his health parallels the tumultuous life of Wellington and thus grasp an understanding of how racism affects a community. Furthermore, by observing Dodie's relationship to characters like his mulatto cousin or situations like his expectoration of an old rattle, readers reveal Chesnutt's

underlying themes of racial identity and his suggestions for how societal change can be made.

Keeping that claim in mind, let's look at Stefanie's entire paper:

Stefanie Jochman

Professor Karlyn Crowley

EN309A

November 5, 20–

Dodie Carteret and *The Marrow of Tradition*: "The Burden of the Nation" On An Infant's Shoulders

During the time of the American Reconstruction, many whites believed that racial inequality was solely a "Negro problem." However, in his collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois argues that "the burden belongs to the nation," meaning that blacks and whites are both responsible for creating a more equal society. In *The Marrow of Tradition* author Chesnutt echoes DuBois's message of interracial cooperation with the story arch surrounding Theodore "Dodie" Carteret, the infant son of the novel's primary white characters, Major Phillip and Mrs. Olivia Carteret. While many critics have focused on the importance of the novel's adult characters, they have neglected the importance of baby Dodie Carteret. At first glance, it may seem that Dodie, an infant, has little to say about racism in American society. However, as a baby, Dodie is symbolic of the potential for a new birth in American racial relations. Once readers pay attention to Dodie's presence in the novel, they can recognize how his health parallels the tumultuous life of Wellington and thus grasp an understanding of how racism affects a community. Furthermore, by observing Dodie's relationship to characters like his mulatto cousin or situations like his expectoration of an old rattle, readers reveal Chesnutt's underlying themes of racial identity and his suggestions for how societal change can be made. Finally, by accepting the importance of Dodie to *The Marrow of Tradition*, readers also accept their responsibility to promote social change and equality for all races.

Born in the first chapter of the novel and near death in the last, Dodie Carteret lives in tandem with the novel's plot. Dodie's birth sets into motion Major Carteret's plan for white supremacy. That movement causes the fictional Wellington race riot, an event based on an actual riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, that is central to the novel's plot. Dodie also plays a role in the heated confrontations between the Carterets and the Millers, two couples who

represent the white and black races, respectively. Near the conclusion, Dodie develops a fever when Wellington erupts in the flames of racial violence. The events of Dodie's life mirror those occurring in Wellington, and by constructing such parallels between Dodie's life and Wellington's racial climate, Chesnutt magnifies the effects of racism on a community. For example, shortly after Dodie's christening, Major Carteret meets with Captain McBane and General Beaumont to establish the white supremacy campaign. Here, Dodie's birth coincides with the birth of changes in the social structure of Wellington. Major Carteret's family lost their fortune in the Civil War; now that he has a son to receive inheritance and power, Carteret desires to create a world in which African American businesses and causes will not threaten Dodie's chances of wealth and happiness (44). Carteret's scathing articles about African Americans in his newspaper create violence and hatred in a once ideal community.

Dodie not only symbolizes the birth of a new era in Wellington history; his arrival also indicates the death of an old one. Dodie is part of a new generation that has never experienced slavery, and thus he would be unfamiliar with plantation life and its demoralizing attitude towards African Americans. How he and other children react towards the attitudes of the past will help to determine the future of Wellington and American society. Charles Chesnutt uses this aspect of Dodie's character to his advantage. He constructs a symbolic event centering on Dodie in which the baby's reaction to his own near-death experience hints at Chesnutt's desires for the new generation. At Dodie's christening, Polly Ochiltree gives her great-nephew an old rattle. Aunt Polly Ochiltree is one of Chesnutt's characterizations of the "Old South,"–the era of pre-Civil War history immortalized in plantation fiction. She upholds the "Old South" mentality of supporting black inferiority and submission. When Dodie is born she declares "I shall leave my house and land to this child! He is a Carteret—he would never sell them to a negro" yet she inadvertently threatens her bequest by giving Dodie the rattle. Dodie begins gasping for air after he chokes on a piece of Aunt Polly's rattle. He is physically strangled by a figurative piece of the "Old South" (123). When Dodie finally spits out the rattle on his own, Chesnutt is making an important statement. In order to breathe, society—like Dodie—must discharge that which is strangling it.

A further parallel between Dodie and Wellington is created when Dodie contracts croup near the end of the novel. Throughout *The Marrow of Tradition*, Dodie suffers from colds and other common childhood infections; he recuperates from each and continues growing and developing. Similarly, life in Wellington remains relatively quiet as the supremacist movement grows and

develops. Then, when Carteret's campaign gets out of hand and the riot ensues, life in town is disrupted. At the same time Dodie, Carteret's son, contracts the croup. The croup is an inflammation of the bronchi that involves congestion, mucus, and a high fever. Such symptoms are comparative to the intense heat and congested streets of the riot. During the riot, fire silences screams; the streets run red with the blood of blacks and whites; an angry mob tramples citizens; and, when the riot reaches fever-pitch, Dr. Miller's hospital is burned to the ground.

When Dr. Miller encounters the riot, he describes its emotional heat as one in which "friendship, religion, humanity, reason, all shrivel up like dry leaves in a raging furnace" (217). Such a furnace could only reside in Hell, to which Wellington's riotous state bears similarities. In her haste to escape the danger of the hellish riot, Dodie's nurse leaves him near the draught of an open window, so he catches cold and develops the croup (235). Dodie's croup and Wellington's riot share the same root cause: Major Carteret's white supremacist movement, which brought Hell to earth. Chesnutt's narrator observes how even Carteret is surprised by the damage his movement has done. "'Is it serious?'...He had always thought of the croup as a childish ailment, that yielded readily to proper treatment; but the child's evident distress impressed him with sudden fear" (236). The major's amazement, while directed toward his son's illness, also infers that Carteret realizes he can no longer control the riot and fears that he will suffer for his part in it. Indeed, Dodie "burns" with fever over the flames of his father's earthly Hell. Since Dodie is Chesnutt's symbol for future generations of white Americans, his fever warns white readers that, though African Americans are the ones attacked during the Wellington riot, the white race will pay for their sins if racial violence continues.

Chesnutt's decision to construct parallels between Wellington and Dodie, the white child of upper-class parents, is important to the novel's overall message of interracial cooperation. It would be easy for readers to identify the effects of racism and racial oppression upon an African American child; that child is on the receiving end of the oppression. When Chesnutt focuses on a white child amidst an environment of racial oppression and inequality, however, readers recognize the negative effects of supremacy on the oppressors. Furthermore, readers can observe how whites' prejudice towards blacks endangers them and their children. Major Carteret expects Dodie to live a life of ease, free from "Negro domination," because he, as Dr. Price informs Dr. Miller, "has certain principles...certain inflexible rules of conduct by which he regulates his life. One of these...forbids the recognition of the Negro as a social equal" (88).

