

CONTEXTUALISING FLAWS OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION AND ITS FAILURE IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *TENDER IS THE NIGHT*

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Abstract

This paper analyses the disfigurements of American civilization and its complications in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. Fitzgerald used his experience living abroad to rewrite this novel as the account of Dick Diver, an American psychiatrist who forfeits his genius for a life of drinking and dissipation and gives up his idealistic youth in the name of social success. The story follows the downfall of an American psychiatrist who, like Fitzgerald, is in complete mental and professional disarray and has married a wealthy and attractive patient. The novel is a tribute to the ideals that have been abandoned by a French Riviera expat community. This turns the novel into a tragedy by showing the failure of its main character, a promising man who has been overcome by the forces of change brought about by the post-war societal structure. Due to Dick's emotional and spiritual degradation, the novel's action takes on a tragic quality.

Keywords: Spiritual, Moral, Society, Life, Failure

Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the spokesman of the roaring twenties or the Jazz Age of America, is one of the most influential authors of the twentieth century American literature. He paints a striking image of contemporary social realities and intimately depicts the nuances and complexity of the psychological makeup of the people selected to symbolise the dominant mood of the day. Fitzgerald attempts to characterise and shed light on the challenges that a crisis presents for a person while keeping in mind the crisis that is currently plaguing modern man.

The great social novel, *Tender is the Night*, shows how the complexities of psychology can be used to dramatize the repercussions of a crumbling civilisation on human nature. The lives of wealthy American expatriates on the Riviera in the 1920s may sum up the novel's plot in a single sentence or two. The novel's primary setting is the post-war Western world, which is undergoing dissolution and reshaping in terms of identity. It is a great American novel about history, a chronicle of the post-war loss of identities linked to stable societies, social duty, and selflessness, not a great American historical novel. That past is reflected in the tale of the hero, Dick.

Fitzgerald's enduring preoccupation with the incalculable gap between the ideal and actual worlds is best illustrated by Dick's personal sorrow. His fruitless attempts to reconcile these two incompatible universes in his interpersonal, social, and professional relationships bear the brunt of the novel. However, as he and his group of friends and acquaintances also serve as a microcosm of western civilisation, one man's personal suffering eventually takes on worldwide meaning throughout the novel.

The focus of *Tender is the Night* is a group of foreigners who gather on the French Riviera in the years following World War I, specifically from 1925 to 1929. Members of the decadent European nobility and several affluent Americans from various social and cultural backgrounds are among these worldwide drifters. The main action moves between the Riviera and Zurich, Switzerland, even though the novel starts and concludes on the French Riviera. From 1917, when his army superiors send him to Zurich to finish his medical studies, to the start of the actual fighting on the Riviera in June 1925, Dick's backstory is filled in with a fifty-page flashback.

Dick's perspective is used to tell the story of *Tender is the Night*. He is a promising young American psychiatrist who develops feelings for Nicole Warren, a wealthy and attractive psychiatric patient, while pursuing his education in Switzerland. Dick marries her against his better professional judgement, gradually giving in to her relentless, wistful offering of herself. They had been married for six years and are living with their two kids at the Villa Diana, a lavish residence they constructed on the Riviera with Nicole's money, at the start of the novel, which takes place in June 1925. Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress, visits the adjacent Gausse Beach with her mother, Elsie Speers, for a few days. It is there that Rosemary meets Dick and falls in love. Nicole starts to understand the situation and experiences two abrupt, violent mental convulsions as Dick slowly reacts to Rosemary's advances.

Dick assists Nicole in regaining her composure as Rosemary and her mother depart the Riviera. Dick has been treating Nicole like a husband-doctor for the past six years of their marriage. By building an environment that provides her with some consistency, he has calmed her fears and

restored her sanity with every recurrence of her disease. Following Nicole's second assault, Dick collaborates with Dr. Franz Gregorovius, a psychiatrist friend, to build a clinic for affluent mental patients. Dick aspires to create a safe environment for Nicole at the clinic in Zurich. Baby Warren, Nicole's cunning sister, supports this endeavour, which is funded by Warren money, with the intention of keeping the family's hold on Doctor Diver's expert services for Nicole.

