

# The Destruction of a Person is a Social Murder

-- An Analysis of the Inevitability of Dick's Decadence in *Tender is the Night*

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**Abstract:** Starting from the historical background of Jazz Age, this thesis analyzes the inevitability of the promising psychiatrist Dick in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* towards self destruction from the perspective of society. Dick's failure was destined because he could not be recognized by the upper class and could not escape from the cage of his time. His fervent dreams were incompatible with his time, so he was unable to rewrite the tragic ending.

**Keywords:** *Tender is the Night*; The Jazz Age; Self Destruction.

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## 1. Introduction

*Tender is the Night* is Fitzgerald's last novel, playing the elegy of the jazz era. The curtain of the story is opened by Hollywood actress Rosemary, and through her eyes, readers can see a young couple with unlimited reverence and respect. Husband Dick is a young and promising psychiatrist, and his wife Nicole's beauty and wealth make their marriage perfect in the eyes of the world. However, what's under the ideal is the ugly reality. Nicole is actually a product of incest, as her illicit association with her father fell into the abyss of mental disorders, and the arrival of Doctor Dick seemed to be a good medicine that healed Nicole of all her wounds about love. On one hand, Nicole's self-awareness awakened, she felt healed, and she began to hate all the places where she used to set Dick off like a planet orbiting the sun. On the one hand, Dick inevitably went towards self destruction, starting to drink, fight, and finally lost himself. The smell of alcohol in his breath ruined his great future; Fighting and causing trouble in a strange city almost blinded his one eye; He also hung out with Rosemary, conquered his disobedient body with a bold revolutionary spirit, and resolutely set out on the dance floor. In the end, he was mercilessly abandoned by Nicole and became a quack doctor in a small town. He was the last tragic subject of the Jazz Age with a romantic touch, possessing the inherent desires, restraint, indulgence, and persistence of that era.

## 2. Jazz Era: Coexistence of Glamour and Emptiness

"The individual constitutes society, reflects society, and cannot apart from society. The individual is a social entity, a 'whole', and an individual in a certain social relationship." [1] The tragic fate of Dick lies in that he is first and foremost a person who exists in a flashy society, wandering in the vanity fair of the upper class, and the society at his time is inevitably responsible for the occurrence of the tragedy of Dick. It was a crazy era, a difficult era, an era where young people despised life, indulged in joy, pursued money, and were passionate. It was the most expensive carnival era in history, filled with violence everywhere, and people's spirits gradually weakened until they collapsed. After World War I, American society put on a mask of false prosperity. Under the surface beauty, there are hidden crises. The psychological trauma

brought by the war and the unprecedented prosperity of material civilization made hedonism prevail, and nihilism stepped onto the historical stage. Dick's parties are always full of excitement, and occasionally being able to breathe fresh natural air between bursts of excitement is truly precious. People numb their nerves with alcohol and non-nutritious forms of entertainment, attempting to fill one void with another. But things always went betray, and the pleasure brought by excessive pursuit of material possessions backfired and brought about pain. Rosemary's urgent desire to become a Hollywood celebrity made her a victim of sexual exploitation; Abbe enjoys the reputation of being an excellent musician, but was beaten to death in an illegal tavern; Baby could never become happy throughout her life, because her emotions only truly exist when telling about these events; Dick, without exception, is also the loser of this carnival game. His traditional values, which were nurtured by his father, are fragile in the face of reality. His ambition to be an excellent psychologist was shattered in cups of absinthe, and ultimately ended up as a quack doctor. The reason for Dick's failure was that his opponent was too powerful, and throughout the entire era, he was cursed by history.

