

Tender is the Night: The Historical Configuration of the Failure of the American Dream

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Abstract—*Tender is the Night* is F. Scott Fitzgerald's fourth novel with its anti-sentimental language and depiction of events was marked as one of the most outstanding fictions of the 1930s offering a conspicuous criterion of American fiction since the World War I. The influences of a rich history are apparent in it. The most important events, several themes and some critic's idea, major characters in relation to that era, and Fitzgerald's purpose of creating the major hero of the novel who was ruined by means of his own idealism are analyzed in this article. The dominant setting is the chaotic Western world of post-war which reveals new bindings between the content of *Tender* and the Western history in relation to World War I, and the story of the protagonist is a microcosm of that history, a chronicle of post-war loss of the kinds of identities associated with stable societies, social altruism and personal responsibility.

Index Terms— Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, American Dream, twenty century, American novelists

I. INTRODUCTION

Under the influential impact of the evolution which American literary style had gone through by the 1930s, as well as the influences of a rich history of literary, intellectual, social, and political factors, Fitzgerald was compelled to employ a prose distinguished from the one he had used in his previous novels. Fitzgerald, who, by now, had gained the experience of concise writing in shorts stories he wrote for magazines according to his financial needs during the depression and also what he wrote for Hollywood studios, chose to apply a style of writing for his new novel which was deprived of the "elaborate and over lapping blankets of prose," as he defined it himself (Fitzgerald, 1964). The influences of a rich history of diverse factors are apparent in it. The present paper aims to analyze this novel as a historical literary master.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fitzgerald for all time felt a steady pressure from both his spectators and the critics. Spectators asked him to write less sincerely and the critics regarded him as a not serious writer and treated his works with a certain doubt. Peter Quennell (1982) described *Tender is the Night* as "a rather exasperating type of chic". Only some critics and some of his very close friends considered his work as great and blamed him for not employing his talent where it merited.

So far, many essays and articles have been written on Fitzgerald and his work and so many critics and scholars have tried their hands most specifically on *Tender is the Night* to reflect its wonder. It engages high amazement that this work should remind so much and have its impact remain so fresh for such a long time. Fussell (1952) talks of its "hard boiled humor and regarding Fitzgerald's progressive style calls it "as gigantic a landmark as the *Great Gatsby*". Kennedy(1993) articulates his disdain for the frolicsome kind of reading of Fitzgerald's *Tender* which would equate "historical fact with fictional recreation". Stern (2001) calls *Tender is the Night* "not a great American historical novel," but rather "a great American novel about history, a chronicle of post-war loss of the kinds of identities associated with stable societies, social altruism, and personal responsibility. The story of *Dick Diver* is a microcosm of that history". Kazin (1967) emphasizes the theme of fathers. The bad European fathers are unmistakably identified with the American Warrens and the good ones enrich their land and future with "a legacy of magnificent knowledge and civilization". Callahan (1996) suggests we even draw an analogy between *Dick's* significance as a man in his life story and on a wider scale as "a paradigm of the larger content of the international theme of history".

Thus, Fitzgerald builds up dreams and illusions which fall short of the existing possibilities. He is bared to the stupor of the ideality he had such strong faith in. Crashed by this corruption in his real life, he gives life to the heroes of his stories to represent the disillusionment everyman has always been forced to experience through the ruins of his false vision.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The foremost novel of Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* is the main texts to be examined in this paper. At first the researcher read the major printed and electronic resources that present the main issues related to the theme of disillusionment of American dream, and then a study biographical work on this literary master's life to get a clear picture of his background, his development as writer and his response to the age that he lived in.

The approach to this subject is eclectic, profiting from historical, social, and biographical approaches. A close reading of the mentioned texts will assist the revelation of Fitzgerald's process of disillusionment of *The American Dream*.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The magnificence of *Tender is the Night* and the rich content of its true entity were not recognized until the close of the twentieth century. Before that time, the book had always been superficially read as an insignificant story with a repetitive structure based on a shallow foundation. It was judged and criticized with a presupposition the critics and reviewers had developed surveying Fitzgerald's previous books. As a result, the book was contemplated contemptuously for a long time with no respect for the deep morally and intellectually substantial layers it bore.