However, Carteret's efforts to protect Dodie by upholding the "purity and prestige of [his] race" are worthless (89). By showcasing Dodie's swallowing of the rattle, his near-tumble from the window, and his deathly bout with croup, Chesnutt proves the futility of Major Carteret's white supremacist movement. Carteret establishes the campaign in an effort to protect his son and any assets his son would inherit; yet that campaign does nothing to shield his progeny from the clutches of disease or the violence of a town riot.

Continuing with his examination of the effects of white supremacy Chesnutt highlights the invisibility of African Americans as well as their undetermined future by naming the white child, Dodie, while leaving the black child, the Millers' son, to die nameless and unknown to readers. Early in the novel, Chesnutt's narrator makes it a point to describe in detail the naming of Dodie Carteret, saying, "they named the Carteret baby Theodore Felix...Having thus given the child two beautiful names, replete with religious and sentimental significance, they called him—'Dodie'" (50). The sarcastic tone with which Dodie's nickname is introduced suggests not only are the white traditions of naming and nicknaming silly and self-degrading but also that Dodie is, from birth, a spoiled child. However, it is when Dodie is being doted upon—whether being given a new toy, held near the window to see a mockingbird, or cared for by a nanny—that his well-being is threatened. In this way, Chesnutt suggests that a coddled society has the potential to die young.

In contrast to his spoiled cousin, the Millers' son is never given a name by the narrator. He is rarely mentioned other than when he is seen traveling with his mother, and his life has little significance to the narrative until he dies. Even then, he and his mother are lumped among the dead bodies in the streets after the riot. They are nameless, faceless, and lost until Dr. Miller finds them near a lamppost (227). The mob's cruelty towards African American women and children speaks to the dehumanizing nature of racism and its devastating consequences. Furthermore, the namelessness of the Millers' son in comparison to the publicized life of Dodie subtly hints at the invisibility most African Americans suffered during the Reconstruction Era. Here, the neglected society also dies young. By juxtaposing the two children, Chesnutt implies that a happy medium must be met in which both children—and both races—are given equal attention in order for them to survive.

The comparison and contrast of Dodie and his African American cousin can be extended into the relationship between their parents, the Carterets and the Millers. While Dodie's parallel to Wellington is important to the message of *The*

Marrow of Tradition, Dodie serves the novel best as the thread which sews together the Millers' and the Carterets' fates. Initially, Dodie is a source of pride and achievement for the Carterets in their desire to be superior to the Millers. At the beginning of the novel Dodie is as much a welcomed miracle as he is a status symbol, because his birth reestablishes Major Carteret's position as a dominant male in Wellington. Indeed, Major Carteret is able to gain General Beaumont and Captain McBane's attention after the birth of his son, because, as Beaumont remarks, "now that you have a son, major...you'll be all the more interested in doing something to make this town fit to live in" (63). During the Reconstruction Era, a child was a symbol of biological wealth: one's ability to "go forth and multiply." A childless man was left without an heir to his fortune or his family heritage, leaving him in a weakened state compared to fellow businessmen with children to control their future assets. As Chesnutt's narrator informs readers, "One cloud had marred the otherwise perfect serenity of [the Carteret's] happiness. Olivia was childless. To have children to perpetuate the name of which he was so proud, to write it still higher on the roll of honor had been [Major Carteret's] dearest hope" (44–45). To make matters worse in Major Carteret's mind, the African American Miller family has already been blessed with a son and is thus more biologically wealthy than he; a man whom Carteret refuses to acknowledge as a social equal has a greater chance of being remembered and accumulating a fortune. Dodie's birth assures Major Carteret that his name—the family's legacy and position in Wellington society—will not be lost to history. Instead, Dodie will be the heir "to take a place in the world commensurate with the dignity of his ancestors" (62). Carteret is no longer threatened with social inequality amongst his peers. If his plan for white supremacy succeeds, his family will have as much of a chance to succeed as those of the other old "names" and their progeny.

While Dodie pits Major Carteret against Dr. Miller, he is also the answer to Olivia's desires and the cure for her jealousy towards her half-sister, Janet Miller. As the Carteret family's servant Mammy Jane points out "de wust of all, w'iles Mis' 'Livy ain' had no child'en befo', dis yer sister er her'n is got a fine-lookin little yaller boy, w'at favors de fam'ly, so dat ef Mis' 'Livy 'd see de chile anywhere, it 'd mos' break her heart fer ter think 'bout her not havin' no child'en herse'f" (49). Though she does not admit it verbally, Olivia is extremely jealous of Janet's fertility. Since, in her mind, she is superior to Janet and more entitled to her family's heritage–including its physical likeness—Olivia considers Janet's baby to be a trump card: a wealth that Janet, as Olivia's half-sister and the product of a socially taboo relationship, should not receive before Olivia. Aunt Polly poisons Olivia's already poor view of Janet's mother Julia by telling the story of Julia and Mr. Merkel's secret marriage. Thus, Olivia fears

that “her father had...preferred another to her” (202). Since she, like her husband, associates love and legacy with wealth she goes to desperate lengths to protect Dodie’s inheritance, the majority of her father’s estate. While the size of her family is now equal to Janet’s, the Merkel inheritance will ensure Olivia’s son’s social superiority to any of Janet’s children.

At first, Dodie’s life fuels his parents’ greed and prejudice as they struggle to remain superior to the Millers. In the novel’s conclusion, however, Dodie is made to be the olive branch of atonement—a reparation of injustice—and peace for both the families and their races. The atonement for the riot begins when Dodie falls ill with the croup and Carteret reluctantly runs to Miller, a man whose aid he previously refused on the basis of color, for help. Upon arriving, Carteret observes the angry doctor gesturing toward the body of his son, saying “‘dead, his little life snuffed out like a candle, because you and a handful of your friends thought you must override the laws and run this town at any cost...as you have sown so may you reap!” Miller finally speaks for his race and demands that Carteret atone for the deaths he caused by watching Dodie die. Recognizing in Miller the same pain he is feeling for Dodie, Carteret admits “Miller’s refusal to go with him was pure, elemental justice...In Dr. Miller’s place he would have done the same thing.” In fact, the connection is so powerful, that Carteret experiences an “involuntary admiration” for Dr. Miller, and, admitting he was wrong for having turned away Miller’s services, takes the blame for his child’s impending death (241). At this moment, Carteret is changed. By recognizing the pride and love both he and Miller have for their sons, he can no longer fully separate himself from African Americans or believe “The Negroes have themselves to blame...I wash my hands of them” (233). He recognizes his part in the riot, and in shouldering that burden, emphasizes W. E. B. DuBois’s claim that “the hands of none of us are clean” (*The Souls of Black Folk* 72).

