

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*: Cons and Pros of the Narrative Method and Technique

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Abstract—Most critics tackle Fitzgerald's works thematically, whereas what distinguishes his fictional narratives is his magnificent style, suggestive language, and innovative narrative methods and techniques. This is quite evident in *The Great Gatsby* and other pieces such as *The Last Tycoon*, "The Mountain as Big as the Ritz," and the autobiographical piece *The Crack Up*. *Tender is the Night* is among these masterpieces which is our major concern in this paper. Yet still, this novel witnessed some controversial issues in its narrative technique and method. The study of the narrative method and technique in *Tender is the Night* has no less significance in the literary world than it has in *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, Fitzgerald mounted his artistic maturity and craftsmanship in this novel despite all the controversial issues that surrounded the novel's first publication. The present study sheds light on the cons and pros of the narrative technique and method in both versions of *Tender is the Night* with necessary reference to the development of the events in the novel.

Keywords—Fitzgerald, Narrative method and technique, *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver, Nicole.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the controversial issues in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (1934) is that it came to existence 9 years after the publication of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) (Luong Merry B. 2010, p. 22). The themes, ideas, title, and material have been subject to recurrent changes during those years. This is partly because things in the US and world economy and henceforth social and cultural trends had changed rapidly. The Jazz Age, which Fitzgerald was pioneer and representative of, was over by 1929; it was, as described by Fitzgerald himself, "reluctant to die outmoded in its bed, leaped to spectacular death in October 1929" (Fitzgerald, *The Crack Up*. 1965, p. 13), and followed by the 1930s Great Depression during which *Tender is the Night* was made and published. The economic depression influenced people's manners and mores significantly worldwide; they were more concerned with the rising cultural, philosophical, and intellectual ideas and thoughts than the romantic and Jazz-Age issues (Mizener, 1959, pp. 220-221).

The second point (Luong, 2010, p. 21) is that Fitzgerald was very much preoccupied with his domestic problems, particularly the ones with his wife, Zelda's sickness of schizophrenia, which he employed in *Tender is the Night*. In effect, the novel did not get its due attention by the time of its first publication in 1934. Besides, Fitzgerald thought the problem lied in his narrative technique because the narrative

did not take a chronological sequence, it rather used what is called flashback method in cinema. Moreover, this is the third point in the narrative technique of the story. For this particular reason, Fitzgerald made several changes to the novel later on including the title itself until the novel gained its due reputation after Fitzgerald's premature death in 1940 (Eble, 1963, pp. 135-138). The narrative method and technique *Tender is the Night* is composed of five books. Each one contains several chapters. Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, there is only the author's voice to narrate the story; in other words, the story has no first or second narrators, but the novelist's hidden voice to convey it. Here, still Fitzgerald follows a certain technique which is to distribute his moral judgments among the characters as in the case of Tommy Barban and others. What distinguishes each book from the others is a certain angle of consideration through which Fitzgerald delivers his story. His voice is conveyed through the eyes of his characters. Each one looks at the events from a certain angle; and the author's voice shifts from one to another stage by stage and book by book. Dick Diver, Rosemary Hoyt, and Dick again play the primary angles, whereas characters such as Franz Barban and, at the end of the story, Nicole's deliver minor angles (Eble, 1963, pp. 135-138).

Dick's angle comes first in "Case Study" which is the Book One in 1934 edition, but Book Two in 1936 edition. "Case Study" exposes the setting and the whole situation through Doctor Dick Diver's eyes both as a romantic genteel hero and

as a psychiatrist who is allowed to know and consider Nicole Warren's mental and psychological condition. In "Rosemary's Angle," the scene on the Riviera, the Diver's marital life as well as their group of friends are all seen through the innocently fascinated eyes of Rosemary Hoyt. Then, Dick Diver's angle turns to capture the incidents inside and outside the family till his dissipation. Only then, the angle shifts from his eyes. As a balance, Nicole is not allowed to see things through her own eyes until her final recovery, and thus, the novel ends with the way she and her class (represented by her sister Baby) look at things while Dick Diver vanishes into the obscure towns of New York (Luong, 2010, p. 42). By October 1933, the manuscript of what Fitzgerald then called Doctor Diver's Holiday (an early title of *Tender is the Night*) was finished. Before the first draft was published in Scribner's Magazine for January 1934, Fitzgerald decided to change the novel's name to *Tender is the Night*. The book came out under this title on April 12, 1934, when Fitzgerald replanned the novel early in 1932 (Mizener, 1959, pp. 345-347).