While creating the characters of his fourth novel, especially Dick and Nicole, Fitzgerald was stimulated by some events which had occurred in his own life, the people he had met, such as Sara and Gerald Murphy, his wife, Zelda, her mental collapse, her affair with a naval officer, his own emotional conditions, his charm and later disillusionment by his early success, his ambitions and bewilderment, his alcohol addiction and its inevitable consequences, and also his convincing social allure. According to Fitzgerald's description, none of these facts would confirm that Dick could be identified with the author, as the common supposition suggests (Fitzgerald, 1964). So many critics would certainly diminish the book's massive inherent riches and the sense of the author and the features he bred in his novel. Some reviewers, presents Dick as the man of 1920s throughout the incidence of the events within the book and of 1930s when most current readers read and reviewed it rapidly.

"Fitzgerald ornately defines his approach towards the protagonist of the novel who was unbreakable with "the heightened promises of life", and was to be broken by means of his own idealism and the deceptive, illusory world surrounding him which had aimed at his destruction" (Tate, 2007).

So far, there are still so many false suppositions made of the way Fitzgerald structures his heroes. Fitzgerald had to revise the story several times to come to a final version that might decrease the vagueness concerning the chief causes and the readers' misperceptions of Dick's character, the hero of the book. Then, when he changed the chronological order of the story, he managed to magnify the richness of the material of the book. Cowley(1976) states that "there was a hesitation whether the author had intended to write about a whole group of Americans on the Riviera— that is, to make the book a social study with a collective hero— or whether he had intended to write a psychological novel about the glory and decline of Richard Diver as a person". Plainly by starting with Diver as a young doctor in Zurich, Fitzgerald declared that the novel is psychological story about Dick Diver, and that its social meaning is gained by addition or synecdoche. The other characters are grouped around him in their subordinate roles. From beginning to end Dick is the center of the novel.

Rosemary section in the final edition seems to have conserved its old appeal, but is not as strengthened as the last episodes in which the hero's steady decline is portrayed vehemently. Yet, the first part reminds a different impression in the new revision. We meet the recurrence of the image of a forgotten era which was once discarded with antagonism, and then again, amidst an overwhelming period, sought for uneasily. The last chapters portray Dick not as "the organizer of private gaiety, curator of a richly incrustated happiness" (Fitzgerald, 1934). This is the story of the progressive collapse of the man, who has lost the control over himself. "Different causes could explain his failure first the principles of the social aristocracy and its potentiality for corruption. And then the transference of his vitality to his psychic wife who by absorbing the essence of his life not only survived but also fortified her person" (Dyson, 1990). We can also survey the causes by analyzing his childhood world. Perhaps his drawing on all his resources to let everyone profit his energy had caused his emotional bankruptcy and then his decline. "Whatever the reasons were, definitely we can never come to any decisive conclusion. Yet, we are almost sure that he was progressing through a steady fall and was gently sinking into absolute obscurity" (Kazin, 1967).

Several themes are set in the context of this story. Some are concerned with the devastation of moralities, the chaotic humane relationships, and the corruption of humane values; war as an eminent theme stressing moral chaos, loss and search for identity as an overall theme, Europe and America, past and present, and black and white are among the most recognizable ones. Some other critics have notified other themes too; wealth, the movies, acting, swimming, the New Woman, the fathers, sun and moon, heat and coolness, can be pointed out as the most prominent ones. Reading the story deeply will lead the readers to a broader understanding of the text. The dominant setting is the chaotic Western world of post-war. Thus, new bindings between the content of *Tender* and the Western history in relation to World War I will be discovered. What matters mostly, is the puzzling state of identity.