Nicole has another mental breakdown at the clinic, causing an automobile accident that nearly kills the Divers and their kids. When Dick's own emotional reserves are continuously depleted, he unconsciously tries to break away from Nicole's crippling, parasitic need. To see Rosemary, who has become a very successful Hollywood actress in the four years since they first met, Dick takes a leave of absence from the clinic. After a brief sexual encounter, Dick opted to go back to Zurich and Nicole, despite their best efforts to resume their romance. Reports of Dick's growing drunkenness and his negative effects on some of the patients have alienated Dick's partner, Gregorovius, who attempts to end the partnership.

Dick and Nicole head back to the Villa Diana, their house on the Riviera. Nicole's mental stability returns as Dick's behaviour starts to exhibit noticeable irregularities. She starts dating Tommy Barban, a dashing soldier of fortune who has been in love with Nicole for a long time and friendly with the Divers. He consents to a divorce when Dick uses deceit to get Nicole to declare her independence from him. Dick returns to the United States following Nicole's marriage to Tommy Barban, and he moves between minor New York town practices. By the novel's end, Dick has failed both professionally and psychologically, whereas Nicola appears to have recovered. In contrast, Rosemary's perspective is used to tell the story.

A young movie actress named Rosemary arrives at Cap d'Antibes on the Riviera at the start of the novel. Rosemary finds herself sandwiched between two groups of foreigners when she visits the beach. An incoherent mixture is the first. "Mama" Abrams is one of those old "good sports" who have been preserved into a new generation by a healthy digestion and an inability to encounter new things. Albert McKisco is a writer who, according to his wife, Violet? A sardonic young man named Royal Dumphy and his friend are present. Dick and Nicole, their pals Abe and Mary North, and a young Frenchman named Tommy Barban make up the second group. Luis Champion is the one who keeps warning Mr. Dumphy not to "be too ghastly for words." Despite Rosemary's natural attraction to the second group, the first group swiftly picks her up and cannot wait to tell her they know her from her movie. The group is not particularly content.

Rosemary feels depressed and uneasy about these people, and she dislikes them because of their lack of imagination, poverty of ideas, and shapelessness of nature. She is drawn to the second group because she sees glimmers of the opposite traits. Rosemary perceives Dick's thoughtfulness, elegance, empathy, and, most importantly, his ferocious energy. It makes sense why she falls for him. Fitzgerald then goes back in time to investigate Dick's past. After attending Yale, being a Rhodes Scholar, and receiving training as a psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins, Vienna, and Zurich, he got his old-fashioned, formal manners and what Fitzgerald refers to as "good instincts, honour, courtesy, courage" from his father, a kind, poor clergyman in Buffalo. When he returns to Zurich after the war, he runs across Nicole, a young mental patient who has clung to their tenuous

relationship throughout the conflict and her sluggish recuperation from a disease that is not hereditary but was caused by her father's seduction of her. Despite his professional understanding that Nicole might have a lifelong mental illness and the Warrens' unspoken haughtiness in hiring a doctor to care for her, Dick falls in love with Nicole and marries her. This deed exposes Dick's character flaw of unbridled giving.

Dick is aware from the beginning that by living with Nicole among the Warrens and their type, he is making the task he has set for himself as difficult as possible, but he finds it more exciting and challenging because he is still young. He has met the task with ease for many years. Then, indiscernibly at first, his life starts to fall apart. He gradually comes to the realisation that he has depleted the source of energy for the exceptional self-discipline that enables him to perform what he refers to as his "trick of the heart" for others. This change takes place very deeply within his nature.

Fitzgerald takes pains to keep the reader from believing that change is something that can be controlled, that some people fall into dissipation, or that the wealthy are lazy. Dick does start to stray in these ways, but it is just a sign of his problems - a frantic attempt to pass the time and avoid boredom when his life has lost its meaning and purpose. Men like him -talented, attractive, and successful - feel literally that all the uses of the world are tired, boring, flat, and unprofitable because of his dreadful spiritual ennui, which has no apparent reason. He may not have been able to give Dick the unity he could have, but the true problem is that Dick's catastrophe has an inexplicable cause.

