



[Tender is the Night](#), by F. Scott Fitzgerald

In A Nutshell

Tender is the Night was published in 1933 by Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, better known as F. Scott Fitzgerald, the American author famous for his novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Set between 1913 and 1930, mostly in Southern France and Switzerland, the novel tells the story of what happens when the extremes of love, madness, and ambition play out against a high-glamour backdrop, in a physical and psychological landscape torn apart by World War I.

It's hard to talk about *Tender is the Night* without talking about its author, his wife Zelda, and the famous people they knew, like Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemmingway, to name a few. Fitzgerald officially began work on *Tender* in 1925. He agonized over it and revised it continuously even after its 1933 publication. In 1930 Zelda was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for treatment of schizophrenia. Scott finished the novel while Zelda was still under psychiatric care, and the novel reflects the anguish of Fitzgerald's experience with her mental health.

Though based in part on Fitzgerald's friends, Gerald and Sara Murphy, to whom the book is dedicated, you can't deny some of the biographical parallels between Dick and Nicole Diver, the main characters, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Like Zelda, Nicole is a brilliant and ambitious woman, who is diagnosed with schizophrenia; and like Scott, Dick is a brilliant and ambitious man who feels he's not reaching the high goals he sets for himself. Like Scott, Dick is not wealthy. When Zelda and Scott were still together, Scott had an affair with a young film

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star, Lois Moran. Dick has an affair with Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress based on Moran. There's even a character that is widely believed to be based on Hemingway, Tommy Barban, the mercenary Nicole falls in love with. But, no, Zelda did not leave Scott for Hemingway.

The real life story of Zelda and Scott ends tragically. Scott, a heavy alcoholic (like Dick) died in 1940, at forty years old, of heart failure, before completing the novel he was working on, *The Last Tycoon*. Zelda's death was positively gruesome. She died in 1948 inside a psychiatric hospital when it caught on fire. Luckily Dick and Nicole don't die that way (or at all) in *Tender is the Night* – a biographical analysis of the novel can only take us so far.

You should know, though, about a unique controversy surrounding the novel. Despite its controversial content, including incest, *Tender is the Night* doesn't really show up on the banned lists like its younger sibling, *The Great Gatsby*. Maybe this is because the biggest controversy surrounding *Tender is the Night* has to do with *time*, of all things. The novel opens in 1925. We meet the Divers at their fabulous French Riviera home, and watch their endless party. It's not until the second part of the novel that we learn of Nicole's dark past, and how she and Dick met. Doesn't sound like any big deal, right? Well, the novel didn't do so well. It was published in the heart of the Great Depression, and some critics say that audiences didn't want to read about lifestyles of the rich and famous in a time of economic crisis.

Fitzgerald had a different idea of the problem. He made extensive notes for a revision, which would place the events in chronological order, but died before a revision was undertaken. Fitzgerald's friend, the American writer, critic, and journalist Malcolm Cowley decided to do it for him. Cowley revised the novel according to Fitzgerald's notes, and the revised version was published in 1951, after Fitzgerald's death. The Cowley edition can be found online here, though Shmoop is using the 1933 original version.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 It 's widely known that F. Scott Fitzgerald believed that the rich were different than other people. Ernest Hemingway famously told him, "Rich people are the same as everybody else, but with more money." Does this debate play out in the novel? If so, which characters represent the other side of the argument?
- 2 There is lots of gorgeous scenery in the novel, much of it natural. Is this just here for our pleasure, or is nature important to the themes of the novel? Is Nicole 's garden an important place? If so, why?
- 3 If you were to write the sequel to *Tender is the Night* starring Topsy and Lanier, how would you imagine them? What passages in the novel lend credence to your predictions? Are these characters important to the novel? Why or why not?

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