Dick started out his journey to get hold of a bright future incarnated with infinite ideals, promises, and prospect, distinguished as he was structured with a multi-layer individuality, naive yet complicated, deeply romantic but strongly self-disciplined, extremely excited and hopeful, though intentionally yielding to moralities, educated and experienced, and backed with the inheritance from his forefathers. He is the manifestation of the ideal young, hopeful American

proud of his father's ministerial background and of his ancestors who founded a new history. Kazin emphasizes the theme of fathers and draws our attention towards the duality Fitzgerald believes to be implanted in the legacy of both American and European fathers who are classified as good and bad.

Dick Diver's father, a sincere minister, always followed his slogan of service and politeness. He looked up to his father as a genuine image of the glorious America, equipped with the idealism he has relied on. He sacrifices his resourceful self to be the source of love, salvation and "the last hope of a decaying clan" (Prigozy, 2002) and he is disposed to redeem, to serve, to heal, to create love, and be useful. That's where his allure lies.

Soon Dick become aware of all probable disillusion he had to confront on his way to achieve maturity. Yet, with no faith left for him and the markedly different man he had turned into, he struggled dreadfully to peruse the core of the idealism he had lost everything for and remain brave and kind in reaction to the damaged new world.

Dick's collapse of his utmost qualities and his vital energy is resulted from the permeating corruption of his surrounding world and faith in his pre-war romantic idealism. Dick's surname, Diver, signifies his unending attempt to dive into the moral discipline and identity, creativity, education, and the principles he has to follow like his father and aunts, the qualities which are portrayed in his grand talents and skills in aquatic sports. On the contrary, the word could also be used as a means of depicting his descent, and steady dive into destruction, immorality, privacy, and finally absolute solitude. Fitzgerald indicates Dick's gradual degeneration by once describing him as "Lucky Dick," "the big stiff" (Fitzgerald, 1934), and later as a man who has gone hobbler and has lost the ability to "rise on the aquaplane" (Fitzgerald). Relying on his vital, inspiring self, Dick features the symbol of the American redeemer of mankind, to sacrifice all his physical and mental superiorities to save the world and to be the best psychologist. He is the personification of the new world when still shining with the glories of pride and hope, bright ideas, promises, ambitious and idealistic expectations.

Fitzgerald's declares some informal details in this story and with this he aims to point out his fascination with the pre-war manners. Fitzgerald, as the demonstrator of 1920s and 1930s, mostly uses pre-war world background compounded of 19th century sensibilities as the settings of his novels. His characters, many images and attitudes he employs have also been under the influence of the pre-war hints. He desires to represent the values of manners, honor and courtesy of this sophisticated community despite its corrupt propensities. Thus, Dick implies a two – dimensional character to symbolize the young American in his era. Also playing the role of Doctor Richard Diver, he magnifies the ideology of his nineteenth century with its virtues and morality, the qualities obviously implanted in Fitzgerald's own person.

Tender is the Night is not actually believed to be a war novel, yet the best novel created in the lost generation, it focuses on the legacy of war with its firm appeal with the World War I as the book's convincing background. This setting is used to display both the pre-war and post-war worlds and their prominent disparities. Actually, Fitzgerald had never been able to free his mind from the preoccupation with war, what had brought devastating change about to all aspects of human life around the world. All Social, political, and cultural structures were deeply affected by war and its expected consequences. It had caused chaotic turbulences in the political systems of many countries as well. War, both had given rise to radical social and cultural disorders, and encouraged the cause of existential notions and motives in the society. The war ruined the old principles of the governmental and social structures in society and stressed dominance of the wealthy class.

