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## Analysis of George Wilson and Myrtle Wilson in *The Great Gatsby*: A Multi Theoretical Assessment

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### Abstract:

*The Great Gatsby* is a novel by American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. The researcher will discuss the formalist and postcolonial reading in this novel through two characters George Wilson and Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle is George Wilson's wife and Tom's mistress and not beautiful, lower class and attracted to dominant men. George is Myrtle's husband, mechanic, working class, poor, faithful and God-fearing. The researcher will do an intensive reading of both the characters and analyze their positions and their existence in the novel. Researcher will focus on George Wilson and Myrtle Wilson character through applying multi theoretical assessment on *The Great Gatsby*. According to postcolonial that will show readers how these two characters used to treated as (others) the main theme of postcolonial and according to formalist how light is an image of hope but this hope will never reached and the desire will never granted.

**Keywords:** formalism, post colonialism, alienation and working class.

### Introduction

*The Great Gatsby* is a tragic love story, a mystery, and a social commentary on American life. Although it was not a profitable success for Fitzgerald, this novel has become an acclaimed masterpiece, read and taught throughout the world. It presents the extravagant lifestyles of four wealthy characters as observed by their close friend and the narrator, Nick Carraway. Like Fitzgerald, Nick is from Minnesota, attended an Ivy League university, during World War I served in the U.S. Army, moved to New York after the war, and questions—even while participating in—high society.

Nick left the Midwest to work in the bond business in the summer of 1922, Nick settle down in West Egg, Long Island, among the *nouveau* rich as epitomized by his next-door neighbour Jay Gatsby. A mysterious man of thirty, Gatsby is the subject of endless fascination to the guests at his lavish all-night parties. He is rumoured to be a hero of the Great War. Others say he served as a German spy. However, Gatsby claims to have attended Oxford University, but the evidence is doubtful. Nick comes to know more about Gatsby, but every detail about him seems questionable, except his love for the charming Daisy Buchanan.

Jay Gatsby's depraved parties are thrown with one goal: to attract Daisy, who lives across the bay in the more fashionable East Egg. From the lawn of his extensive mansion,

Gatsby can see the green light glowing on her dock, which becomes a symbol in the novel of an unreachable treasure.

Daisy is a married and a mother; yet, Gatsby still loves her as his "golden girl." They first met when she was a young lady from rich family and he was a working-class military officer. Daisy promised to wait for his return from the war. Instead, she married Tom Buchanan, a wealthy classmate of Nick's. Gatsby, then, obtained a great fortune and set out to win her back again.

A profound indictment of class privilege in the *Jazz Age* and beyond, *The Great Gatsby* explores the conflict between politeness and self-indulgence. In the conclusion, the characters collide, leaving human wreckage in their wake.

### **Post colonialism**

Postcolonial theory describes literature produced in countries that were once colonies of other European countries and it is based on concepts of resistance and otherness. Postcolonial theorists used to write in English language and their main theme was focus on struggle independence, emigration, national identity and childhood. Postcolonial literature comes from Britain's former colonies like Africa and India. Post-colonial theory convey to us through literature that how colonizing culture distorts the reality and the experience of the colonized countries and is used to call the colonized others, savages, and evil. Postcolonialism presses the colonized to internalize the colonizer values, but the colonized attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past. Post-colonial literature comes from former British colonies in African and India. These writers focus on common themes such as the struggle for independence, emigration, allegiance, national identity and childhood.

The major post-colonial works are: Edward W. Said "Orientalism", Homi K. Bhabha "The Commitment of Theory" and Gayatri C. Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

As Lois Tyson writes in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*:

In fact, because postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonized peoples as any Population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population, You may see postcolonial critics draw examples from the literary works of African Americans as well as from, for example, the literature of aboriginal Australians or the formerly colonized population of India. However, the tendency of postcolonial criticism to focus on global issues, on comparisons and contrasts among various peoples, means that it is up to the individual members of specific populations to develop their own body of criticism on the history, traditions, and interpretation of their own literature. (416)

That how colonized peoples has been subjected to political domination of another population and shows the global issues or comparisons among various peoples that how individuals can use literature to tell others about the reality of history and their own culture.