When the original version of the novel was first published, the general mood of its failure made Fitzgerald demand a republication of it to rearrange its form. In the only edition published during his lifetime, the novel begins from the middle of the story, with the Diver family at the peak of their popularity, the charmed center of a circle of careless hedonists spending their vacation on the Riviera. A vague but early hint that there is something wrong soon discloses when Nicole suddenly breaks down in a hysterical fit at the end of Book One (Luong, 2010, p. 22).

Book Two opens with a flashback to 1917, when Dr. Diver arrives in Zurich to complete his studies. His relationship with Nicole, first as a doctor-patient, then as a lover is explained, and the story is carried beyond the point the novel began to show the beginning of his decline in 1928. In 1936, when a new edition was suggested, Fitzgerald was thinking to revise the method of narration in *Tender is the Night*, but it was not published then. Unfortunately, it was only after his death there was found among his effects a revised copy on which he had written: "This is the final version of the book as I would like it" (Mizener, 1959, pp. 220-221). Malcolm Cowley's edition of this 1951 edition follows the outline that Fitzgerald jotted in his notebook:

- I. Case History (1911-1919)
- II. Rosemary's Angle (1919-1925)
- III. Casualties (1925)
- IV. Escape (1925-1929)
- V. The Way Home (1929-1930)

And according to Cowley, both of the editions have their virtues as well as flaws. In the last version, the story gives a tragic emphasis to Dick Diver's downfall by an initial account of his early promise and his fatal meeting with Nicole, but it sacrifices one of the artistic elements which is the sense of awesome mystery and fascination which is preserved in "Rosemary's Angle" as Book One in the original version (Cowley, 1963, p. 9). To provide authenticity, Fitzgerald deploys this novel technique of using several angles to narrate the story.

II. DICK DIVER'S ANGLE

With the aim of tackling the method and technique of narrating *Tender is the Night*, it is inevitable to take significant slices of the story into consideration in a chronological sequence of events. Fitzgerald begins his second version of the novel with "Case History," the story opens on the protagonist Dr. Dick Diver, a 26-year American scholar of medicine in Zurich. The history of Dick's scholarship goes back to 1914 when he was an Oxford Rhodes Scholar from Connecticut to have one final year at John Hopkins (home) and took his degree. Then, in 1916, he could manage to get to Vienna to study psychology. However, after being discharged from the army, "instructions from his local board were that he was to complete his studies in Zurich and take a degree as he had planned." During this severe period of Europe's history, Dick set himself to his task seriously and wrote many pamphlets which he arranged to be "the backbone of the book he published in 1920" (Fitzgerald, 1963, pp. 19-20).

For the purpose of setting the core problem of the story, Fitzgerald creates two antagonistic parties made to share a love story and subsequently a marital life. The conflict is made by attributing the first party in his protagonist Dr. Dick Diver to the genteel tradition of health, culture, and social ethics, whereas the second party represented by his beloved wife Nicole Warren belongs to psychological and moral sicknesses, material power and crooked manners and morality of the very rich American stratum. Dr. Diver's career as a psychiatrist paves the way to a fragile ground of such a relationship. Fitzgerald's definition of his cultivated hero is clearly applied to Dick. He is made open to the promises of life before him as one of the gifted young Americans. That was a "heroic period" in Dick's life, he was charming, and he used to inspire the people around him with his affection and good health for which his friends at Yale University used to nickname him as "Lucky Dick" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 20). Dick is described as serious and brilliant by his friend and coworker Franz (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 259).