Since it had caused a thoughtful sense of confusion, pessimism and disillusion as its outcome, the First World War in America was reflected in the form of a civil war between the loyal groups and the disenchanted post-war rebels. It raised chaos in principles of the nation and, destroyed the idealism of the Western man of the 18th and 19th and left him completely disappointed in his eternal quest for salvation. Fitzgerald, like Dick, sensed the tragedy of the end of their idealistic hope coming down to them from their good fathers. Yet, realizing its true nature and feeling in their lives, they disproved the dream and its promise as a fundamental, illusory essence to the impressive idea of America. Fitzgerald encompasses his insight of the effect of war on man's life and mind and the vast momentum it gave to the several changes in history and man's view. To Dick no devotion is left in the post-war man to inspire him to sacrifice his life for his morals. Dick grieves over the dead humanitarian and expected world of steady principles which was falsified from the old-fashioned idealism he had inherited as a historical legacy from his fathers: American faith; his lovely safe world, from the early days of 17th century to the immediate pre-war past losing which he never felt at ease again.

In search of a reasonable logic for his choice of war as the setting of his story Fitzgerald digs deep down into the history of the 17th and 18th centuries of Dick's ancestors' American context. There he finds a chain of wars all mingled each leading straight to the other. Thus, he moulds his international theme into the theme of war; the American Civil War adumbrates World War I and the 17th-century anarchy and violence and the American Indian wars are contemplated as an impetus to the Civil War. "Fitzgerald hints at Abe's drunken involvement with Swedish and American blacks in Paris as a war between hostile and friendly Indians" (Fitzgerald, 1934); Fitzgerald gets the opportunity to light up the connections he has continually referred to. Later to uphold exhaustive pattern of war as a basis for the mixture of the main idea, once more, he points that "Dick's career was bidding its time, again like Grant's in Galena..." (Fitzgerald).

Thus, Fitzgerald concentrates on war as an influential pattern to viaducts the gap between past and present. We may also foresee Dick's collapse or, the decline of America's idealism, and its promises of a new world of willingness, through Abe North's decline. Furthermore, he creates national figures by making an association between Dick and Abe

and then relating the two to America. As a result, their personal histories could be disguised with national history since they both mirror America's heightened capacity for a romantic life. They also illustrate the dream, and the ideal new visions on which America was founded. The degeneration of the great Abe of the North to an Abe North is an appliance Fitzgerald employs to infer the obliteration of the ideal of the American context inherited from Lincoln.

There are many references to war in the novel among which there are two battle scenes for instance. Fitzgerald does not care for much sentimentality here. The corrupted world he had sacrificed his own world to and the principles he had valued to guide it to salvation, as well as the disturbing annoyance he felt after he realized the battle was not worth fighting. The only thing that helps him cope with the price he has paid to buy Nicole's freedom is the torment he feels for his false recognition from the beginning. His foolishness was falling in love with Nicole in the first place. Thus, he tries to overcome the feeling of hate for himself.

In the last scene Fitzgerald brings all the themes to a stable resolution. He truly hush-up conflicting motifs which start clash and war: past and present, the sexes, wealth and dependence, new irresponsible freedom and old disciplined responsibilities, critical egotism and old courtesies and honor, reliable morality, impetuous fulfillment and considerate self – discipline, the fathers, both American and European, who left a destruction of identity and culture. Before the World War I, both men and women have decided roles and identities on which they could rely. The fact is that war broke all systems of traditional thoughts, sentimentalism, and culture. Rosemary, the symbol of American virtue, achieves her sexual freedom and economic independence. Mary North gains riches, and position through a second marriage. In the uproar of a post-war chaos, Mary, the American woman, becomes even more a feudal subject to her man than she had ever been to Abe. As for American Nicole, from the long list of men, "none of whom she needs obey or ever love" (Fitzgerald, 1934), she chooses the wholly overmastering male. Fitzgerald chooses to show the disastrous post-war world by representing a group of ultramodern women with corrupt interests.

