

In other words, the colonialist ideology contained in literature is deposited there by writers and absorbed by readers without their necessarily realizing it.

Some questions postcolonial critics ask about literary texts

The questions that follow are offered to summarize postcolonial approaches to literature. Keep in mind that most postcolonial analyses, regardless of the issues on which they focus, will include some attention to whether the text is colonialist, anticolonialist, or some combination of the two, that is, ideologically conflicted.

1. How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? Special attention is often given to those areas where political and cultural oppression overlap, as it does, for example, in the colonizers' control of language, communication, and knowledge in colonized countries.
2. What does the text reveal about the problematics of postcolonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?
3. What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance? For example, what does the text suggest about the ideological, political, social, economic, or psychological forces that promote or inhibit resistance? How does the text suggest that resistance can be achieved and sustained by an individual or a group?
4. What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference—the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity—in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live? *Othering* might be one area of analysis here.
5. How does the text respond to or comment on the characters, topics, or assumptions of a canonized (colonialist) work? Following Helen Tiffin's lead, examine how the postcolonial text reshapes our previous interpretations of a canonical text.
6. Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different post-colonial populations? One might compare, for example, the literatures of native peoples from different countries whose land was invaded by colonizers, the literatures of white settler colonies in different countries, or the literatures of different populations in the African diaspora. Or one might compare literary works from all three of these categories in order to investigate, for example, if the experience of colonization creates some common elements of cultural identity that outweigh differences in race and nationality.

7. How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples? Does the text teach us anything about colonialist or anticolonialist ideology through its illustration of any of the postcolonial concepts we've discussed? (A text does not have to treat the subject of colonization in order to do this.)

Depending on the literary work in question, we might ask one or any combination of these questions. Or we might come up with a useful question not listed here. These are just some starting points to get us thinking productively about literature from a postcolonial perspective. Keep in mind that not all postcolonial critics will interpret the same text in the same way, even if they focus on the same postcolonial concepts. As in every field, even expert practitioners disagree.

Whatever ways we may choose to apply postcolonial criticism, our goal in using this approach is to learn to see some important aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without this theoretical perspective; to appreciate the opportunities and the responsibilities of living in a culturally diverse world; and to understand that culture is not just a fixed collection of artifacts and customs frozen in time but a way of relating to oneself and to the world, a psychological and social frame of reference that necessarily alters in response to cross-cultural encounters, whether those encounters occur in our community or on the pages of a literary text.

The following reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is offered as an example of what a postcolonial interpretation of that novel might yield. You'll notice that my postcolonial reading relies a good deal on psychological analysis and is similar, in some ways, to my discussion of the novel in chapter 3, "Marxist Criticism." In addition, my postcolonial interpretation includes both an analysis of the novel's three minor black characters and its erasure of the African American presence in Jazz Age New York City, an analysis you will also find as part of my African American reading of the novel in chapter 11. This kind of theoretical "overlap" is quite common for a postcolonial interpretation because postcolonial criticism draws on these three theories, among others, in its attempt to analyze all aspects of colonialist and anticolonialist ideologies. In short, my postcolonial interpretation of Fitzgerald's novel focuses on what I will argue is the work's colonialist ideology, an ideology that can subjugate minority populations within a nation's borders as well as colonized populations elsewhere on the globe. Indeed, as I will argue, the novel illustrates some of the ways in which colonialist ideology is also a psychological state—not just a way of thinking but a way of being—that is detrimental to those who oppress others as well as to those who are oppressed.

Although I believe that one of the greatest products of postcolonial criticism is its potential to bring the work of writers from formerly colonized societies, especially the work of marginalized postcolonial writers, to the fore, I hope that my reading of *The Great Gatsby* serves anticolonialist intellectual efforts by illustrating the ways in which colonialist ideology is inherently racist, classist, and sexist and is a fundamental element lurking at the core of American cultural identity. As many postcolonial critics attest, the key concern of postcolonial criticism is resistance to colonialist ideology in all its forms, and we can't resist an ideology until we know where it's hiding.