As a result, despite its eerie emotional appeal, *Tender is the Night's* central action is just as perplexing and inexplicable as the well-known line from Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale', which serves as the inspiration for the title. Fitzgerald may and does construct a cast of characters for the reader that illustrate Dick's identity through dramatic analogies or contrasts. The first person we learn about is Abe North, a musician who has been drinking for the past seven years after having a stellar beginning. As a result, Abe North has already arrived at the point Dick will arrive at the end of the novel. Dick hears - indeed, he overhears, as a piece of idle, heartless gossip - that Abe has been beaten up in a New York speakeasy and crawled to the Racker Club to die, or was it the Harvard Club, just as he is starting his own desperate battle with the urge to quit, around halfway through the novel. As Dick attempts to comprehend the significance of Abe's death - a death more startling, filthier, humiliating, and scary to him than anything he had imagined - the gossips' complaining argument about where Abe died fades away around him.

Additionally, there is Tommy Barban, a charming, intelligent, and worldly barbarian who represents everything Dick dislikes most. The meticulously planned life that Dick initially created for Nicole and himself because it was essential to her health has gradually changed to serve a different purpose as Nicole's need for it has waned, eventually evolving into an intricate, nearly ritualised arrangement of the pleasures of a highly cultivated life. Tommy is annoyed by the entire situation, in part because it is entirely controlled by Dick and keeps Nicole, whom he has loved for years, as a prisoner, but also because it reflects a way of life that strongly offends him.

Rosemary asks him whether he is coming home as he prepares to depart the Riviera. These

two, together with Dick, Nicole, and Rosemary, make up the main cast of the novel. It is encircled by a wider cast of supporting people, each of whom reveals a different facet of Dick's universe. Dressing dressed as a French sailor and picking up a girl in Antibes is the latest wild woman from London, Lady Caroline Sibley-Biers. She is petulant and foolish. She is adamant that her succession of encounters with socially desirable Englishmen - which she no longer truly expects would result in anything - make up a full life and that the most dehumanising rituals of British social life are the greatest way to live. There is Albert McKisco, the bewildered yet arrogant owner of a variety of borrowed concepts that shield him from reality.

The neurotic orderliness, the stylish grossness, and the lifeless intellectuality of Dick's universe are all defined for us by these people. Because they are wealthy, they have the freedom and fullness to be who they are, something that other people cannot do. However, their wealth does not make them who they are; rather, the world does. Dick's desire to connect with people and inspire them to live by reminding them of who they were before is like a wound, or what Fitzgerald refers to as a "lesion of vitality," from which his spiritual force gradually drains until nothing remains. At the beginning of the novel, "one June morning in 1925" when Rosemary meets Dick.

The first faint signs of the loss have begun to show. He is still able to produce for people such enchanted moments as the one on the beach that Rosemary has watched with delight, when he holds a whole group of people enthralled not by what he does - what he does is almost nothing - but by the quality of his performance, the delicate sense of the tone and feeling of occasion and audience by which he can make a small group of people feel they are alone with each other in the dark universe, in some magically protected place where they can be their best selves. He performs this trick of the heart once again for Rosemary when she goes to dinner with Divers just after she has met them.

At the climax of that dinner, the table seemed for a moment to have risen a little toward the sky like a mechanical dancing platform. But, now, each such moment is followed for Dick by a spell of deep melancholy in which he looks back with awe at the carnival of affection he had given, as a general might gaze at a massacre he had ordered to satisfy an impersonal blood lust. Rosemary catches a glimpse of that melancholy, without recognizing it, her very first morning on the beach when, after all the others have gone, Dick stops to tell her she must not get too sunburned and she says with young cheerfulness. These periods of melancholy are one consequence of his decreasing vitality; another is his inability to maintain the self-discipline he has heretofore exercised almost unconsciously because it is only by not yielding to his momentary impulses that he can fulfil his central need to make the world over for others.