When Olivia makes her appeal to the Millers to spare Dodie’s life, she also acknowledges the dirt on her hands while empowering her half-sister Janet. Chesnutt’s narrator acknowledges the way Dodie’s croup has, to paraphrase Polly Ochiltree, turned the world upside-down: “Death, the great leveler...wrought a marvelous transformation on the bearing of the two women. The sad-eyed Janet towered erect, with menacing aspect, like an avenging goddess. The other, whose pride had been her life, stood in the attitude of a trembling suppliant” (125, 244). Olivia, who avoided confronting her half-sister out of fear, pride, loathing, and greed, must finally confront the woman her family wronged in order to save Dodie. Olivia is even willing to reveal her

deepest secret; Janet is her legal sister. While Janet thought that being considered a Merkel was what she had always desired, when she hears Olivia's proclamation, she develops another of her own: "I throw back your father's name...but that you may know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who injured her, you may have your child's life" (246). As if speaking for an entire race thought to be in want or desire of the life of a white citizen, Janet rejects name, estate, reputation, and relation, but, in doing so, affirms her equality with Olivia as a human being, mother, and citizen of Wellington. Furthermore, both Janet and her husband's reactions to the Carterets' pleas suggest that, in times of racial conflict, African Americans must be willing to take a stand, but they must also be willing to work with whites—rather than against them—to obtain equality

The Carterets level themselves with the Millers and, in doing so, take a step toward accepting racial equality, but their responsibility to society is far from over. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Dodie Carteret and the Millers' son represent Wellington's future generations, but at the novel's conclusion Dodie is suffering and his cousin is dead. Thus, the new generation is forcing the old one to reckon with its racial division. Like DuBois's theory concerning racial equality, Dodie's only chance at survival depends on the cooperation of both races, and, as his attending physician Dr. Evans emphasizes, "There's time enough, but none to spare" (246). However, even if Dodie survives, the absence of his cousin forces him, previously the representative for the new white generation, to represent all races, and thus work towards a society of equals. Here, at the last page of the novel, Dodie ceases to be an ailing white child and becomes a symbol for America's ailing society. Chesnutt wrote *The Marrow of Tradition* in order to bring attention to the societal consequences of race riots and oppression. Dr. Evans' last remark is intended to spur readers into action as much as it hastens Dr. Miller. Once readers recognize Dodie's importance to Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* as a symbol of Wellington, racial relations, and the future of American life, they can understand the urgency of "there's time enough but none to spare" and rush to shoulder W. E. B. DuBois' burden of the nation.

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5.6 Student Writer at Work: Hannah Schmitt's Ethnic Studies Paper in Action

Now we'll look at a paper drawing on many of the same themes as Ashley's and Stefanie's paper but discussing a modern American novel about the Native American experience. In her modern American literature survey, Hannah read the novel *Tracks* by Native American writer Louis Erdrich.Louis Erdrich, *Tracks* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). Hannah is particularly interested in the character Pauline, who attempts to erase her Native American identity and assimilate into white culture, particularly through her devotion to the Catholic religion. Hannah's paper investigates many topics common to postcolonial and racial criticism, particularly the idea of mimicry. Hannah skillfully explicates the complex motives behind Pauline's mimicry in the novel. Hannah demonstrates sympathy for Pauline while explaining the damaging social forces that led her to think as she does about her native culture.

YOUR PROCESS

1. As we've suggested throughout this text, these process papers will make more sense if you are familiar with the literary work under discussion. In most sections, we've provided links to public, electronic editions of the texts under discussion. The following paper, however, discusses a modern work that is still under copyright, Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks*. The interpretive moves in the paper should make sense whether you've read the novel or not, but we highly recommend that you buy and read the novel to accompany your work with the sample paper. You can buy *Tracks* at Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060972459/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=ryacorsonlhom-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0060972459).
2. As you read Hannah's paper, keep Ashley's *Heart of Darkness* paper in mind. Jot down your ideas about how the two compare. Keep in mind that while *Heart of Darkness* was written by an author from the imperial culture, *Tracks* was written by a minority writer. How does this difference shape the two arguments written about the works? Can you spot common concerns between the two papers? Where do they diverge?

Hannah Schmitt

Professor John Neary

ENGL 236: U.S. Literature II

3 April 20–

“Kill the Indian ... and Save the Man”

Pauline Puyat and the Fragmenting Force of the U.S. Government in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*

In 1892, Capt. Richard H. Pratt delivered a paper, “The Advantage of Mingling Indians with Whites” at the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction. In this speech, Pratt infamously proposed to “Kill the Indian ... and save the man” (Pratt 261). Pratt’s argument would become the most notorious summary of the mission of government-sanctioned Indian boarding schools, which attempted to forcibly assimilate Native American children into white culture. From the 19th into the early 20th century, the United States actively sought to destroy Native cultures through forced assimilation and, as Pratt requoted in his speech, believed “that the only good Indian was a dead one” (260).

Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* unfolds in the 1910s, in the midst of Pratt’s boarding school culture. The Ojibwe characters in *Tracks* must respond to the United States’ threat to their culture and attempt to sort out their own cultural identities in the midst of profound racial tension. The two narrators of the text, Nanapush and Pauline, deal with the intense racism they encounter in different ways. Nanapush, the fairly stable, reliable narrator, rejects white culture and attempts to preserve Ojibwe culture despite social pressures to abandon it. Pauline takes a different approach. Unlike Nanapush’s voice, Pauline’s narrative structure is erratic, full of wild assumptions and bizarre occurrences. Pauline is at times cruel, manipulative, guilty, masochistic, morose, cunning, illogical, and, above all, highly religious. In light of Pauline’s many failings, readers may be tempted to view Pauline as the unmitigated villain of the story, and dismiss her story as irrelevant. Such a dismissive reading of Pauline overlooks the novel’s historical context, particularly the pervasiveness of discrimination

against Native Americans and the arid cultural climate created by the United States' boarding school programs. If audiences read Pauline without considering these crucial factors, Pauline's character loses its essential historical commentary. While Pauline's flaws are indeed substantial, they are not entirely her fault. Unlike Nanapush, who firmly believes in the value of his Ojibwe roots and rejects the racism of encroaching white culture, Pauline listens to the United States government's stance on Native Americans. She comes to believe that in order to be accepted by the surrounding white society she must indeed kill her inner Indian to save her white identity. Over the course of *Tracks*, then, Pauline attempts to erase her Ojibwe identity through her extreme, conservative Catholicism. Herein lies the significance of Pauline's character. As her quest to assimilate into white society and therefore ease her guilt over her identity continues, Pauline—and, through Pauline, her audience—discovers that she cannot assimilate the way the United States government wants her to. Pauline's connection to her Ojibwe heritage runs so deep that when she attempts to "kill" it she inadvertently fragments her own existence and plunges into a frantic insanity. Through Pauline's experiences, readers learn that the United States' attempt to "kill the Indian ... and save the man" is not only unethical, but impossible.

