

## Depiction of the Theme of Truth and Illusion in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the theme of truth and illusion in *Tender is the night*. The novel tells the story of American Psychologist Dick Diver and his wife, the wealthy but psychologically unstable Nicole. The novel relates the disintegration and collapse of its hero Dick Diver on the moral, psychological and social levels. Dick begins his life with a moral advise from his father that "nothing could be superior to good instincts, honour, courtesy and courage". But the pressure of a materialistic age nullify his beliefs in the essential goodness of man.

**Keywords:** jazz age, money, tender is the night, dick diver, nicole

### Introduction

By the time Fitzgerald set out to write *Tender is the Night*, the jazz age had completed its youth and was fading into decrepitude. The young generation that danced to the music of jazz, that forgot every moral and social responsibility in the excitement of sex and liquor that diverted its attention to the thirties. The 1920's saw a break with the traditional set-up in America. The Great War had destroyed old perceived social conventions and the new ones developed. The young set themselves free especially, the young women, they shocked the older generation with their new hair style and clothes. They also went out without a man to look after them, went to all-night parties, drove motor cars, smoked in public and had sex before and after their marriage. After the horror of the First World War, the young generation mistrusted the older generation and did their own thing which flew in the face of the establishment.

### F. Scott Fitzgerald: *Tender is the Night*

The novel *Tender is the Night* focuses on the contradiction between Dick's idealism and the ugly reality of the materialist age in which he is living. As the world of Nightingale lures Keats, the world of the rich lures Dick Diver. On the one hand the Nightingale's world is a world of fulfilled romance and ecstasy, but on the other hand it is a world of night, silence and repose. Dick's decision to marry Nicole, who represents the attraction of sex and beauty on one hand and the deceased state of Western Civilization on the other, locks him with death. He knows from the very start of his career that the "price of intactness was incomplete". Also he knows that carrying with him this "incompleteness", he will forever will be attracted to the Elkins world and consequently will be incapable of giving himself wholly to the discipline of psychiatry. But Dick marries Nicole out of his tendency to take unnecessary risks, to match himself against impossible odds, and to "play close to the lines". The psychological problems that dick invites by marrying Nicole are disastrous. The social implications of their relationship also play an important role in his crack up. The series of compromises that he has to make with his values to adjust in the world of rich seals his fate.

The hero in *Tender is the Night* is a brilliant young psychiatrist, son of a poor but respectable clergyman. He acquired in his youth all the romantic possibilities of life, a scholarship of Yale, a Rhodes fellowship to Oxford, a medical degree at John Hopkins and three years of Post Doctorate studies with the finest Viennese Psychiatrist. At Zurich, Switzerland he falls in love with his patient a young beauty, Nicole, a rich heiress of warren's fortunes. Nicole's illness stems from her father's incestuous attack on her and love for Dick was a transference, caused by her mental disorder, Dick's love and sacrifice spell a new life for her.

He has a brilliant start as a scholar. He has a 'romantic readiness', an eagerness to expand himself for others, to dedicate his life to Nicole despite the advice of a Prof. that this is a professional situation. But the love battle for Nicole leaves him utterly spent and defected. In his chivalry and "willingness of heart" he allows himself to get involved. He battles with his own ambition of becoming a great psychologist. For the moment he manages to keep a little balance between the idyllic and the intellectual, then "cracks like an old plate". His marriage with Nicole makes him a partner to the vast Warren money. But the sudden acquisition of great wealth eclipse his professional ambitions and leads him to a way of life through endless social gaieties. He realizes that in order to fulfil himself as a doctor, he must reject a hedonistic side of himself for whom the meaning of life 'la jole de vivre' (entireness). At the same time that he realizes this, and he also suspects that should he reject his hedonistic self, he might be denying a part of himself that is more important to the fundamental Dick Diver his psychiatry.

Dick knows that a doctor patient marriage would be unwise. But he compromises with his career. In the beginning of Diver's marriage, he has no thought of giving up his practice. But in the early years of their marriage, however, the seeds are sown which must eventually find their fruition in Dick's falling away from his profession and in his surrendering to his desires for luxury. From the day that Dick decided to marry Nicole his life has been fragmented by his attempt to live in two different worlds.

When the novel begins, in June 1925, Dick and Nicole have been married for six years, and are living with their two children at the villa Diana, the luxurious home they have built on the Riviera with Nicole's money. During their six years of marriage Dick has developed husband – doctor attitude toward Nicole. With each recurrence of her illness he has soothed her anxieties and brought her back to sanity by recreating for her a world in which she finds some measure of stability. When Dick meets Rosemary on the Riviera, he has for the past six years been alternately acting as father doctor and lover husband to Nicole. At the age of thirty four, then, Dick is in a difficult situation. Instead of being free of psychiatry to enjoy 'la joie de vivre', he is bound by his sense of obligation to the care of Nicole. Dick's subsequent failure to find fulfilment in Rosemary and his realization that only a life in attendance upon Nicole awaits him combine to destroy his desire for life. The result is a fragmented Dick Diver dependent upon his drinking and broken by the twelve years he has given to Nicole.

It is entirely never clear why a young, brilliant handsome idealistic and charming doctor, engaged in serious research married a neurotic, beautiful and rich heiress who has been his patient. Among the various research put forth two seem most acceptable. One is that Dr. Dick Diver truly falls in love with Nicole. There appears to have been a combination of love and pity working on him. Her beauty may have attracted him and appealed to Dick and after having encouraged her unconsciously he may have felt cruel to withdraw and being the gentleman he was, it was the honourable thing to do. Fitzgerald is of the view that Dick's indiscriminate yearning for love leads him to seek it in abortive or self - destructive relationships. Dick is attracted to "sick women" first to Nicole, then to the hallucinatory artist patient at the clinic, then he is attracted towards Rosemary, and later the adolescent daughter of another woman patient at the clinic

Fitzgerald presents a vivid picture of modern social realities and renders with full intimacy the intricacies and complexities of the psychological makeup of characters chosen as representative to typify the governing mood of the period. Keeping in mind the state of crises in the life of modern man, Fitzgerald tries to define and illuminate the problems and difficulties the crises situation posed before the individual.

### References

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