By the beginning of twentieth century, England's social, political, economic, and ideological domination of its many colonies began to disappear which known as decolonization. The

ideology that used by colonizers is to make colonized as inferior to them.

Charles E. Bresseler writes in his *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*:

Such beliefs directly affected the ways that the colonizers treated the colonized. Using its political and economic muscles, Great Britain; the chief imperialist power of the nineteenth century, domination her colonies, making them produced and then give them their countries raw materials in exchange for what material goods the colonized desired or were made to believe the desired by the colonizers. Forced labour of the colonized became the rule of the day, and thus the institution of slavery was commercialized often the colonizers justified their cruel treatment of the colonized by invoking European religious belief. (236)

The major work in postcolonial theory is *Orientalism* by Edward Said as Peter Parry writes in his book *Beginning theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, “Said identifies a European cultural tradition of ‘Orientalism’ which is a particular and long- standing way of identifying the East as ‘Others’ and inferior to the West. The Orient, he says features in the Western mind as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (186).

### **Postcolonial reading of The Great Gatsby**

Critical theory such as Marxism, feminism, lesbian/gay/queer theory, and African American criticism has taught us, no ideology separate from the psychology it produces. Ideology cannot exist without the psychology appropriate to it, the more clearly intimate connection between ideology and psychology demonstrated in postcolonial criticism. For one of postcolonial theory’s most conclusive goals is to combat colonialist ideology by understanding the ways in which it operates to form the identity—the psychology—of both the colonizer and the colonized.

In the novel, the character of Tom Buchanan is ‘othered’ by the people,.As Lois Tyson writes in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*:

The connection between classism and colonialist psychology is especially evident in the nature of Tom’s womanizing. He doesn’t pick on women from his own cultural milieu. He seduces only working-class women: for example, “one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel” (82; ch. 4), where Tom and Daisy stayed upon returning from their honeymoon; Myrtle Wilson; and the “common but pretty” (112; ch. 6) young woman Tom tries to pick up at Gatsby’s party. (442)

The reason Tom is attracted to these women is their powerlessness, which raises his own power. He can do what he wants with them. He openly lies to Myrtle. He even breaks her nose and gets away with it. The reason he breaks Myrtle’s nose is because she dared to say Daisy’s name and believe that she is as good as Daisy. This suggests that Tom sees working-class women as “bad girls,” as sexual objects and nothing more. This enables him to place these women in a separate category ranging from “good girls” like his wife and Jordan Baker to other like his paramours. Tom considers his mistresses social inferiors, who do not deserve the respect reserved for upper-class women. In other words, Tom’s classism and sexism are

merged, and his womanizing is a form of classist ‘othering’. According to Tom’s privileged cultural milieu, working-class women are cultural outsiders. Myrtle behaves like a colonial subject. She seems to have internalized the same colonialist psychology Tom has. But because she is on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, that psychology disempowers her and makes her especially vulnerable to Tom. She considers his social superiority a valuable asset and she will do anything to keep him. Myrtle embodies the role of colonial subject most clearly during the party at the small, three-room apartment Tom keeps for their trysts, where she engages in her own form of mimicry. As Lois Tyson writes in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*:

Mrs. Wilson . . . was now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-colored chiffon. . . . With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. . . . Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment. (443)

Acting as she imagines the very wealthy behave, Myrtle complains about the elevator boy as if he were her servant, “rais[ing] her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. ‘These people! You have to keep after them all the time,’ ” she says (36; ch. 2). Then she “swept into the kitchen, implying that a dozen chefs awaited her orders there” (36; ch. 2). Clearly, Myrtle behaves in such an artificial manner because she believes that her “real self” is not good enough and she feels inferior to Tom and his social set.