Pauline's guilt over her racial identity causes her to distance herself from her culture by rejecting its values, specifically reproduction. Even before Pauline enters the convent, she attempts to reject reproduction in favor of death, recognizing that if she procreates, she will continue her Ojibwe line. Unlike Fleur, who celebrates reproduction, Pauline seeks out death and shows no interest in perpetuating her culture. While Fleur and Nanapush embrace their culture and see it as something desirable which ought to be preserved, Pauline only sees her guilt, and has absorbed the criticisms against her society. In Pauline's eyes, her heritage should not be preserved. Whenever Pauline finds herself in a position which traditionally places her in control of preserving life (and, therefore, culture), Pauline attempts to deny or subvert her role. Pauline becomes a midwife for her community, but transforms this life-giving role so she becomes a symbol of death. When Pauline becomes pregnant, she sees her pregnancy as the continuation of an identity from which she distances herself. The other Ojibwe characters in the text celebrate new children as a hope for life in their rapidly shrinking community: they pamper Lulu and celebrate Fleur's pregnancies despite their misgivings about Fleur herself. To Pauline, however, bearing children solidifies her bond to a community she feels ashamed of, and therefore attempts to abort her pregnancy. When Pauline feels Marie move later in her pregnancy, Pauline describes how "the fists of hate took me so hard that I wept" (133). At Marie's birth, Pauline frantically attempts to stop her

labor, afraid that if she gave birth she "would be lonelier ... an outcast ... a human being who could be touched by no other human" (135). Pauline rejects Marie because she continues a cultural identity. As a mother, Pauline would always be tied to her Ojibwe roots because she has helped perpetuate their society.

In order to stem her association with reproduction—and with it, her Ojibwe heritage—Pauline rejects not only procreation but also her own sexuality. After she banishes her sexuality, Pauline attempts to fill the sexual void she has created with voyeurism and manipulation, alternatives which never fully satisfy her repressed sexual longings. Pauline describes her own sexual encounters with Napoleon as unfulfilling, and rejects her own sexual tensions. Instead, Pauline contents herself with watching other couples have sex and manipulating the sexuality of those around her. When Pauline finds herself drawn to Eli, she responds by manipulating him and Sophia (another character Pauline oversexualizes) into having sex. Pauline takes the sexual expression which her culture values and attempts to turn it into something negative, by stigmatizing Sophie and threatening the relationship between Fleur and Eli. Pauline wants to punish the other characters in the novel for their sexual urges.

At the same time, though, Pauline seems to envy other characters' freedom of sexual expression, and attempts to achieve her own sexual satisfaction by living vicariously through them. Even as she exploits Sophie and Eli, "pitiless" and declares that "they were not allowed to stop" (84), Pauline "shrank backwards into their pleasure" (83). When Pauline describes how "Sophie shuddered [and] her eyes rolled to the whites," she also presents readers with the image of Sophie's "skirt floating like a flower" (83). Pauline distorts the sex Eli and Sophie have, but she almost subconsciously slips traditionally beautiful metaphors into her otherwise coarse descriptions. Similarly, when Eli and Fleur make up in the winter, Pauline describes how the ice fishers outside their cabin celebrated their relationship and drew hope from Fleur and Eli (130). After Pauline fails to prevent Fleur's miscarriage, her description of the end of Fleur's pregnancy shows her ambivalence towards child-rearing. Though Pauline rejects sexual activity of her own, she nonetheless attempts to relieve her repressed sexuality, and at times seems envious of the other characters.

By becoming a nun, then, Pauline rejects cultural pressure to reproduce, but at the cost of her already-tortured sexuality. She enters into a way of life which discourages its followers from expressing sexual energy. By joining a

community which forbids sexual congress, Pauline avoids confronting her heritage. Pauline can refuse to perpetuate her heritage without justifying her actions, because the rule of her religious order expressly forbids sexual activity. Rather than creating her desire to refrain from sexual relationships, Pauline's decision to join a religious order justifies for her actions.

Besides allowing her an outlet with which to express her own sexual guilt, Pauline's commitment to a religious order also helps her erase her guilt over her existence. Unlike Nanapush and Fleur, Pauline is genuinely ashamed of her Ojibwe identity. By becoming a nun, Pauline seeks to create anonymity in order for her to dispel her guilt about her heritage, and hopes to craft a new identity for herself where others would define her according to her lifestyle rather than her race. By joining a community where the members share a common dress, abide by common rules, and worship in a common way, Pauline seeks anonymity and, with it, a reprieve from her own self-loathing. Furthermore, the comparative isolation of a religious community provides Pauline with a buffer between herself and the highly racialized world outside the convent. She finds, however, that not even religious life erases her identity enough to make her forget her own racialized existence. Though Nanapush, Margaret, and Fleur treat Pauline "as they would a white" (145), the whites with whom Pauline longs to belong refuse to accept Pauline on the basis of her religious commitment, and they continue to evaluate Pauline in terms of her race. Towards the end of the text, Pauline's convent declares that it will not accept any more Native Americans and, in doing so, clearly reaffirms the racial separation between Pauline and the white nuns at her convent (138). Pauline realizes that actually becoming white is the only way she can release herself from the shame she feels about her own identity. Catholicism, then, offers Pauline the chance to change her own genealogy.

Historically, Catholicism has revered mysticism as a plausible and, for certain people, a natural experience. Rather than reconciling herself with her guilt by learning to appreciate her native culture, Pauline tries to change her race. Pauline cannot erase her own racial identity, but, because of Catholicism's acceptance of mysticism, she is able to reject it by having Jesus declare her "not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). Through her conversations with Jesus (real or imagined), Pauline attempts to actually change her own race by having Christ create a new one. Unfortunately for Pauline, characters cannot typically change their race at will, and Pauline gradually loses touch with the world around her. As Pauline's struggle to create a white identity for herself intensifies, she finds herself edging towards insanity, and begins communing

with statues, insisting on her own magical capabilities, and conversing with visions. Catholicism, though, allows Pauline to have these experiences and even provides theological justification for her actions. In the eyes of mystical Catholicism, Pauline's religious extremism becomes not only possible but perhaps even encouraged. Even though Pauline's extremism psychologically damages her, Catholicism encourages her to continue delving into her mystical experiences. Through her mystical experiences, Pauline is able to conform to the dictates of her society and believes she can create a new, white identity.