The colony within: a postcolonial reading of *The Great Gatsby*

As such critical frameworks as Marxism, feminism, lesbian/gay/queer theory, and African American criticism have taught us, no ideology is really separate from the psychology it produces. Ideology cannot exist without the psychology appropriate to it, without the psychology that sustains it. Thus, such ideologies as classism, sexism, heterosexism, and racism are not merely belief systems. They are also ways of relating to oneself and others and, as such, involve complex psychological modes of being.

Perhaps nowhere is the intimate connection between ideology and psychology demonstrated more clearly than in postcolonial criticism. For one of postcolonial theory's most definitive 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. And as a pervasive force in Western civilization, colonialist ideology can be found operating, sometimes invisibly but almost always effectively, even in those cultural practices and productions in which we would not expect to find it, for example in an American novel that doesn't seem concerned with colonialism at all: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). When looked at through a postcolonial lens, Fitzgerald's famous novel about the American Jazz Age is the quintessential text about *othering*, a psychological operation on which colonialist ideology depends and that is its unmistakable hallmark.

As the history of Western civilization has shown repeatedly, in order to subjugate an "alien" people, a nation must convince itself that those people are "different," and "different" must mean inferior to the point of being less than fully human. In postcolonial terminology, the subjugated people must be *othered*. In our own country, for example, the justification for exterminating some Native American nations and assimilating others through compulsory colonialist education was that Native Americans were "savages," literally inhuman. Similarly, the enslavement of Africans and their indoctrination in the colonialist ideology of white superiority was justified by officially defining Africans as only three-fifths

human. As our own national history reveals, then, colonialism doesn't require a colonized population beyond a nation's geographical borders. Colonized populations can exist within the geographical borders of the colonizing nation.

As *The Great Gatsby* illustrates, colonialism exists "within" in another sense of the term as well: it exists within the individual psyche, where it influences our personal identity and our perceptions of others. Specifically, I will argue that Fitzgerald's novel reveals the colonialist ideology hiding at the heart of American culture by revealing the colonialist psychology that lurks at the core of American cultural identity.

As might be expected, colonialist psychology consists of, among other things, those (often unconscious) attitudes and behaviors by which a culturally privileged group others a culturally subordinate group, that is, by which the culturally privileged distance themselves emotionally from populations over whom they want to gain or maintain control. There are many political and economic motives for othering, but the primary psychological motive seems to be the need to feel powerful, in control, and superior. Thus, colonialist psychology finds in the insecure individual fertile ground on which to establish itself. And as we shall see, colonialist psychology is self-perpetuating: it encourages the personal insecurity that facilitates its operations. Because othering is the activity that both fuels and expresses it, colonialist psychology depends heavily on racism and classism, two very successful forms of othering. Of course, sexism often overlaps with racism and, as we shall see below, with classism, thus subjecting women from culturally subordinate groups to complex forms of multiple othering. Indeed, it is the practice of multiple forms of othering that distinguishes colonialist psychology.

In *The Great Gatsby*, colonialist psychology is not confined to the depiction of characters the novel itself discredits, such as Tom Buchanan. Rather, colonialist psychology is a pervasive presence in the narrative as a whole because that psychology is central to the characterization of the narrator, Nick Carraway. In addition, the novel helps us understand colonialist psychology from the viewpoint of the colonial subject, who, remaining a cultural outsider whether or not he achieves financial success, wants only to be accepted by the cultural elite, a position epitomized by the character of Jay Gatsby. Finally, in the character of Tom Buchanan, *The Great Gatsby* reveals the detrimental effects of colonialist psychology even on the culturally privileged who seem to be its beneficiaries.

Nick Carraway strikes many readers, as indeed he wants to strike them, as a very tolerant person. Because, as he says, he is "inclined to reserve all judgments," he "was privy to the secret griefs" (5; ch. 1) of his acquaintances when he was a Yale undergraduate. And so is he still when we meet him in the novel as a man just turning thirty. Almost all the main characters confide in Nick. Daisy tells

him about her marital troubles; Tom talks to him about Myrtle; Gatsby tells him the truth about his past life and his initial relationship with Daisy; and even Myrtle describes to him her excitement at meeting Tom and having an extra-marital affair for the first time. And though Nick functions as the novel's moral center—he's the only character who cares about others, who takes a genuine personal interest in their happiness and their sorrows, and who expresses strong ethical reservations about their obvious selfishness—he is extremely tolerant of the personal choices they make in their private lives. While he feels he must break off his correspondence with a young woman he knew back home before he can date Jordan, he seems perfectly comfortable with the very different lifestyle of the group he has fallen in with on Long Island. Indeed, Nick agrees to arrange Gatsby's reunion with Daisy and to stand guard while the two meet at his cottage during one of Gatsby's parties.