The first failure of this discipline - and the major one - is allowing himself to fall in love with Rosemary. Though he cannot control that impulse, he knows that it "marked a turning point in his life - it was out of line with everything that had preceded it - even out of line with what effect he might hope to produce on Rosemary." Then he finds himself drinking just a little too much in a carefully controlled way - "an ounce of gin with twice as much water" at carefully spaced intervals. The novel on psychiatry he has been working on for years begins to seem to him stale and unimportant and his work at the clinic tiresome. Not without desperation he had long felt the ethics

of his profession dissolving into a lifeless mass. When Nicole has a third serious breakdown, the long months of restating the universe for her leave him exhausted in a way he hits never known before recognizing it, her very first morning on the beach when, after all the others have gone, Dick stops to tell her she must not get tint sunburned and she says with young cheerfulness, "Do you know what time it is?" and Dick says, "It's about half-past one." He goes off alone to try to rest and get himself together and discovers to his horror that he cannot stop yielding to every vagrant impulse of his nature - to charm a pretty girl, to blurt out without regard for his listeners the bitterness in his heart. He can see what is happening to him more clearly than anybody else, yet he is unable to stop it since it is occurring somewhere below the realm of reason and outside of his control.

At that initial encounter with Rosemary on the beach in Antibes, the first subtle indications of this loss of identity had emerged. Five years later, he and Rosemary reunite on the same beach, which is now packed with drab, stylish individuals. He can still force himself to act in that way by a desperate attempt, but these moments are becoming fewer and farther between and necessitate him being extremely inebriated. In such a state, he is as likely to express the dark despair in his heart through some unintelligible act of violence, as he is when he picks a fight with a detective in Rome and is beaten up and sent to jail, or when he gets into a drunken argument with Lady Caroline Sibley-Biers in Antibes and even she manages to make him look foolish.

We feel these insignificant misfortunes as the loose ends of life that men hang themselves with because of Fitzgerald's lifelong tendency to give events the value they have for the person who experiences them rather than their conventional public value. This makes these scenes nearly unbearably moving. Dick ultimately acknowledges his lack of life and its effects, his incapacity to govern himself for whatever reason, and his incapacity to love and be loved. He resolves to bury his deceased himself and to reduce his losses, including his obligations to Nicole, the kids, and his friends.

The fact that Nicole is now fully recovered makes the process easier. Even while she still depends on Dick, she no longer needs him; it is just an old habit. The outwardly tidy, inwardly anarchic barbarian that has always been her true Warren nature has become increasingly apparent as she has recovered. As a result, she automatically turns to face Tommy Barban rather than Dick. Dick thus resolves to push her in Tommy's direction and terminate her reliance on him. He purposefully starts a fight with her at the last minute, then stands by and does nothing while she tries to reject him and stand up for herself.

The way that *Tender is the Night* moves is like how sand trickles in an hourglass. Dick's weakness contributes to Nicole's strength. The story is told mostly from the perspective of one character in each of its three novels. The hourglass shifts in tandem with the changes in point of view, from Rosemary's to Dick's to Nicole's, signifying the dominance of one character over the other.

Tender is the Night's intricate theme weaving is one of the most visually and intellectually rewarding works in American literature. Aware that there would never be an American Eden and that the corrupting realities of human life had always betrayed what Nick had referred to as the

“last and greatest of all human dreams,” Fitzgerald wrote the novel using his own adult power and experience, sadly, realising that America will not be America until it comprehends that dream. Knowing terribly that the realisation of the greatest and most imaginative human desire in a world whose idealisation thus becomes actual is not less than an unattainable dream. Fitzgerald’s generative paradox, however, is as unachievable as it is without the ongoing resuscitation of that hope. The promise of America’s young has been gone.

Conclusion

Dick, the protagonist, has been released from the counter-transference by the forced removal of his love object and his own heartbreaking realisation that the best, most potentially fruitful years of his life have been spent in a subtly eroding neurosis that has left him psychically exhausted. This makes the novel’s poignant and pitiful ending appropriate. He has spent most of his life dreaming rather than truly living. Dick, at least, only remains in Antibes long enough to ensure that Nicole is secure in Tommy’s care before departing for America, bringing nothing but himself with him.

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