By this cultural and moral exposition of his hero's background, Fitzgerald prepares the reader to anticipate Dick Diver's disillusionment by any practical experience of his ideal manners. Besides, Dick is just "like Grant, lolling in his general store in Galena, is ready to be called to an intricate destiny" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 22). Here, the writer makes a comparison between Dick Diver and Ulysses Grant (1822-1885), the 19th president of the U.S.A. (1869-1877), a republican. He was the commander-in-chief of the Union army during the American Civil War (1861-1865). His administration was marked by partisan politics and corruption (Watson, ed. "Grant" P. 460. Longman Modern Dictionary. 1976). According to the American history, Grant was an idealist who believed in the foundations of the pioneer Puritan Fathers. Ironically enough, when this idealist American hero wanted to emancipate the colored Americans, he committed mass butchery in the Civil War. And when he was elected to succeed Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the USA, he was betrayed by his entourage who were later called the corrupt "Robber Barons." With this significant

comparison between the two idealists Dick Diver and Grant, the story of *Tender is the Night* begins.

It is in Dohmler's asylum, Zurich where Dick gets introduced the 1st time to his friend Franz who delivers Nicole Warren's case history to him. The place is itself described by Franz as "...we are a rich person's clinic," a hint to affiliate psychological and moral sicknesses to the very rich people (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 23ff). Franz starts narrating Nicole Warren's case history to Dick. After reading Nicole's card "Diagnosis: Divided personality.... The fear of men is the symptom of the illness" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 14). As Franz goes on in detailing the case, the reader comes to disclose more about a father-daughter incestuous affair that eventually made the girl collapse into schizophrenia. "After her mother died when she was little," says Mr. Warren to Franz, "she used to come into my bed every morning, sometimes she'd sleep in my bed.... We were just like lovers – and then all at once we were lovers – and after it happened I could have shot myself...." (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 35). These are the people with whom Dick is to confront in a mutual love affair and marriage; they are the very symptoms of the "God damned degenerate" world of the American rich where the simplest heavenly relationship of a father and daughter turns into incest and assassination of a "little thing" beauty.

After this brief presentation to the corrupt antagonist the Warrens' sick realm, Franz asks Dick about his future plans. "I've only got one, Franz," says Dick enthusiastically, "and that's to be a good psychologist – maybe to the greatest one that ever lived," then Franz replies: "That's very good – and very American" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 37). Hence, Dick's future wholesome ambitions are put against the Warrens' past sins. With this romantic readiness for the possibilities of life together with the sense of nostalgia toward the old illusions of morality, Dick Diver is prepared to be seduced by the physical features and sensuous voice of Nicole Warren. Tracing the impact of Nicole's sensuous inviting voice while singing to Dick compared to her father's claim "she used to sing to me," Nicole herself becomes the germ of corruption in her atmosphere (Fitzgerald, 1963, p.39). And here lies the significance of the lines Fitzgerald borrowed from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" as a title and epigraph for this novel:

Already with thee *Tender is the Night*,

.....

..... But here there is no light.

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways

The comparison is made clear between the nightingale's singing voice with the tender night and the verdurous gloomy atmosphere and "mossy ways." Dick is quite aware of Nicole's demonic figure coming out of the enchanted wood by the moonlight; "as if this was the exact moment when she was coming from a wood into clear moonlight" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 41). Using this suggestive language, Fitzgerald sets the atmosphere and the plot, introduces the problem through ambivalent backgrounds and ambitions of his characters.

III. ROSEMARY'S ANGLE

One of the privileges of the original version of *Tender is the Night* is beginning the novel with "Rosemary's Angle." The presentation of the Divers and their circle through the eyes of a new comer, Rosemary Hoyt, the star of Daddy's Girl. Fitzgerald describes Rosemary as being "so young and innocent... embodying all the immaturity of the race, cutting a new cardboard paper doll to pass before its empty harlot's mind" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 137). The rich people summoned on the Divers' "bright tan prayer rug of a beach" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 69) are unlike any Americans she has ever encountered, yet she observes that their joy is caused by the existence of a single person. Being captivated by Nicole's beauty and Dick's charm, Rosemary has a sense of "a conviction of home coming, of a return from the derisive and salacious improvisations of the frontier" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 101).

Still in her 18 with an immature views and virginal world where her romantic dreams are transformed into vivid shades, Rosemary is made to see Dick as if he has recreated Eden (Sklar, 1967, p. 270). The whole place is envisaged by her as a temple and Dick as a high priest. Confessing that she loves him, Rosemary almost kneels "feeling the smooth cloth of his dark coat like a chasuble" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 105), and while she is reacting to their "expensive simplicity," she is unaware that their sacred charm, "the nursery-like peace and good will, the emphasis on the simpler virtues, was part of desperate bargain with the gods and had been attained through struggles she could not have guessed at" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 88).