So it seems especially significant that there is one area in which Nick continually makes judgments about others with no apparent consciousness of doing so: in his numerous references to the plethora of minor characters who are in some way foreign, in some way alien, to the privileged cultural group of his day, of which he is a member: white, upper-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, born of families who had prospered in America for several generations. Whenever Nick has cause to mention people from a different culture, he emphasizes their ethnicity as if that were their primary or only feature and thus foregrounds their "alien" quality. For example, the woman he has hired to keep his house and cook his breakfast, whom he sees every day, is referred to six different times and always by such appellations as "my Finn" (88; ch. 5) and "the Finn" (89; ch. 5). Her language consists of "mutter[ing] Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric stove" (8; ch. 1), and even her walk—"the Finnish tread" (89; ch. 5)—is described in a way that foregrounds her ethnic difference.

Similarly, Wolfsheim's secretary is "a lovely Jewess" (178; ch. 9); the witness talking to the police officer at the scene of Myrtle's death is "the Negro" (148; ch. 7); the youngster playing with fireworks in the "valley of ashes" (27; ch. 2) is "a gray, scrawny Italian child" (30; ch. 2); and the people in the funeral procession Nick sees one day on his way to New York City have "the tragic eyes and short upper lips of south-eastern Europe" (73; ch. 4). While Nick's choice of words is certainly effective as colorful description, its relentless focus on the ethnicity of characters outside the dominant culture of Jazz Age America hints at a disquieting dimension of his attitude toward "foreigners," a dimension that becomes clear when he speaks of Meyer Wolfsheim.

Nick introduces Wolfsheim to us as a "small flat-nosed Jew" (75; ch. 4), and we are told very little else about his appearance except for his nose. But his nose is mentioned so frequently and in such descriptive detail that Wolfsheim is reduced

to the single physical feature that, as the statement just cited indicates, Nick finds the most unattractive and associates the most strongly with Wolfsheim's ethnicity. For example, Nick says, Wolfsheim raised his "head and regarded me with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril" (73–74; ch. 4), and "dropp[ing] my hand [he] covered Gatsby with his expressive nose" (74; ch. 4). Apparently, all of Wolfsheim's expressiveness, in Nick's opinion, resides in his nose, for when Nick wants to tell us that Wolfsheim has become angry, he says, "Mr. Wolfsheim's nose flashed at me indignantly" (75; ch. 4). When Wolfsheim is interested in something Nick has said, Nick reports, "His nostrils turned to me in an interested way" (75; ch. 4). When Wolfsheim is emotionally moved, Nick communicates this fact by saying, "[H]is tragic nose was trembling" (77; ch. 4) or "The hair in his nostrils quivered slightly" (180; ch. 9).

Nick is clearly othering Wolfsheim, as he others almost all the ethnic characters he sees. And in doing so he dehumanizes them. Othering dehumanizes because it permits one to identify oneself as "the human being" and people who are different as something "other" than human. Othering thus facilitates the demonization of people we define as different from us, as we see when Nick's description of Wolfsheim turns that character into a version of "the Jew as monster," a form of othering that served Hitler well in Nazi Germany. Nick achieves this effect, apparently with no consciousness of doing anything amiss, with the only descriptions we get of Wolfsheim that do not include his nose: in Nick's words, Wolfsheim has a "large head" (73; ch. 4), "tiny eyes" (74; ch. 4), "bulbous fingers" (179; ch. 9), and finally, "cuff buttons" made of "human molars" (77; ch. 4). Of course, Nick is demonizing Wolfsheim because this character is a criminal of rather vast proportions. But Nick foregrounds Wolfsheim's Jewishness to such a degree that even Wolfsheim's criminal status becomes associated with his ethnicity.