Catholicism also allows Pauline to justify her masochism and, in doing so, lends itself to Pauline's self-destruction. Just as her insanity can be understood through the lens of Catholicism as mysticism, Pauline's self-inflicted suffering can be seen as religious asceticism. Like mysticism, asceticism has historically held a prominent place in Catholic history—many saints (particularly from the Middle Ages) practiced "mortification of the flesh." Just as Pauline's desire to lose her identity and her visions are encouraged under some forms of Catholicism, Pauline's masochism gains religious significance when she filters it through a religious lens. Pauline's willingness to hurt herself reaches extremes in the novel, and she engages in clearly self-destructive behavior in an attempt to alleviate her guilt. Over the course of the text, Pauline scrubs her hands raw, takes to wearing potato sack drawers, and starves herself. Pauline regulates her most basic bodily functions—such as urination—in order to alleviate her guilty conscience. Though even the Mother Superior of her convent discourages her practices, the religious heritage of Catholicism makes Pauline's practices more acceptable, and she is seen as overly devout rather than as psychologically unwell. Pauline releases her guilt by hurting herself while lessening her stigma.

However, Pauline also distorts the message of Catholicism. As Pauline attempts to scour her Ojibwe heritage from her life, she alters the traditional images of Catholicism to support her outlandish attempts to achieve racial superiority. As she delves deeper into Catholicism, she recognizes the hypocrisy of the racism she encounters and manipulates traditional Catholic prayers and images to express how angry and ostracized she feels. Pauline cannibalizes her religion in a desperate bid to make Catholicism once again relate to her. When she and Fleur encounter Margaret after Fleur's miscarriage, Pauline imagines Margaret scolding her: "she jabbered at me, finding the blood, the cold ashes, how it was my fault, my fault, and my most grievous fault" (163). Pauline takes the *mea culpa* line from the Confiteor, a part of the traditional Catholic Mass, and changes it from a means of expressing her guilt to releasing herself from it. By invoking these words as Margaret accuses her instead of recording the actual

charge Margaret brings against her, Pauline paradoxically attempts to step-side her guilt by drawing on overtly religious language to establish her own spiritual superiority. Margaret threatens Pauline because Margaret, like Nanapush, becomes a whole, healthy individual by embracing her culture. She reminds Pauline that Pauline psychologically unstable. To counteract her misgivings about herself, Pauline refuses to assign weight to Margaret's accusations. Even the verbs Pauline uses seem to doubt the legitimacy of Margaret's concerns: she depicts Margaret as "jabbering" at her instead of scolding her. The religious imagery Pauline uses creates a moral high ground—just as becoming a nun creates distance between Pauline and the other Ojibwe characters, Pauline relies on her religious knowledge to establish superiority over Margaret.

Pauline's guilt, though, also makes her angry at the religion to which she belongs, and her prayers gradually develop a sardonic edge as she realizes she cannot become whole. As Fleur desperately attempts to save her child, Pauline prays to the "God who bound my wrists, who tripped me, [the] Lord and Author of all Lies" (158). Later on, as she lies ill at the convent, she prays, "Dark from dark ... True God from True" (195). In both these instances, Pauline takes traditional religious imagery and reverses it, applying typically negative imagery to the Catholic God. In the first instance, God takes on a traditional title for Satan and becomes the "Author of all Lies." The Catholic God has failed to assuage Pauline's guilt and has created a world in which she cannot achieve the unracialized (read: white) existence she longs for. Pauline has attempted to erase her heritage with her faith, and realizes that even her religious vocation cannot free her from the racism of the society around her. The second prayer, which she adapts from the Nicene Creed, changes the Creed's "light from light" to "dark from dark," thereby reversing God's origin story. The God Pauline trusted in to provide her with equality betrays her, and she realizes that not even her deity seems able to forget her race. Pauline's religious commitment changes then, and she declares that "Christ was weak" (192). Her comparatively devout tone at the beginning of her religious quest gives way to her distrust in the promises of her religion, and she eventually rejects the religious belief in the superiority of Christ entirely.

Pauline, though, is not the only character to draw from her spirituality in order to deal with her racial identity. Nanapush recognizes Pauline's struggle because he has worked through similar issues. He, however, ultimately accepted his Ojibwe heritage, and can therefore develop into a healthy, fulfilled adult. As an older man, Nanapush has already dealt with his own misgivings about his identity, and has developed his own philosophy for dealing with encroaching

white society. At the beginning of the novel, Nanapush recounts witnessing the deaths of his relatives and friends. By this time, he is familiar with white society—in his youth, he served as a guide for buffalo hunters (139). When the novel begins, then, Nanapush is acutely aware of the racism of surrounding white society. Unlike Pauline, though, Nanapush has decided that the best way to confront discrimination is not to assimilate and attempt to erase his cultural heritage but rather to hold true to his cultural heritage and reject the pressures of white society. Nanapush does not ignore racism; rather, he acknowledges white society and then manipulates it to his advantage. Like a traditional trickster, Nanapush slyly waits until he has an opportunity to exploit the system which oppresses him, then strikes. Because of his own background Nanapush recognizes Pauline's struggle to deal with her guilt and, in his own trickster way, attempts to convince her that she cannot find fulfillment by rejecting bits of herself. Nanapush is observant, and takes it upon himself to point out Pauline's actions to others. When Pauline begins wearing her shoes on the wrong feet, Nanapush declares "God is turning that woman into a duck," and draws everyone's attention to Pauline's feet (146). When Pauline takes to wearing potato sack drawers and bars herself from urinating during the day, Nanapush cleverly pokes fun at her practices by plying her with liquids and then telling a story about water (149). By constantly drawing attention to Pauline's practices, Nanapush turns her devotional practices into a joke, and attempts to show Pauline how ridiculous her actions are. However, Pauline cannot or will not accept the alternative Nanapush offers to her own guilt, because she is unwilling or unable to recognize the goodness of her own culture.

Though, Pauline wants to "kill the Indian ... and save the man," she discovers that this approach to dealing with her identity not only fails to assuage her guilt but also drives her insane. Over the course of *Tracks*, readers watch Pauline unsuccessfully try to separate herself from her Ojibwe heritage. As Pauline slips into insanity, readers realize that Pauline cannot develop into a healthy individual without first accepting herself.

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5.7 Student Sample Student Paper: Alyce Hockers's "The Slavery Metaphor of *Moby-Dick*"

This final sample paper by Alyce examines the practice of whaling in Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* as a metaphor for and critique of African American slavery in the mid-nineteenth century.Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (1952; University of Virginia Electronic Text Center, 1993), http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Mel2Mob.html. The links that Alyce points out are perhaps less obvious than in other works about slavery, but the surprise of her argument is partly what makes it so successful. Many critics have discussed Melville's construction of race in *Moby-Dick*, and Alyce draws on those critical voices to make her case. By linking ideas of race in the novel with ideas about the whaling industry, however, Alyce connects the central activity of the novel (hunting for whales) to a central social and political issue of the day, slavery.