It is noticeable that Fitzgerald did not absolutely believe the feminist disturbances in the society. On the contrary, he expressed rebel impulses towards the shibboleths that had been determining and regulating the lives of the enormous number of the population before the war. However, he was not concerned with feminist movement and its main beliefs. He was mostly after the symbolic role it could play to meet the supplies of the essential change. Fitzgerald was to observe the challenge to make a change in the anarchic economical social, political, and cultural orders. Fitzgerald makes the notion of freedom of all moral standards in the theme of the New Woman who was unconventional from the whole restrictive rules of the past. This, he skillfully nurtures as one of the major concerns of the novel and associates it with his other main points.

Fitzgerald argues that following the idea of the women's liberation from the pre-war identities and limiting standards in a recently constituted world of the post-war is intended to finish up in a succession of a childish immaturity. It may also be relevant to men's condition in the new, unstable world concerning their social status, identity and the new tendencies and features they acquire from the society. Women stripped off from the preceding traditions and are in a continual effort to follow men's motto which Fitzgerald questions its validity. In his novel, he observes that by the obliteration occurring to social institutions and values and with money as the dominating force to gain power and social stature, the only obtainable means for both men and women to make a new system of morals would be nature, selfish wishes, and personal perspectives. The idea could be pursued in the post-war aristocracy and the widespread capitalism of the era. Released from the restricted world of the past, by the war and its supplementary social and economic ramification, into an amorality which require no sense of responsibility, men and women practiced a sense of immature irresponsibility. Without his sense of responsibility he is deteriorated into the level of the supplies of power, money, or desire. Later Baby Warren follows her ancestor's example as a symbol of the fickleness of aristocracy. Baby, as an ideal, descendent of Warren inheritance, has always been in quest of a doctor to buy the responsibility of the Warrens to him to take care of Nicole and to reimburse for their short-comings. In his novel, Fitzgerald entails that the disdainful irresponsibility of the Warrens testifies to their unfounded identity. They really belong to nowhere, although everywhere is home for them. He observes that the breakdown of American culture is originated from the irresponsibility and hateful characteristics of Warren like inheritors of America whose popular culture is molded into immature sentimentality.

Rosemary's Daddy displayed "a father complex so obvious that Dick winced for all psychologists" (Fitzgerald, 1934). The movie and the role Rosemary played in it depicts Fitzgerald's attitude towards the respect the American social system pays to crooks like Nicole's and Baby's daddy who have spoiled American culture with their corrupt origin prosperity. Here, Fitzgerald blends all the most significant themes pervading the novel: war, Warren fathers and their inheritance and the New Woman. The novel includes a fine comparison between Devereux and his European complement Senor Pardo Ciudad Real to suggest the common international corruption. The luxurious Hotel des Trois Mondes, symbolically refers to both internationalism and the sexual demi-monde. Furthermore, it has turned into an international fact that the new children declare their freedom within the corrupt legacy their parents have left them. At the end of the novel, the victorious enduring ones along with the inheritors of this spiteful legacy are the homosexual, Royal Dumphrey, the Mckiscos), as well as Mrs. Abrams. On the contrary, the Diver fathers, those standing as the icons of "good instincts, respect, courtesy, and into social forgetfulness, all alone, Dick stands at his father's grave and hopelessly says goodbye to the huge cultural heritage which is doomed to obliteration: "Good-by, my father-good-by all my fathers." (Fitzgerald).

Later, Fitzgerald learns to discard the idea that the disturbance of the Romantic idealism and ambitions lies in the decline of the society in which the visionary resides. In other words, he delivers the idea to the reader that the super dream is responsible for its breakdown since it bears the heart of corruption in its very existence. It is a self-begotten, pained, and illusory image with no real referent outside the mind of the dreamer. In a totally unsentimental fade – out, Dick resigns to his loneliness in his final return to the awful emptiness of his “Sole self” in upstate New York- “almost certainly in that section of the country, in one town or another” (Fitzgerald, 1934). The hero leaves off the stage and we lose sight of him without getting a chance to express our compassion or regret for his dying fall.