Another significant example of Nick's othering of ethnic characters occurs when Gatsby is driving him to New York City in his enormous luxury car. Nick sees "three modish [fashionable] Negroes" in "a limousine . . . driven by a white chauffeur" (73; ch. 4). He describes them as "two bucks and a girl" and says, "I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry" (73; ch. 4). Of course, Nick's un-self-conscious racism is obvious in his othering of these characters: the black men are "bucks"—animals rather than men—and the description of their wide-stretched, rolling eyes resonates strongly with racist stereotypes that portrayed African Americans as foolish, childish, overly dramatic, comic characters.

In addition, Nick's description of these characters fulfills the kind of narrative function Toni Morrison describes in her analysis of the Africanist presence in white American literature. These black characters—fashionably dressed, riding in a chauffeured limousine, very conscious of their social status in the eyes

of others—are the mirror and shadow of Gatsby. The only obvious difference between them is that Gatsby can hide his origins, which he does, whereas they can't because they can't hide their color. From Nick's point of view, despite Gatsby's "elaborate formality of speech [that] just missed being absurd" (53; ch. 3), his ridiculous fabrication of wealthy "ancestors" (69; ch. 4), his "circus wagon" (128; ch. 7) of a car, as Tom calls it, and all his other ludicrous affectations, he is the romantic embodiment of success. The black characters, however, are its parody. In barely more than one sentence, in the single image with which Nick describes the black characters, he projects onto them everything about Gatsby that he, and perhaps the reader, hold in contempt. *They* are preposterous, not Gatsby. Thus, Nick's othering of these characters facilitates their function as scapegoats sacrificed to Nick's, and the text's, recuperation of Gatsby.

To put the matter another way, the novel erases real African Americans, who were a very visible and important presence in New York City during the 1920s, where much of the novel is set, and substitutes in their place a comic stereotype—a colonialist other—that reinforces white superiority. This is no small move, given the historical reality of New York City during the 1920s, which was home to the Harlem Renaissance as well as to sites of black cultural production like The Cotton Club, where African American jazz greats attracted wealthy white patrons in droves. In fact, given Fitzgerald's penchant for creating a strong sense of place through the evocation of specific cultural details, it wouldn't be unreasonable to argue that the text falls short of the demands of its setting by not having one of the main characters visit a Harlem nightclub, or at least refer to a visit there, for that is surely what fashionable young white people such as the Buchanans, Nick, and Jordan would have done. The novel's erasure of African Americans becomes even more ironic when we consider that *The Great Gatsby* is credited with representing the Jazz Age, a term coined by Fitzgerald. Yet black Americans, who invented jazz and who were its most famous musicians, are conspicuously absent from the text.

Indeed, the novel's erasure of this local, "colonized" population is a feature of colonialist ideology that often accompanies othering. The colonized other doesn't count, becomes invisible to the eyes of the colonizer, who not only takes the fruits of colonized labor but also takes credit for those fruits. It should be no surprise, then, that the novel gives the credit for jazz symbolically to whites. The only musicians we see playing jazz are the white musicians at Gatsby's party. And they are "no thin five-piece affair," Nick tells us, "but a whole pit full of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos and low and high drums" (44; ch. 3). In other words, jazz has been "elevated" to the status of high culture in the form of an orchestra, and high culture belongs to white, not black, Americans.

Significantly, the orchestra spotlights its performance of a piece that, the conductor informs us, was played at Carnegie Hall: "Vladimir Tostoff's *Jazz History of the World*" (54; ch. 3). Could Fitzgerald have found a more conspicuously European—that is, white—name than Vladimir Tostoff? There's no way a reader could mistake him for an African American. In the world of this novel, jazz is, symbolically at least, a European invention. Thus, Tom's warning that "[i]t's up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things" (17; ch. 1), though mocked by Nick and by the novel's unflattering characterization of Tom, is an attitude the novel seems, unconsciously, to share.

There is, however, an important exception to Nick's othering of ethnic characters. "The young Greek, Michaelis, who ran the coffee joint" (143; ch. 7) next to George Wilson's garage, is a well-developed, sympathetic character who is not reduced to his ethnicity. Michaelis takes an interest in Wilson's concerns. He spends the whole night sitting up with George, trying to help and comfort him, after Myrtle is killed. He cooks breakfast for himself, George, and "one of the watchers of the night before" (168; ch. 8) who returns the next morning to help out. And the text gives Michaelis a good deal of authority by making him "the principal witness at the inquest" (143; ch. 7) concerning Myrtle's death. This exception makes sense, however, when we recall that white Americans consider Greece the cradle of Western civilization. It can hardly be coincidental that, in a novel filled with one-dimensional, dehumanized ethnic characters, the single ethnic character given fully human status is associated with Greece, an important source of white civilization's superior image of itself.