There could be no cultural superiority if there were no cultural inferiority to contrast with it. This idea is more internalized by Tom whose behaviors and social status depends on ‘othering’ everyone, he considers “beneath” him and then showing his “superiority.” For example that how he used to take George Wilson wife and behave very badly with him. As in Tyson writes:

George thinks he can resell the car at a profit, which he badly needs, and Tom toys with him repeatedly concerning whether or not he will let George have the vehicle, even offering to sell him Gatsby’s enormous luxury car so that George will have to admit he can’t afford it. Indeed, Tom can’t even buy a puppy from a poor old man without insulting him to show that the man has not fooled Tom about the value of the dog: “Here’s your money,” Tom snaps as he gives the man ten dollars; “[g]o and buy ten more dogs with it” (32; ch. 2). There are many more examples of Tom’s unnecessary and open hostility toward his social inferiors, but the point is that he wouldn’t need to display his social superiority so aggressively if he were secure in it. (443)

## **Formalism**

In the middle of second decade of the twentieth century, two different groups of Russian scholars emerged in Moscow and Petrograd they have changed the tendency of literary theory . According to Moscow Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukarovsky, Peter Bogatyrev, and G.O. Vinokur. And the next in Petrograd and they call them also (OPOYAZ) Victor shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, and Victor Vinogradov. The adherents of both groups disagreed about the

principles of literary interpretation, they were united in their rejection of nineteenth century assumption of textual analysis and especially the work of literature was the expression of the author's worldview and rejection of psychological and biographical criticism as being irrelevant to interpretation. Formalism attempted to show the differences between everyday language and poetic language as mentioned by Dr. Sharad Rajimwale in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*:

“Formalism attempted to explore the difference between the two, considering the primary function of ordinary language as communication a message, or information, by references to the world existing outside of language. Literary language, on the contrary is not viewed as refereeing to external world but draws attention to its own formal features, the interrelationships among the linguistic signs” (159).

The earlier phase of Formalism was dominated by Viktor Shklovsky, whose theorizing, influenced by the Futurists, was lively and iconoclastic. While the Symbolists had viewed poetry as the expression of the Infinite or some unseen reality, Shklovsky adopted a down-to-earth approach, seeking to define the techniques which writers use to produce specific effects. Shklovsky called one of his most attractive concepts ‘defamiliarization’ (ostranenie: ‘making strange’). He argued that we can never retain the freshness of our perceptions of objects; the demands of ‘normal’ existence require that they must become to a great extent ‘automatized’ (a later term). That Wordsworthian innocent vision through which Nature retains ‘the glory and the freshness of a dream’ is not the normal state of human consciousness. It is the special task of art to give us back the awareness of things which have become habitual objects of our everyday awareness. It must be stressed that the Formalists, unlike the Romantic poets, were not so much interested in the perceptions themselves as in the nature of the devices which produce the effect of ‘defamiliarization’. The purpose of a work of art is to change our mode of perception from the automatic and practical to the artistic. In ‘Art as Technique’ (1917), Shklovsky makes this clear,

As written by Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*:

“The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (Lemon and Reis, 1965, p. 12; Shklovsky's emphasis)” (32)

Shklovsky also declared that the structure of a narrative has two aspects: *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot) *fabula* is the raw material of the story and can be considered the writer's working outlines. This outline contains the chronological series of events of the story. The *zyuzhet* the literary devices the writer uses to transform story into plot by using technics as digression, disruptions, and surprises.

## Formalist reading of *The Great Gatsby*

As in Lois Tyson, the author of *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, a paradox is, “a statement that seems self-contradictory but represents the actual way things are” (138). According to formalist analysis, the researcher will uncover why the green light in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is a symbol of a paradox of desire that gives an image of hope for the characters, but this hope will never be reached and the desire never granted. The light at the other side of the water can be as “the light at the end of the tunnel”. This is known as a reference to hope after or during a trial that is being faced. Like this example, the light represents the hope Gatsby has that Daisy would one day return to him. The green light is there to show a picture of hope for Jay Gatsby. We can say that the green is associated with envy, that how Gatsby feels for Tom Buchanan and what in part is the reason why Gatsby’s desires are never fully met. While this light symbolizes hope and desire, it also represents the animosity and distance between the Buchanans and Gatsby. Consequently, we can see how Gatsby is close enough to see the light of Daisy house at the end of dock, but too far away emotionally to say hello without the help of Nick, her cousin. Therefore paradox is showing that he is close, but far. Gatsby is the closest financially and location wise than himself to Daisy. The light gives us a clear image of the desire and longing felt by Gatsby that would never be fulfilled because of jealous anger. The tension of the light affects other aspects of the novel, which in turn gives the book organic unity. Organic unity is defined by Lois Tyson as, “the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole” (Tyson 138). The green light is a unifying element of *The Great Gatsby* and it is one of the most profound symbols in the novel.