Being applied with these immature romantic naiveté, Fitzgerald employs Rosemary's character and vision to make a keen contrast between a simple eye's attitude of beauty and charm against the ugly reality lurking underneath that surface. Eventually, Rosemary herself becomes one of such god-like "high priest's" victim. The conflict is made clearer in "Case History." It indicates the strain imposed on Dick by his effort to draw others into his vision of an earthly paradise. Dick's attempt, as put by Edwin Fussel, is "to prevent, for a handful of the very rich, the American dream from revealing its nightmarish realities" (Fussel, 1963, p. 50).

IV. NICOLE'S EYES

Disintegration is at the core of *Tender is the Night*. And at the abyss of this disintegration lies Nicole's image (Shapiro, 2016, p. 157): Rich, corrupt, racist, and empty of illusions, as Rosemary sees her: "She sat in the car, her lovely face set, controlled, her eyes brave and watchful, looking straight ahead toward nothing" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 81). According to Fussel, her image is a personification of the vacuumed concept of Progress in "Fitzgerald's Brave New World." Being her psychiatrist and husband, instead of recovering her from her sickness, Dick gets himself infected by her moral disease and becomes corrupt and thus gets through what he later calls an "emotional bankruptcy" (Fitzgerald, "The Crackup," 1965). As a balance, this leads Dick to

downfall to a virtual incestuous love affair with the innocent Daddy's Girl, Rosemary. Dick's fall is balanced by Nicole's climb to completeness: "You ruined me, did you?" says he to his recovering wife. And when Tommy Barban, Nicole's new lover, advises her to prevent Dick from drinking, she is amazed as if realizing her recovery at last: "I tell Dick what he should do or shouldn't do!" (Fitzgerald. 1963. pp. 292-3).

This disintegration leads to Dick's loss of confidence in himself and in all his beliefs of a good will. Therefore, he gives in to excess and dissipation. The last confrontation between him and Nicole is significant. Here, Dick seems to suffer the symptoms of his wife's sickness, whereas she speaks in a confident and sarcastic tone. "Don't touch me.... Why did you come, Nicole? I can't do anything for you anymore. I'm trying to save myself," says Dick. However, her rhetorical question afterward is a revelation and an end to the preset conflict: "From my contamination?" (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 320).

From that point onward, Fitzgerald begins to project the rest of Dick's decline through Nicole's eyes. With his loss of confidence and disintegration, Dick's angle retreats to give way to his antagonist to conclude the story in which case Dick retreats and vanishes to be a mere reference at the end of the story. The book closes with fragmentary reference to Dick's mediocre career as a small town medical practitioner in New York; Dick Diver's figure recedes into a vague distance (Fitzgerald, 1963, p. 334).

V. CONCLUSION

F. Scott Fitzgerald was obsessed with innovation. After the narrative success of *The Great Gatsby*, he spent long years writing, renaming, and reshaping *Tender is the Night* even after its first publication in 1934. The most problematic issue in the novel is that it has two methods in the narrative technique: The 1934 edition which begins from the middle of the story with a naïve new-start actress Rosemary's angle. The second edition that went to publication after Fitzgerald's premature death in 1940, the novel starts in a chronological sequence of events according to his will and final revision. This method is on the one hand. On the other, we have a new

narrative technique used by Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*. Yet regardless of these problems, Fitzgerald comes out with a novel style in applying objectivity to the story.

Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, where Fitzgerald employs Nick Caraway as both a major character and narrator, in *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald uses his own voice as a narrator in the first person, but this voice is materialized through certain characters' eyes and angles such as Dick Diver, Rosemary Hoyt, Franz, and Nicole in the end of the story. All these subjective views, whether professional, sympathetic, or naïve add a collective objectivity to the authenticity of the story; the authenticity that is necessary to story to be accepted and appreciated. These new methods and techniques are quite peculiar to Fitzgerald's craftsmanship in the art of narration.

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