Why does Nick engage in this kind of ethnic othering? Of course, one important reason is that, as a member of the dominant cultural group, he was programmed to do so. However, Nick also has some personal insecurity that makes him need to feel he is in control, that makes him need to feel superior to others in some way, and therefore that makes him especially vulnerable to colonialist psychology. At the age of thirty, Nick is still being financed by his father while he tries to figure out what he should do with himself. His summer in New York is just the latest in a series of experiences failing to produce either a promising career or a lasting romance. Nick fears that all he has to look forward to is, as he puts it, "a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair" (143; ch. 7). In addition, though Nick comes from the "right" family and the "right" background, apparently he doesn't expect a large inheritance. He needs to find a profession and, while he searches, his family funding goes only so far as to provide a modest cottage and pay his expenses. Certainly, this is no small feat, especially as Nick's expenses include courting Jordan. But given the cultural milieu in which he was raised, he doubtless has had many friends who come from families immensely more wealthy than his. As a member of the

cultural elite, Nick knows the importance of gradations in social rank and must therefore be aware that his lack of fortune, relative to his peers, puts him at a social disadvantage. Thus, Nick has at least two important reasons to feel the need to assert his superiority and thereby assert his control. And the othering of ethnic subordinates offers him precisely this feeling.

The novel also helps us understand colonialist psychology from the viewpoint of the colonial subject, the cultural outsider who wants only to be accepted by the cultural elite. Although Gatsby has two important characteristics that place him, geographically, among the cultural elite in the text—he's white and wealthy enough to buy a mansion on Long Island Sound—he has far more in common with the colonial subject. For the culture to which Gatsby aspires, the culture to which Daisy Fay Buchanan belongs, is not his own. Its subtle social codes and gradations of social status are unfamiliar to him, and he can't quite get the hang of them. He is oblivious, for example, to the important social distinction between the upper-crust East Eggers and those who live at "the less fashionable" (9; ch. 1) West Egg, where he resides, just as he is oblivious to the gradations of class among the "menagerie" (114, ch. 6), as Tom calls them, who attend his parties. And it doesn't even seem to occur to Gatsby that a person of Nick's background—a Yale graduate from a socially established family, related to Daisy—might not be interested in selling fake bonds, a criminal enterprise in which Gatsby offers to include him in return for Nick's arranging Gatsby's reunion with Daisy.

In short, Gatsby lacks the proper bloodline, class origin, upbringing, and education for Daisy's set. He has lied and faked his way into her life, both during their initial courtship and again after their reunion. And as a result, Gatsby is unhomed: he feels he belongs nowhere because he is caught between two antagonist cultures, that into which he was born and that to which he aspires. Indeed, his personality is dominated by an endless struggle to rid himself of his own roots, his own identity as a poor boy from a family of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (104; ch. 6) in North Dakota. When he tells Nick that his "family all died" (70; ch. 4), the lie carries with it the weight of unconscious psychological desire: Gatsby would like to eradicate all trace of his social origins.

We can see the force of this desire in the excessive quality of Gatsby's mimicry, his elaborate attempt to imitate the dress, speech, behavior, and lifestyle of the culturally privileged. For example, Gatsby fabricated an upper-class family and invented a past that includes an Oxford education; big-game hunting; living "like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe"; jewel collecting, "chiefly rubies"; and "painting a little, things for myself only" (70; ch. 4). He created a new, more fashionable-sounding name for himself. He adopted numerous affectations of upper-class speech and "correct" manners, including calling everyone

“old sport” and “excus[ing] himself” from his party guests “with a small bow that included each of us in turn” (53; ch. 3). And he purchased an enormous mansion and many very expensive possessions that he uses for display only. Even Gatsby’s blind devotion to the selfish and shallow Daisy can best be explained by her symbolic quality, in Gatsby’s eyes, as a princess “[h]igh in a white palace[,] the king’s daughter, the golden girl” (127; ch. 7). If Gatsby can win Daisy, then he has proof that he belongs to the cultural elite she represents for him, that he is no longer a poor farm boy, a “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (137; ch. 7), as Tom calls him. Clearly, Gatsby is trying to stop being Jimmy Gatz as much as he is trying to become Jay Gatsby. For as his characterization illustrates, mimicry involves not only the laborious attempt to be accepted by a culture different from the one into which one was born but a simultaneous attempt to rid oneself of everything one has identified as other than that culture. Mimicry thus involves the othering of oneself.

