

**FITZGERALD'S DICK DIVER:
A WARRIOR FADING INTO OBSCURITY**

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Tender Is the Night traces the decline, failure, and retreat of Doctor Richard (Dick) Diver, the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's last complete novel. Armed with pre-Civil War codes of courage, integrity and honesty, Diver fights a losing battle against the pressures and temptations of a post-World War I world, a world dominated by the "new" woman, dedicated to money and leisure, and characterized by corruption and dissipation. Tender Is the Night is a novel of opposites, of horn-locked antagonists struggling desperately to maintain their independence. The basic--and central--conflict of the novel is not external, however, but internal. The title of the book is taken from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and, as Sergio Perosa remarks, "bears a vague hint of dissolution and death, a foreboding of the protagonist's gradual sinking into darkness and oblivion."¹ Dick Diver, similar to the persona in "Ode to a Nightingale," is a man divided within himself. He wants to be both the scientist and the romantic, but for him the two roles are mutually exclusive and, Hamlet-like, he wavers fatally in his selection. The son of a poor minister, Diver feels as much attraction to the temple's money changers, who can underwrite the romantic life, as he does to the pure altar of psychiatry. His inability to resolve his own internal civil war, to choose between science and romance, leads him inevitably into an external

¹Sergio Perosa, The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald, trans. Charles Matz and the author (Ann Arbor, 1965), p. 116.

conflict triggered by his marriage to his social and philosophic opposite, Nicole Warren, a wealthy girl from Chicago. His values are those of the old Southern aristocracy inherited from his father, a Southerner from Virginia who as a young man migrated to the North after the Civil War. Ill-equipped, the son is thrust into a world which he does not comprehend and into a struggle which he is fated to lose. Dick Diver is a flawed warrior irresolutely defending his pre-Civil War codes against the gradual encroachments of a new post-World War I society which ultimately defeats him and forces him, "the last hope of a decaying clan,"² into an obscure retreat.

This study will be based upon the "final version" of Tender Is the Night.³ The "final version," first published in 1948 and edited by Malcolm Cowley, focuses more sharply and consistently upon the flawed Dick Diver and his story; the reorganization of the novel, which Fitzgerald himself had undertaken before his death, makes clearer the reasons for Diver's decline. The reorganization stresses, among other things, the relationship between Dick Diver and the war motif, and thus better explains his inability to function in the post-war world; it more vividly portrays Diver as the

²Tender Is the Night, ed. Malcolm Cowley, in Three Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1953), p. 321. All further references to the novel are to this text and will be indicated by parentheses in the body of the text.

³As various critics and biographers note, Fitzgerald first published TITN in 1934 under the most adverse conditions imaginable. Not only was his wife Zelda establishing a pattern of seemingly continuous mental disorder and Fitzgerald himself degenerating into a weakened mental and physical state, but the serialization of TITN in Scribner's Magazine was accorded neither the critical acclaim nor the popular support Fitzgerald needed and desired so badly to bolster his sagging self-confidence in his own powers as an artist. Because little time existed between magazine serialization and book publication, TITN was published in April 1934 without major revisions to the magazine version. Fitzgerald, however, was dissatisfied with the original version; he felt that the novel should begin with the young psychiatrist in Switzerland, rather than with Rosemary at the Riviera. He wanted the focus, from the very beginning, to be on Diver.

idealistic warrior who marches into battle unprepared for the rigors of warfare, who allows the enemy to subvert his two greatest weapons of truth and intelligence. "In all seventeen drafts," Milton Stern maintains, "it is clear that what Fitzgerald is concerned with is a presentation of the glittering golden world in its effect on the yearning, searching American, on the bitter arriviste, on the dewy naif, on the strong and callous rich, but most of all, on the innocent, expectant idealist."⁴

Henry Dan Piper's observation in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait that successive revisions of Tender Is the Night advance "from introspection to that broader vision of the relationship of man to society"⁵ precisely pinpoints another of Fitzgerald's objectives in his reorganization. Fitzgerald was a social historian who, in his novels and certain of his stories, managed to capture the essence of an event or an era with uncanny precision. In his fictional creations, Fitzgerald selected diverse, yet representative, elements and blended them together into a credible union deliberately aimed at the reader to make him aware of broad and powerful undercurrents in American society. Fitzgerald's "final version" of Tender Is the Night, representing his "most considered judgment,"⁶ gives us that broader vision of American society by more sharply emphasizing the backdrop of war against which Dick Diver plays out his role. As Stern perceptively remarks, "in the book's pervasive metaphor of war, Fitzgerald uses the Civil War as he uses World War I--as an end to innocence, as an end to the good gone days of graces and virtues dissolved into the corruption

⁴Milton R. Stern, The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Urbana, Ill., 1970), pp. 294-5.

⁵Henry D. Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York, 1965), p. 228.

⁶Matthew J. Bruccoli, The Composition of Tender Is the Night: A Study of the Manuscripts (Pittsburg, 1963), p. 199.