## 3. A tragic Stage Built Together

Dick embodies the quintessential American ideal - a young, ambitious man with the potential for greatness. His career as a psychiatrist, his happy marriage, and his social status all point to a fulfilling life. However, this idyllic picture is built on shaky foundations. Dick's wealth is inherited, not earned, and his access to elite circles depends on the whims of others. This dependence feeds his insecurity and reliance on external recognition, setting the stage for his eventual downfall. The cause of his destruction may appear to be a momentary confusion of reason, but it actually has deeper and more complex historical and social roots. Dick's tragic stage is not his solo play, but rather a co-constructed one by the upper class. In addition to Dick's personal choice mistakes, Nicole's exploitation and betrayal, Tommy's cold-blooded ruthlessness, Rosemary's departure, Baby's mockery, and Mary's hypocrisy and selfishness all paved the way for Dick's final self destruction. In this social murder case, everyone is the murderer.

### 3.1. The Marriage of Reason and Desires

The entanglement between reason and desire is vividly reflected in Dick. He is able to soberly judge the results of his own behavior and strive to guide the direction of things, while also being dominated by desire. He is like a pendulum swinging back and forth on both sides of reason and desire. When he first met Nicole, he did try his best not to have any other thoughts except healing her mental illness, but he loved the way she found herself beautiful, wealthy, and holding her hands high. Dick's medical intuition and Dohmle's sharp reminding told him to end his contact with Nicole. However, the marriage to Nicole could quickly integrate him into the upper class society, and he surrendered to the feet of wealth, power and beauty. The marriage to Nicole was a turning point in his life, and the emotional fight with Nicole after marriage made him physically and mentally exhausted. He has lost himself. Alcoholism became a part of his life, and when Dionysus approached him, he attempted to balance it with the power of Apollo and write a way to halve alcohol consumption, but all in vain. His rationality was also reflected in his last conversation with Rosemary, when he said that it started to change a long time ago, but it wasn't obvious at first, and after his mental breakdown, his attitude and behavior didn't change for a while. To some extent, he was falling soberly. When reason falls under the skirt of desire, life inevitably walks up to chaos.

### 3.2. Everyone is the Murderer

Dick's appearance was accompanied by gaze and admiration, but he left the stage in the image of a loser. After reading, readers may think that his unfortunate marriage and buried future were the reasons for his downfall, but in reality, they are not the cause, but the result. It is an inevitable result of the hypocrisy, selfishness, and cold-blooded numbness of the upper class society.

In the eyes of the Warren family, Dick was just a "bought doctor" and a tool. Therefore, "once she could live like a normal person, she immediately abandoned Dick and threw herself into the embrace of the upper class. Nicole squeezed Dick's energy and talent, and ultimately left him." [2] When Dick was in danger during his trip to Italy, Baby's reason for rescuing him was only because he was still useful to them,

and use moral advantages to restrain him. When Dick left, he made the statement that people are at a loss as soon as they exceed their own responsibilities. Mrs. Mary became hysterical with the Diver couple over a basin of bathwater and realized how deeply she and they had broken apart. Tommy gave up the former relationship and tore apart the last dignity of Dick and his wife. Rosemary's passionate feelings for Dick naturally dissipated with the latter's decline. The coldness and cruelty of the upper class, coupled with the passing of his father, prompted Dick to embark on a path of self destruction.

## 4. Conclusion

*Tender is the Night* is a powerful indictment of the corrosive effects of wealth, social expectations, and the American Dream. Dick Deaver's tragic story is a testament to the fragility of human identity and the destructive power of social pressures. His decadence is not only a personal failure, but also the murder of society, the consequence of a system that prioritizes outward expression over the true needs of the human spirit. Through Dick's fall, Fitzgerald forces us to question the values we hold dear, urging us to adopt a more humane and compassionate approach in our pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. Fitzgerald portrays a group of images of the upper class of the Jazz era for readers, who are enslaved by filthy materialism, manipulated by endless emptiness, harboring evil intentions, cold-blooded numbness, and insatiable greed. They are the products of the times and the spokespersons of hedonism. In such a society, personal growth is difficult, and personal degradation can be seen everywhere. One Dick after another destructed themselves in the Jazz Age. Readers lament the decline of Dick while bemoaning the false romanticism of the Jazz Age. Therefore, *Tender is the Night* has profound historical and practical significance.

## References

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