Gatsby’s characterization also suggests that mimicry is inseparable from unhomelessness, for one wouldn’t engage in mimicry if one didn’t feel unhomed. Mimicry is an attempt to find a home, psychologically, by finding a culture to which one can feel one belongs. But the conviction of one’s own inferiority that produces mimicry also requires one to seek that home in a culture one deems superior to oneself. Therefore, as the portrayal of Gatsby illustrates, mimicry is an attempt to belong that is doomed to failure because, even if one succeeds in adopting the “superior” culture, one’s feelings of inferiority will ensure that one is never at home in it. Indeed, Gatsby, who actually succeeds in acquiring the literal home he seeks, the mansion—the “colossal affair by any standard . . . with a tower on one side . . . and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (9; ch. 1)—does not really occupy his home.

For example, among all the “Marie Antoinette music rooms and Restoration salons . . . [and] period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk . . . [and] dressing rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths” (96; ch. 5), the only area that shows any signs of Gatsby’s occupancy is a small “apartment, a bedroom and a bath and an Adam study” (96; ch. 5). Furthermore, Gatsby doesn’t seem to notice the difference between, on the one hand, the well-ordered cleanliness of his home under the care of the trained servants he fires and, on the other hand, the disarray into which it falls at the hands of the nonprofessional crew supplied him by Wolfsheim: “There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere,” Nick observes, “and the rooms were musty as though they hadn’t been aired for many days” (154–55; ch. 8). In fact, “[t]he grocery boy reported that the kitchen looked like a pigsty” (120; ch. 7). Neither does Gatsby seem at all perturbed by the prolonged presence of Mr. Klipspringer, evidently a party guest with no place else to go who took it upon himself to stay in one of his host’s empty bedrooms. Gatsby doesn’t respond to these rather radical

alterations in his home because, emotionally, he's not really there. He can't be at home in his home because it's not his home: it's a form of mimicry. And mimicry is too outer-directed to provide any space for one's inner life.

Finally, *The Great Gatsby* reveals, in the character of Tom Buchanan, the detrimental effects of colonialist psychology even on the culturally privileged who are its apparent beneficiaries. Tom is clearly the most culturally privileged character in the novel. Despite his lack of personal refinement and his "ungentlemanly" behavior, he has all the cultural advantages afforded by race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, family, and education. In addition, his inherited wealth, which he need not lift a finger to maintain, is enormous. "[F]or instance," Nick reports, Tom "brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that. . . . [E]ven in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach" (10; ch. 1).

Tom is also the character who most overtly exhibits the attitudes and behaviors associated with colonialist psychology. For one thing, as we saw earlier, he fervently believes in white supremacy, a colonialist ideology that others nonwhite people in order to justify subordinating them. Paraphrasing the racist *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* by Goddard, a fictional stand-in for *The Rising Tide of Color* by Stoddard (Brucoli 208), Tom tells Nick, "[W]e're Nordics . . . and we've produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art and all that" (18; ch. 1), but "if we don't look out the white race will be . . . utterly submerged" by "these other races" (17; ch. 1).

In addition, Tom is a classist, and the belief in the inherent superiority of the upper class is one way in which colonialism justifies the domination of colonized peoples. Indeed, Tom holds everyone in contempt who is beneath him in social class, including "these newly rich people," as he calls those who have acquired their own wealth. He says that "[a] lot of [them] are just big bootleggers" (114; ch. 6). While it is true that a number of people acquired a fortune through bootlegging in the 1920s, the implication here is that people who have not inherited their wealth as Tom has done are not to be trusted. In fact, Tom's mistrust of Gatsby, to whom Tom's comment about the newly rich specifically refers, is the product of his classism. And that mistrust occurs long before Tom learns, to his enormous surprise, that Gatsby is his rival for Daisy's affections.