The green light symbolizes desire, and also symbolizes the helplessness to have one’s desires fulfilled. Gatsby longs for Daisy, but even when she is standing by his side, their relationship is not what Gatsby imagined it would be. The narrator, Nick Carraway, Daisy’s cousin and Gatsby’s confidant states, “Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Daisy is the light and once Gatsby touch her, once he had fulfilled his purpose of getting Daisy’s again, then light returned to being just a light. Its only green light and nothing more, in Nick’s eyes. Gatsby wished to get Daisy again, but it is not possible because she is married. The relationship was in the past and had to remain there. Therefore, his hope that one day she will return to him it’s not realistic by any means and this could speak to the enchantment of the green light. F. Scott Fitzgerald also writes, “. . . his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where dark fields of the republic rolled under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us” (Fitzgerald 180). Gatsby’s hope is not realistic and the relationship was already behind them. Sometimes we hope for the past in present as Gatsby but this not possible in this life but you can get it in imagination. All the hope in the world could never come to pass. The green light is the paradox of a compass of hope that never direct anyone in the right place to find or obtain their desires, and Gatsby is not an exception.

The green light combines many elements of the text, while it symbolizes desire, it also represents jealousy. Green is related with envy or jealousy, that *The Great Gatsby* has. Gatsby knew Daisy was married and therefore the entire idea of the hopeful green light was rooted in part by jealousy of Tom Buchanan. The hope of Gatsby to get Daisy would not be satisfied because of jealous revenge. Wilson, wife was killed by a car driven by Daisy, Wilson believed Gatsby was the man who have an affair with his wife and the one who drove over her with his car. But, in reality, he did neither of those things and was just protecting Daisy. he is shot by a man in jealous anger near to the light that considered as sample of hope.

The green light unites other themes and elements in the novel to convey the decaying American dream. *The Great Gatsby* was in 1922 and written in 1925. This is important to note, because the text speaks to the time period in an important way. The green light is unclear in the sense that it represents unachievable desires and the hope associated with the American dream. It is the sheer desire that made the American dream succeed, and with desires being impossible, the American dream begins to decay. Jealousy has role in the decay of the American dream as well as in the symbolism of the green light. Green is also the colour of money and the desire for money can compare with greed and jealousy, and both themes are found in the novel. However, if it is compared to and with other aspects of the story we begin to see a better image of the work as a whole. “No, Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (Fitzgerald 2). The book show how the entire work is affected by the ambiguity green light dreams and desires that are never reached because of jealousy and other unifying aspects of the book. The green light in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is a symbol of a paradox of desire that gives an image of hope for the characters, but this hope is never reached and the wish never granted because of greed and jealousy.

### **Conclusion:**

There are many ideologies that others people and one of them post colonialism. Postcolonial it is not only at the time of former colonies, but is a pervasive presence in the whole world and the clear image of that in the characters of *The Great Gatsby* that how they used to behave with lower class, we can say also colonialist psychology and it’s clear in the narrator character Nick Carraway, also classism is an ideology that others people, so the clear connection between classism and colonialist psychology is in the nature of Tom’s womanizing. He is not in relation with any women from his own milieu, he seduced only working- class women. As in *Great Gatsby* is a symbol of paradox of desire, that gives an image of hope for Gatsby but this hope will never come to the end. So the light at the house of Daisy can be compared to “the light at the end of tunnel” the light symbolize hope and desire but this hope will never fulfilled, so Gatsby he wants to live the past in present but it’s unrealistic, therefore you have to live life for moment and forget about pass and do your best for today and tomorrow.

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