YOUR PROCESS

1. As we've suggested throughout this text, these process papers will make more sense if you are familiar with the literary work under discussion. For this section, you should (ideally) read Herman Melville's 1852 novel, *Moby-Dick*. *Moby-Dick* is a long novel, however. For an initial reading, you might instead consider Robert A. diCurcio's "Nantucket's Tried-Out *Moby-Dick*," which provides a summary of the novel along with a selection of "core chapters" that will help you understand the broad strokes of the work. Before you get started, read diCurcio's "Note to the First Time Reader" (http://www.melville.org/diCurcio/bib.htm).Robert A. diCurcio, ed., *Nantucket's Tried-Out* Moby-Dick*: Robert A. diCurcio's Companion Reader to Melville's Masterpiece* (Nantucket, MA: Aeternium, 1996), http://www.melville.org/diCurcio/bib.htm.
2. Again, keep the previous three papers in mind as you read this final peer paper. What points of convergence and divergence do you see among the four?

Alyce Hockers

Professor Ryan Cordell

English 235: U.S. Literature 1

April 14, 2011

"The Slavery Metaphor of *Moby-Dick*"

"Who aint a slave? Tell me that ... [H]owever the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way either in a physical or metaphysical point of view" (Melville 23–24). The issue of slavery, although not discussed explicitly in Herman Melville's Moby-Dick, is criticized subtly in a parallel of the industries of whaling and slavery. During the time that *Moby-Dick* was written, whaling and slavery were two of the biggest sources of economy in America, and it is therefore not surprising that the two had some striking commonalities. When readers of *Moby-Dick* in the mid-19th century picked up the novel, they were expecting a high-seas adventure tale about whaling. Instead they were subtly handed an interpretation of slavery, which was an incredibly debated topic, thanks in part to the recent publishing of the Fugitive Slave Laws, which was at the forefront of American minds during the period of the publishing of the novel. It is important for the modern reader to understand the subtle metaphor comparing slavery and whaling; not only does it help us grasp the history of both institutions, but it also helps us gain insight into the fact that Melville could very well have been against white supremacy. It was difficult to discuss views on the institution of slavery at the time period, so Melville may have been using his novel as a subtle message into his insights on the issues of the industry. Throughout the entirety of Melville's novel, the business of whaling is used as an extended metaphor of slavery and the pursuit, capture, and killing of runaway slaves to help readers understand the brutal and unethical nature of the institution of slavery.

The chasing of whales through the vast oceans is analogous to the chase of runaway slaves after they had escaped from their masters. The chase was about dehumanizing the hunted group; in this case: the whales or the slaves.

Although the whale is already non-human, men treated them like they were an object rather than a life form. Both whales and slaves were not only hunted mercilessly, but also all for profit. Whaling was an incredibly profitable enterprise if you survived the journey to bring home the spoils of the hunt. The hunting of slaves, albeit much less dangerous, was also profitable. Wealthy landowners gave extremely large sums of money (at least for the time period) in return for the capture and return of their runaways. Landowners needed their slaves, just as America needed sperm oil, and both enterprises would reward money to whomever could supply them with their means to their desired end. When looking for runaway slaves, wanted posters often gave descriptions of the runaways that included various scars and marks that were on the bodies as a means of identification. Fred Bernard comments that "[i]mportant to the capture of runaways were their various marks, some natural, others inflicted" (396). Slaves were scarred from many things, including various beatings by their masters. One advertisement said this in the description of a runaway slave: "has had the upper lid of his right eye torn, and a scar on his forehead" (Advertisement). The same can be said for whales. Many of the animals escaped after having been marked by whalers, but not entirely captured. "Not a few are captured having the deep scars of these encounters,—furrowed heads, broken teeth, scolloped fins; and in some instances, wrenched and dislocated mouths" (Melville 349). This effectively gave them scars that could be used to identify them, most notably seen when the book is discussing Moby Dick. Captain Ahab repeatedly remembers every scar on the white whale, including his deformed jaw, and uses those to identify the whale to other men during his search.

There are also strong parallels with whaling and slavery in direct regard to color. Other than Moby-Dick himself, who is part white (the implications of which will be discussed in the subsequent paragraph), most whales are entirely black. The narrator of Moby-Dick comments, "blackness was the rule amongst almost all whales" (Melville 139). And Captain Ahab is considered, by most interpreters, to be white, as were most whaling captains of the time. This vision of whites (whaling captains) chasing blacks (whales) immediately conjures up illusions of slavery. With such an obvious parallel, Melville's brashness with his views of slavery, during a time period in which the institution was highly debated, is quite surprising.

There is an obvious and glaring issue with the story of whaling as an extended metaphor for chasing slaves. Throughout this article, we have talked about whites chasing blacks. But in *Moby-Dick*, isn't the Pequod a black ship and Moby

Dick, notably, a white whale? Why is this all turned around? Fred Bernard thinks that it is because Moby Dick serves to represent a black trying to pass as a white, which makes him all the more pursued because of it (392). During the time, whites tried to keep blacks as completely separate from them as possible. Mulattos were frowned upon and tortured even though they were part white. Moby Dick, although often portrayed as white, is actually only partly white. His hump is albino while the rest of his body is black, like the rest of the members of his species. I think, at the very least, that the discrepancy in the metaphor only serves as irony and makes the metaphor even more profound. Everything is the same between whaling and the chasing of slaves. The chase, the torture, the killing, and the aftermath all have strong parallels in both industries. The only difference is that the roles have been reversed. What if it were the blacks (the black ship) chasing the whites (the white whale)? The irony gives more food for thought and attacks the ethics of the institution of slavery. I think that the switching of the colors of the chaser and chasee in *Moby-Dick*, rather than being a reason against the story as a metaphor, actually supports it. The metaphor itself makes you think about slavery, but the switching of the roles makes you evaluate the ethics of it.