Tom knows that Gatsby is a West Egger and not a member of his own set, a social distinction made painfully clear to the reader, though apparently not to Gatsby, when Tom and two friends, all on horseback, drop by Gatsby's house one afternoon for something to drink. All three treat Gatsby disdainfully. Tom's friend, Mr. Sloane, doesn't even speak to Gatsby but just "lounged back haughtily in his chair" (108–9; ch. 6). When Sloane's lady-friend becomes tipsy and invites Gatsby to join them for dinner, Mr. Sloane hurries her outside while

Gatsby goes to get his coat, and the three riders depart before Gatsby is able to join them. Tom is outraged that Gatsby doesn't realize he's unwelcome: " 'My God, I believe the man's coming,' said Tom. 'Doesn't he know she doesn't want him?' " (109; ch. 6). Tom can't imagine "where in the devil" (110; ch. 1) Daisy could have met Gatsby and writes it off to "women run[ning] around too much these days" and therefore meeting "all kinds of crazy fish" (110; ch. 6). Tom is standing in Gatsby's enormous, lavishly furnished mansion set on a forty-acre estate, and yet he knows, and quite correctly, that Gatsby is his social inferior. Indeed, Gatsby's unawareness of the social distinctions so important to Tom are largely responsible for the mocking references Tom makes to Gatsby's parties, possessions, and probable social origins. For Tom needs everyone to know exactly in what manner he outranks them.

Classism, like racism, is an ideology that others people, a fact illustrated with particular clarity in the language Tom uses when referring to Gatsby. As we have seen, Tom calls Gatsby's parties "menagerie[s]" (114; ch. 6), that is, collections of animals. He refers to Gatsby's car as a "circus wagon" (128; ch. 7), in other words, something used to transport animals or human "freaks." And he refers to Gatsby as a "crazy fish" (110; ch. 6). Gatsby cannot have fully human status in Tom's eyes because he doesn't have the social rank such a status requires. Surely, Tom's classist othering of Gatsby is also one of the reasons Tom is able to dispose of him without a moment's hesitation when he sends Wilson, armed and crazed, to Gatsby's house, knowing that Wilson intends to murder Gatsby yet taking no action to prevent it.

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. What seems to attract Tom most to these women is their powerlessness, which augments his own power. He can do what he wants with them. He flagrantly lies to Myrtle. He keeps her at his beck and call. He can even break her nose and get away with it. And the reason he breaks Myrtle's nose—because she dares to say Daisy's name, that is, because she thinks she's as good as Daisy—suggests that Tom sees working-class women as "bad girls," as sexual objects and nothing more, who are in a separate category altogether from "good girls" like his wife and Jordan Baker. Because his mistresses are his social inferiors, he feels they don't 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. For in terms of Tom's privileged cultural milieu, working-class women are cultural outsiders. That is, Tom's classist victimization of working-class women

resembles the white colonial official's racist victimization of women from the indigenous colonized population: both define their prey as "bad girls" and are thereby able to other them, thus allowing themselves to sexually exploit their victims while relieving themselves of all responsibility toward these women as human beings.

Certainly, Myrtle behaves like a colonial subject. She seems to have internalized the same colonialist psychology Tom has. But because she's on the bottom rung of the social hierarchy, that psychology disempowers her and makes her especially vulnerable to Tom: she considers his social superiority such a valuable asset that she will do anything to keep him. We see Myrtle as the 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.

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. (35; ch. 2)

Behaving 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" isn't good enough, because she feels inferior to Tom and his social set.

However much freedom and power colonialist psychology affords Tom, though, it comes at a cost. Besides the obvious spiritual or moral damage colonialist psychology does to the culturally privileged by facilitating and providing a rationale for unethical behavior, it also can produce a tormented inner life. This is precisely what it does to Tom Buchanan.

There could be no cultural superiority if there were no cultural inferiority to contrast with it. And no one internalizes this idea more thoroughly than Tom. He behaves as if his social status depended on othering everyone "beneath" him and then showing his "superiority" through some form of aggression. He doesn't merely harbor racist, classist, and sexist attitudes; as we have seen, he continually and aggressively displays them. And it's the recurrent and petty nature of these displays that suggests the existence of a strong psychological motive.

