

# A comparative analysis of absolution of the great gatsby

Literature



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We immediately see contrast between the two texts in their openings. The first sentence we read in "Absolution", 'there was once a priest with cold, watery eyes, who, in the still of night, wept cold tears', seems like the beginning of some sort of fairy tale or fable. It has a dreamy, child like quality to it. 'The Great Gatsby' begins somewhat differently. We are given a direct insight into the character.

This difference continues throughout the start of both texts. 'Absolution' provides us only select, specific details that sum up what F Scott Fitzgerald wants us to know about the priest, while 'The Great Gatsby' begins with a lengthy introduction which seems to give us a clear idea of the life our character leads. In the first chapter of 'The Great Gatsby' Nick, the narrator, details his origins and how he came to live in West Egg, the initial setting of the story. The somewhat detached atmosphere of the opening of "Absolution" seems to break with the introduction of Rudolph Miller.

The boy's introduction is much different to the general, removed introduction we see with the priest, as seen in phrases such as 'there was once' and 'on Saturday nights'. The new character is introduced as a 'beautiful, intense boy', with 'enormous staccato eyes, lit with gleaming points of cobalt light'. This specific description of the boy's eyes seems to directly contrast with that of the priest at the beginning. His eyes are 'cold' and 'watery', while the boys seem vibrant and alive. On the other hand, the character that Nick first interacts with is described simply as 'some man', who asks for directions.

We see that Nick has no real concern for the man, while the priest seems genuinely taken aback by the beauty of the boy's eyes. This acts as a

reflection on Nick's character. Although he tells us earlier on that he is 'inclined to reserve all judgements', which suggests his motives would be positive and he would be acting in good nature, we see that his real motive to help the man was selfish. He describes himself as 'lonely no longer', and somewhat arrogantly, proclaims himself to be a 'guide, a pathfinder, an original settler'.

This unreliability seems to continue with Nick's clearly judgemental description of his cousin's husband, Tom. We see, from the very start, that Nick is an unreliable narrator. We cannot really trust all that he says. Both the stories explore the idea of identity. We see with Nick, through his narrative voice, he gives us his own perceived sense of identity. As already said, he tells us 'he is inclined to reserve all judgements', but as the chapter progresses, we clearly see this is not quite the truth.

Nick seems to have his actual identity, and then the false identity which he sees himself as and wishes others to see him as. This sense of imagined and real identity, as seen through the eyes of Lacan and his concepts, is seen even more clearly in "Absolution". The nervous, god-fearing boy Rudolph creates an invented separate identity, Blanchford Sarnemington. When Rudolph becomes this character, a 'suave nobility' comes over him. It seems to be his escape from the problems in his life, religion and his strict father. His father himself has his own problems with identity.

He is described to have a 'mystical worship for the Empire Builder, James J Hill', who was 'the apotheosis of that quality in which Miller himself was deficient - the sense of things, the feel of things, the hint of rain in the wind

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on the cheek'. He sees something in Hill that he wishes he had. This relationship is most similar to that of Nick and Gatsby, which we begin to see by the end of the chapter. He has a fascination and adoration for the man. Another area we see explored in both stories is father-son relationships.

'The Great Gatsby' begins with Nick giving us a quote from his father, which clearly displays some degree of paternal respect. He values what his father has told him. Rudolph seems also to have this sense of paternal respect; his father is a major source of authority to him. Despite the harsh discipline we see that Carl Miller exercises over Rudolph, we are told that 'he was proud of Rudolph down to his heart' and that he was 'beginning to feel truly as well as formally sorry for what he had done'. Nick tells us that him and his father had 'always been unusually communicative in a reserved way'.

It seems in both cases that the father-son bond is quite deep despite what it may seem on the surface. The first chapter of 'The Great Gatsby' we see begins to explore the moral flaws in society following the end of WWI, as seen in the attitudes of characters such as Tom Buchanan. Tom is extremely arrogant and supercilious. We see that one of the first things he says to Nick is 'I've got a nice place here'. He seems to value his wealth and material ownership over anything else. Tom gives us the first example of conspicuous consumption, a common theme in the book, through his lavish house.

His mistress, we begin to hear about in the first chapter is just another example of this. He already has a wife, he acquires another woman just a symbol of his power and wealth. He can have whatever he wants.

'Absolution' we see is less concerned with such social and moral deficiencies,

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being more concerned with the innocence of a child and religion. This important religious aspect of society seen 'Absolution' is replaced by conspicuous consumption and materialistic consumerism in 'The Great Gatsby'. However, the Church is still observed largely critically by Fitzgerald in 'Absolution'.

It appears somewhat draconian in ruling Rudolph's life, as we see through his constant fear of committing the most minor of apparent sins. He lives in fear instead of faith. This is accentuated by the priest's apparent feelings of regret at the end of the story. He seems to encourage Rudolph to do all the things he never did, like go to parties and amusement parks. We see in both texts Fitzgerald displays a similar style in his use of imagery and light. This is most notably seen in his use of colour symbolism.

At the end of the first chapter of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick describes 'the silhouette of a moving cat across the moonlight', followed by the emergence of 'a figure' who 'emerged from the shadow of my neighbour's mansion' and stood looking at 'the silver pepper of the stars' Nick specifically describes 'a single green light, minute and far away' as he looks out across the water. This initially seems to be symbolic of Gatsby's desires, specifically for Daisy, but as the book progresses we see it is symbolic of anything distant that you desire.

The use of 'green' is important, as green is the colour we associate with envy and desire. The same use of light and colour is apparent in 'Absolution'. We see this in the priest's dying speech at the end of the story. He refers several times to 'glimmering' and 'twinkling' lights as he talks about amusement

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parks and parties, the vibrant lifestyle he never had. The lifelessness of his religious life is further emphasised by the description of 'flat bloomless vines and the pale echoes of flowers' outside the church. There is no colour, no vibrancy or vitality.