V. CONCLUSION

In his fourth novel, *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald inserts his sensitiveness and his knowledge of the brutalities in civilized people’s behavior while appreciating their shallow vitality which, in his last novel, is really affected and drawn away by undercurrent unhappiness. First of all the hero, preserves his dominance to all the other personae all through the novel. Thus, looking for the reasons of his collapse is significant. A variety of explanations are provided among which we can state his wife’s enormous wealth. The book casts an intensely pessimistic outlook on the subject and relates Dick’s doubts over his good fortunes and achievements in his bright magnificent days to its puritan roots. Scott Fitzgerald arranges the whole thing so that life would take the responsibility to do it for him. *Tender Is the Night* restates the indispensable theme and complicates it. Diver is the man with the inborn capacity for romantic speculate, temporarily a member of the American leisure class of the twenties. His intellectual and creative energies have been diverted from normal inspired channels and expended on the effort to avert, for a handful of the very rich, the American dream from revealing its frightening realities.

Dick is a product of his civilization and shares its characteristic dearth: the illusions of everlasting strength and health, and of the essential decorum of people; illusions of a nation, the lies of generations of American politicians, historians, publicists, fireside poets, and similar confidence-men, who had no such easy excuse. This intrinsic romantic has been further damaged, by the particular forms of sentimentality of his own generation.

The man is potentially noble, but with the fatal flaw of imagination conditioned by the superficial symbols and incentives of his culture that is brought against the conditions of enticement represented by Nicole, the granddaughter of a “self-made American capitalist”, and of a German Count, and her family is placed in perspective by Fitzgerald’s recurrent analogies with feudal aristocracy. Yet behind this frontage of glamour and power lies unnatural desire and parody.

Through Nicole, Fitzgerald conveys, all that is sexually and socially pleasing in youth and beauty. Only at the end of the novel she has aged. She is an empty child, representative of her social class, of the etiquette and morals of the 20es, and of the world of principles for which America, like Diver, was once more selling its soul. But it is mainly Nicole’s appearance of everlasting youth that allows Fitzgerald to exploit her as a central element in the narrative correlative he is constructing for his vision of American life. Uncommonly he handles her in a way that goes beyond social criticism, entering, and the realm of religious apprehension. Diver, at the end of the novel, with full awareness of the oath, blesses the Riviera Beach before returning to the dimness of small-town America. He never neglected to keep it grounded in a precise social and economic world, and it is in this realm that most of his correspondences are established. Nicole is the typifying object of her class and society, particularly in the terms she proposes for the obliteration of her victim’s moral and rational integrity. Basically some controlling lines of theme can be observed in this novel. The man of imagination is damaged by that American dream. On the historical level, the critique is of the error of American romanticism in attempting to exceed and thus escape historical responsibility. On the economic level, the critique is of the lethal beauty of American capitalism, its destructive appeal and irresponsibility. On the religious level, Fitzgerald intermittently insinuates the possibility that human kind are prone to muddle themselves with the obvious similarities between the city of man and the city of God, paying scant attention to their more radical disparity. Rosemary Hoyt brings from Hollywood to Europe the latest American version of the dream of youthful virtue and through her eyes, Fitzgerald gives us his first complicated glimpses of the Divers, and their hangers-on, at the Americanized Riviera. Because of Rosemary’s sensitive but undisciplined insights, Fitzgerald can insist on the ironic tensions between the richest texture of social form and the hidden actuality of moral agony. Rosemary manifests the effects of Hollywood sentimentality on the powers of American insight and imagination. Immature and egotistic, she provides one more symbol of the corruption of imagination in American civilization; without resources for escape such as are available to Dick Diver.

Rosemary is for this novel the objectified image of Fitzgerald’s new world. Only intermittently, Dick Diver escapes the limits of this frightening world and only as the delusion fades, he achieves a minimal salvation, a few devastated fragments of reality, including the secrecy of professional and social breakdown.

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