For example, Tom takes cruel advantage of George Wilson's poverty, not only by stealing his wife but also by tormenting George about the car George would like to buy from Tom. 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.

One explanation for Tom's insecurity is that he is from the Midwest, and therefore he can never have the cultural status that, in his day, belonged only to the wealthy old blueblood families who had lived in the East since their forebears arrived in America so long ago. He attended Yale and must know, as Fitzgerald painfully knew as a Midwesterner at Princeton, that this is the one kind of cultural superiority he can never have, no matter how many millions he has or how lavishly he lives. In this one way, Tom himself is other, a fact that must be especially disconcerting since his recent move east. And I think it is this knowledge, whether it is conscious or unconscious, that makes him feel insecure enough to need to prove his social superiority at every conceivable opportunity.

Nick senses the problem when he says, referring to Tom's comments about *The Rise of the Coloured Empires*, "There was something pathetic in his concentration as if his complacency [self-satisfaction] . . . was not enough to him any more" (18; ch. 1). "Something," Nick adds, "was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory [dictatorial] heart" (25; ch. 1). Nick can't explain Tom's problem, but we can: the colonialist psychology that empowers Tom also undermines his confidence because it simultaneously tells him, "If you're not on top, you're nobody" and heightens his awareness of any way in which he might not be "on top."

As I hope this reading of *The Great Gatsby* makes clear, I'm not suggesting that Fitzgerald's novel can be read as a colonialist allegory, that its characters can be interpreted as symbolic stand-ins for colonialist types the way that characters in, for example, Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) or "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836) are symbolic stand-ins for abstract moral concepts like good and evil. Rather, I'm suggesting that *The Great Gatsby* reveals the ways in which colonialist psychology, on which colonialist ideology depends, operates on the home front to sustain the imbalances of cultural power that have characterized America since its inception. For although the founders of this nation broke with Anglo-European political philosophy when they framed the American Constitution, they nevertheless inherited many aspects of Anglo-European cultural philosophy.

Most conspicuously, they inherited the belief that members of the white race are God's chosen people and the natural rulers of the world. That is, they inherited Anglo-European colonialist ideology, which permitted a small group of small

nations—England, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands—to dominate most of the globe from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century and which permitted white Americans, in turn, to dominate the Native American lands we now call the United States of America and to hold African captives as slaves. An ideology this successful dies hard. And as *The Great Gatsby* illustrates, one reason colonialist ideology is so successful is that it is supported by a complex psychology that strongly influences the way we perceive ourselves and others.

Is colonialist psychology as pervasive a presence in America today as *The Great Gatsby* suggests it was during the 1920s? Certainly, the othering of American citizens is no longer supported by law, as it was in the legal discrimination that subjugated all nonwhite Americans, and many white immigrants, before the civil rights movement of the 1960s. And respect for cultural difference is promoted by our government, our media, and our educational system as it has never been before. Surely, these changes constitute a significant improvement.

Yet white supremacist backlash, for example as witnessed in the proliferation of racist hate groups; the persistence of covert racial discrimination, for example in housing, employment, and education; the othering of the homeless, indeed their virtual erasure from American consciousness and conscience; and all the forms of othering that still flourish in this country today make it clear that America's neocolonialist enterprises around the globe will be accompanied by versions thereof at home for a long time to come. For colonialist psychology and the discriminatory ideologies it supports are part of our historical and cultural legacy, as *The Great Gatsby* illustrates. And this is a reality that will have to be confronted anew by each generation of Americans.

Questions for further practice: postcolonial approaches to other literary works

The following questions are intended as models. They can help you use postcolonial criticism to interpret the literary works to which they refer or other texts of your choice.

1. Analyze the anticolonialist agenda of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In order to accomplish this task, examine the novel's representation of precolonial tribal life in Africa. What is lost as a result of colonial contact? What are the colonizers' strategies in indoctrinating the native population to their way of thinking? Why are the colonizers so successful?
2. What does Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) suggest about the social and psychological effects of colonialism on the colonizers (Philip and Moira) and, primarily, on the colonized? Analyze, for example, the problems of corruption, class division, and colonial education as they