Both the whales portrayed in *Moby-Dick* and the slaves of America fought vehemently against whaling and slavery, respectively, although the fight was unfair and seemingly futile. The whales that the *Pequod* would harpoon would drag the boats across the ocean for hours before giving up to capture. In the chapter "Stubb Kills a Whale," the narrator comments that "whole Atlantics and Pacifics seemed passed as they shot on their way, till at length the whale somewhat slackened his flight" (Melville 256). And the vast amount of slaves that did run away from their masters is a testament to their "resistance to servitude." Graham Russel comments of the implications of the wanted poster advertising runaway slaves: "First and foremost, runaway notices are evidence of slave resistance" (Russell xiii-xiv). There were steadfast rules regarding slavery and regarding whaling. The fast-fish, loose-fish rules were similar to the fugitive slave laws. If someone else caught a whale (or slave) that already belonged to someone else, they couldn't claim it for their own (Ellickson 89). But, if no one had laid claim to that particular whale yet, it was fair game for anyone. This is similar to how blacks were plucked from Africa and used as slaves when they hadn't been purchased yet. After a slave had already been purchased, though, another white man could not take the slave as his own. And even if the slave ran away, other whites were obligated to return them to their original master. "The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 mandated that states to which escaped slaves fled were obligated to return them to their masters upon their discovery and subjected persons who helped runaway slaves to criminal

sanctions" ("Fugitive Slave Act"). Examples abound of court cases where slaves were awarded back to their masters after running away. Although whaling cases were usually settled out of court, the ideas were the same. An ironic intersection of the two industries occurred in April of 1851. Escaped slave Thomas Sims was brought to court and awarded back to his master. The judge that handed down the decision just so happened to be Melville's father-in-law (Pisano 12–13). The relation between Melville and slavery at the time gives weight to the novel's interpretation as an epic metaphor.

Slaves and whales were also only known superficially to their chasers during the time period. At the time, whites treated blacks as if they were a different species. They could describe them physically, but they didn't know the true character of the race. The same can be said for the whaler's knowledge of whales. Ishmael goes into great detail describing how whales cannot be accurately described because they can't be taken out of their element without ruining what they really are. "The living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters; and afloat the vast bulk of him is out of sight ... and out of that element it is a thing eternally impossible for mortal man to hoist him bodily into the air, so as to preserve all his mighty swells and undulations" (Melville 239). Africans taken out of Africa and turned into slaves weren't the same beings as they were in their home country. They were out of their element and they had been changed, which is analogous to whales who are removed from their watery homes. Without water to hold them up, they are not the same and cannot be accurately understood or depicted. On the same note of the concept of foreign species, there was also a language barrier in both industries. There is the obvious language barrier between whales and humans, but blacks also spoke their own language, while it may still have been a version of English. We can see this notably when the cook, Fleece, gives his sermon to the whales using the slave dialogue of the time, which is in stark contrast to the tongue of the white man: "Cussed fellow-critters! Kick up de damndest row as ever you can; fill your dam bellies 'till dey bust—and den die!" (Melville 281). The communication barrier between the two allowed for hostility between the groups. Had the whales or the slaves been able to speak the same language as the whalemen or the white man, they may have been on more even playing fields and the group dynamics may have been less like predator and prey.

The ferocious capture and brutal killings of whales portrayed in Moby-Dick parallel the captures and killings of slaves during the 19th century before emancipation. In contrast to the aforementioned chasing being about

dehumanizing the prey, the killing was about domination by the hunter. Although the exact details regarding whales and slaves aren't the same, seeing as they were happening on completely different terrains, the big picture is extremely similar. Just as whales were chained to the sides of boats after capture, so, too, were slaves chained after being apprehended. Moses Roper, a slave, writes in his autobiography that a white man "chained me down in a log-pen with a 40 lb. chain, and made me lie on the damp earth all night" (13). The white man also chained him to another slave and, Roper goes on, "He kept me chained to her during the week, and repeatedly flogged us both while thus chained together, and forced us to keep up with the other slaves, although retarded by the heavy weight of the log-chain" (15). This was either in preparation for death or to be brought back to their masters. Also, as described before, slaves were mercilessly whipped as punishment for anything, an action which sometimes led to death. Whales were continually stabbed with harpoons to capture them and kill them. The abuse continues after the killing of the first whale aboard the Pequod. Stubb orders a piece of the whale to be cut away and cooked for him for dinner. David Cope comments that this "displays a tyrannical streak directly connected to [Stubb's] role on the ship and indirectly to the assumption that, as a white man, he may abuse blacks without repercussion." This is paralleled further as the scene goes on. As Stubb is physically abusing the whale by eating his flesh, he is also verbally abusing Fleece, an African American. He mocks this black cook as he devours the whale, strongly showing a correlation of the abuse by white men of blacks and whales (Melville 264–65).

The aftermath of the killings wraps up the ongoing whaling metaphor of slavery during the 19th century. After killing whales, the whalemen tied them to the boat as a symbol of their accomplishments. They also beheaded them and skinned them. The whale's head was the most valuable piece of the creature's body, so it was often hung by beams from a whaling ship, like the Pequod, not only to harvest the profitable pieces but also as a symbol of the domination of the ship and the men on board. Fred Bernard discusses a reward poster reprinted by William Lloyd Garrison in the *Liberator*, an anti-slavery proponent of the time period, in which a sum of money is offered for the return of a slave, but even more money is offered for the slave's head. "Tying this analogue to Melville is the fact that these slave heads, like those of the sperm whale ... were worth more than the mere bodies of the victims" (398). The head was a symbol of the creature's life force; the part that identified the animal and gave it its essence. The white man taking control of the head was like taking control of the core of the creature, which both industries were aiming to do. In the end, both industries led to near extinction. The hunting of whales led to dwindling

numbers and near extinction of the creatures. The hunting of escaped blacks led to uproar in terms of ethics, which ultimately and eventually led to emancipation: the extinction of slavery.

A discrepancy lies in the economics of both industries. Although both industries involved killings, one industry got their profits from a dead animal, while the other got theirs from live ones. This anomaly, rather than discrediting the validity of the metaphor, actually helps us understand the motivations of white hunters. Whales were more profitable dead than they were alive, but slaves were more profitable alive than they were dead. Indeed, an individual slave was more profitable living as a worker, but had slaves been allowed to get away with escaping from their owners, the industry would have quickly crumbled. Killing a runaway slave, although not initially a great monetary decision, sets an example for other slaves to keep their place.

Herman Melville's Moby-Dick acts as an extended metaphor to parallel the whaling industry with the institution of slavery and the chasing of escaped slaves. We may never know Melville's true views of slavery, but shouldn't we take a hint from the fact that Moby-Dick, analogous to a runaway slave, was the ultimate victor? During the 19th century, Melville's possible views against white supremacy would not have been well received by the masses, so Moby-Dick could have been a front to subtly portray his thoughts on slavery. Although not as racially motivated as some other books of the time, or even other books of Melville's, Moby-Dick has strong racial themes that, although not at first apparent, critique racial inequalities of the time and question the ethics of slavery.

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5.8 Strategies for Starting Your Cultural Identity Paper

This chapter summarizes a range of different ideas about literature that all center on the identity of authors, their characters, and (in part) their readers. In each paper we find a close consideration of the way different groups interact: how they perceive and represent each other, how they talk to and about each other, and how they exert power against each other. Whether discussing the effects of colonialism in nineteenth-century Africa, the perils of assimilation for Native Americans in the early twentieth-century United States, or the economic parallels between slavery and whaling in nineteenth-century America, each paper takes seriously the cultural and political realities that underlie the creation of literature, and each sees literature as a force that can shape those cultural and political realities. When reading literary works, you should be attentive to issues of identity, power, assimilation, and/or prejudice.

If you follow these steps, you'll be well on your way to writing a compelling paper on racial, ethnic, or cultural themes:

1. Consider the racial, ethnic, or cultural background of the author. Do the characters in the work come from a similar background? Does the author come from a colonized or minority population? Conversely, does the author come from an imperial or majority population? Does the work seem intended to address issues particular to the author's background?
2. Consider the history of the work's setting and/or composition. What were the major political realities of the day? Were there major conflicts, settlements, or economic realities that would have shaped the author's or his or her contemporary readers' worldviews? Are the settings in the work familiar to the author's experience, or are they "other" or exotic settings? How might the politics of the day shape the work's themes, images, settings, or characters?
3. Research the reactions of previous critics to the work. Have they noticed particular attitudes toward race, ethnicity, or culture in the text? Do you agree with their assessment, or do you see ideas they have missed? Can you extend, modify, or correct their arguments?
4. Consider the possible readers of the work. How do you think members of the groups represented in the work would feel about the way their race, ethnicity, or culture is represented? If you come from a group depicted in the work you've chosen, how does that depiction make you feel?

In short, you want to ask how the work you are studying represents the identities of the groups it depicts. If you can begin to answer these questions, you'll be well on your way to a cultural analysis of a literary text. Remember that you can write a cultural analysis in many modes: you can celebrate a work's progressive representation of race or you can critique a work's problematic complicity in negative social attitudes. Either way, you can write a compelling argument about race, culture, and ethnicity in literature.

5.9 End-of-Chapter Assessment

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Just as literature reflects history, literature also reflects the cultural assumptions shared by the society in which it was produced. Often works from the Western canon view nonwhite characters in prejudiced ways that justify Western imperialism.
- You can understand a text's racial, ethnic, or cultural messages by paying particular attention to the way that groups of people are described, particularly in contrast to other groups.
- When writing about race, ethnicity, and colonialism, utilize both primary and secondary sources to fully engage with the text's historical context. Using a mix of primary and secondary sources will be key to writing through the lens of New Historicism, a literary theory that we explore in Chapter 7 "Writing about History and Culture from a New Historical Perspective".
- When writing about literature, you can modify, extend, dispute, or challenge the opinions of other scholars. By demonstrating how your ideas differ from theirs, you demonstrate your maturity as a thinker and writer.

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Freewriting exercise. Choose a work you've read that includes characters from distinct racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. Next, draw a line down the center of a sheet of blank paper. On each side of the paper, compile a list of words that could be used to describe the text's depiction of characters from a particular group in the novel. Don't worry about whether you like or agree with those descriptions—your goal right now is to understand how the text depicts each group. Next, use the second side of the paper to compile words that describe the text's approach to another group. After creating these lists, compare them. Do you notice any interesting convergences, divergences, or tensions between the two lists? Now you're ready to start researching further.
2. As you research secondary sources for your paper, keep a list of all the ideas in the articles you read that you *disagree with*. Remember that you needn't disagree with the entire article. You may decide that the author misreads a particular quote, takes part of her argument too far, or draws a wrong conclusion from particular secondary sources. As you compile this list, think about how you might incorporate your disagreement into your argument—where can you insert your opinion into the scholarly conversations you are reading?

INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENT: CLASS EXERCISES

1. The *Heart of Darkness* paper offers a solid analysis of the text's relationship to colonialism, but the argument is not particularly surprising. In some ways the paper simply brings together a range of critics and amplifies their arguments about the novella. In your class, distribute photocopies of the paper (or, if you meet in a computer lab, e-mail the file) to the class. Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Ask each group to develop three recommendations that would help make the paper's argument more surprising. You might ask them the following questions: What small aspects of this argument might the author further develop? Were there any claims or reasons that surprised you? If so, how might those be expanded and perhaps incorporated into the paper's introduction?
2. Schedule a visit to the computer lab with your students. Have your students visit a digital project focused on racial, ethnic, or postcolonial issues. You might consider Adeline Koh's *Digitizing "Chinese Englishmen"* (http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org), Angel David Nieves's *Soweto '76* (http://www.soweto76archive.org), or the University of Richmond's *Visualizing Emancipation* project (http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation), depending on your course topic.Adeline Koh, "Digitizing 'Chinese Englishmen': Representations of Race and Empire in the Nineteenth Century," http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org; Angel David Nieves, "Soweto '76," http://www.soweto76archive.org; "Visualizing Emancipation," National Endowment for the Humanities and University of Richmond, http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation. Give students twenty minutes to explore the resource, letting them know that you will expect each group to "report out" at the end of their time. By the end of twenty minutes, each group should have developed (a) at least one new claim about the literary work or time period you are studying and (b) at least two research questions prompted by the project they explored. If time allows after all groups report out, you might choose one of the proposed research questions and begin exploring its answer(s) as a class.

INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENT: CLASS PEER REVIEW

1. Have students conduct peer review on one of the sample papers using the organizational peer-review guide found in Chapter 10 "Appendix A: Peer Review Sheets", Section 10.4 "Chapter 5: Race and Ethnicity":

    a. Place students in groups of three to four and have them reread the paper for peer review and fill out the guide sheet.
    b. Have students discuss their feedback responses to the sample paper.
    c. Have students list the major feedback they discussed.
    d. Put the major issues on the blackboard or whiteboard.
    e. Discuss these responses. Make certain that you let students know that any paper can be improved.

2. Plan to have your students conduct peer review on the drafts of their essays that they are writing in your class. Use the peer-review guide from Chapter 10 "Appendix A: Peer Review Sheets", Section 10.4 "Chapter 5: Race and Ethnicity" and have them work in groups of three and do the following:

    a. Bring two hard copies of their essay so that each member can read the paper, OR work in a computer lab where students can share their papers online. You may want to use the educational software that your campus supports—for example, Blackboard or Moodle—or you can have students use Google Drive to set up their peer-review groups.
    b. Have two students focus on the first paper in the group. While these students are reading, have the other student read the other two student papers.
    c. The two students should quickly fill out the peer-review sheet and then have a brief conversation about the strengths of the paper and ways the paper could be improved.
    d. Move to the next student and follow the same process. Depending on the length of your class, you may have to reduce the peer-review groups to two students.
    e. If time permits, ask the students to provide general comments—or ask questions—about the specific papers or the assignment overall.

f. You may want to use peer review for each paper in your class.

5.10 Suggestions for Further Reading

Sources on African American and Ethnic Criticism

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