

Identity in tender is  
the night



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Identity is “ the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is” (Oxford Dictionary). Identity includes one’s sexuality, age, political views, religious beliefs, or anything that shapes who they are. In *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, identity is a constant theme depicted throughout the life of Dick Diver. Throughout the novel, Diver tries to alter the path he originally set out for himself, in hopes of finding his lost identity. Dick Diver is a social climber bound to self-destruct. His feelings of restriction from familial obligations turn him into a self-proclaimed manqué, in search of liveliness. This journey for sanity leads Diver down a dark road of alcoholism, incest, and lack of self-knowledge, ultimately causing him to remain at rock bottom.

In *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver’s decisions shape his future and the person he is. Distracted by society’s standards, his family’s standards and his own standard’s, Diver struggles to remain genuine. In a society “ where the meaning of personal experience is more and more slipping away from the control of the individual” (Broer), Diver makes some detrimental decisions, leading to his present state. Decisions like picking a college major and who Diver chooses to marry are significant decisions. They’re decisions that Diver has to live with for the rest of their life and are not to be taken lightly. The consequences of these decisions can lead to happiness or distress. It is obvious what the consequences were. Marrying someone because of their money or choosing your future career because of an attractive girl were not good choices. If Diver had thought more about what he truly wanted before making irrational decisions his future would have turned out differently.

F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays Dick Diver's feelings of pressure due to his obligation to be successful and societal pressures. Diver's belief that in society, one's image is sculpted by their ancestors' status and their own status, gets him into trouble. He starts making decisions based off of the reactions and opinions of those around him. This process only gives Diver temporary please and end in emptiness. Diver wastes his time throwing parties and living an expensive lifestyle, and he does not realize that he is truly unhappy. Material goods and social status do not bring happiness, which is seen further on in Dick's life. " The awareness of the myth of the self-made man was the greatest of American allusions.... Awareness of the fact did not permit one to escape the truth on which it was premised" (Pitcher). Diver gives into this unrealistic notion of the American Dream, which promotes wealth and perfection. Due to this belief, " realizing that he is in fact not wealthy does a great deal of harm to Dick's concept of his living the American Dream" (Florida Atlantic University). It is an illusion. When we first meet The Divers, they are a perfect example of the American Dream. This means they are both attractive, they have money, and they appear to be happy. However, the American Dream is just a myth, and as the novel unfolds readers see that the Divers are far from perfect (Pitcher). The role of society and the influences it has on Dick's thoughts cloud his identity at the beginning of the novel. Although Diver thinks that his artificial life at the beginning of the novel is his identity, we learn that Dick Diver honestly does not know who he is and feels lost without material items and money. Diver learns that the opinions of others have no impact on a person's true identity.

Furthermore, Diver's familial presumptions shift his identity and give him standards he feels obligated to live up to. Diver's main inspiration in his identity search is his father. Dick's father embodies everything Dick wants to be and is described as "beyond any doubt of what he" (Fitzgerald 204). Diver's father is a confident man, and like Diver, can sometimes be described as powerful. However, Dick Diver's father was also honest and virtuous. These are characteristics Dick could work on. Dick attempts to mimic his father; however, he spends more time pretending to be someone he is not, than just being himself. This furthers his lack of self-identity because Diver is constantly trying to mimic his father's actions and traits. Dick cannot find his identity until he embraces himself.

When Dick Diver's father dies, he feels even more pressure to honor his legacy by being a moral person (Stern). However, this only causes his habits to worsen. Dick becomes addicted to alcohol, leading to violence and destruction. The death of Dick Diver's father completely changes his chances of recovery and self-identification. Diver no longer acts as a paternal figure to Rosemary or Nicole, showing that he has completely lost his sense of identity. Diver realizes at this moment that he cannot control his fate, saying "good-by all fathers" (Fitzgerald 204). He has completely lost any sense of hope. Furthermore, Dick Diver loses the opportunity to be successful and fails to do anything right. He cannot properly treat patients, maintain a healthy relationship, or live a virtuous life. Dick has lost any sense of who he was and has no chance of becoming "as good as he had intended to be" (Fitzgerald 204).

Dick Diver is incestuous and acts as a father figure in all of his romantic relationships due to lack of control in his own life. Diver enjoys controlling his partners, because to him, it affirms that he is powerful and respected. “ Diver undergoes a process of self-dissipation throughout the novel: from a state of initial “ all completeness” to an intermediary one in which we are told that “ he still had pieces of his own most personal self for everyone”(Fitzgerald, 139) and finally to a total exhaustion, which is a form of inertness”(Stamatescu). Younger women are more likely to accept this dominating power because they are used to being controlled by adults and parents. They also might be less experienced and believe that Diver’s urge to control a relationship is normal. Having this power makes Diver feel more valuable as a person because being responsible for someone else and knowing that they depend on him fills the void of his own vulnerability. This is unhealthy for his well-being and results in loss of identity when these relationships fail.

Dick Diver enjoys being around younger women because they have no responsibility and have the freedom to live as they please. This explains Diver’s attraction to Rosemary. When Diver first meets her, he describes her saying, “ her body hovered delicately on the last edge of childhood—she was almost eighteen, nearly complete, but the dew was still on her.” (Fitzgerald 3). Although it is slightly disturbing hearing Diver talk about a young lady in this manner, he describes his attraction to the qualities that make Rosemary youthful. He also notes that she still had dew on her, signifying her innocence and indicating that she was a virgin at the time. Furthermore, Diver describes his daughter Topsy, as “ nine and very fair and exquisitely

made like Nicole...Dick had worried about that” (Fitzgerald 257) and compares Rosemary to his daughter. This shows how inappropriate and extreme Diver’s feelings are. He is even attracted to his own daughter who is only a child. Dick Diver forms relationships with young girls like Rosemary because he wishes he had the same opportunities that they have. Young people have the power to create their future, unlike Diver, whose future was determined when he married Nicole. By surrounding himself with younger people, Diver can watch them blossom and live freely. This makes Diver feel like he is young again and is free from all of his burdens. This also distracts Diver from finding his true self by creating a false sense of identity. Dick Diver will never be young again and accepting his age and place in life is a big part of Diver’s identity that he must come to terms with to be happy.

The twisted relationship of Dick Diver and his wife Nicole gave Diver a false sense of dependency that tarnished his identity. In retrospect, the arranged marriage was technically a way for Nicole to get the attention she needed due to her schizophrenia. However, Nicole’s incestuous past and lack of confidence caused her to become almost completely dependent on her husband, who reminded her of her own father. This made Dick Diver not only Nicole’s husband, but also her doctor and father figure. Nicole’s weakness and Dick’s feelings of importance are what keep this relationship stable (Galioto). Dick and Nicole’s once strong bond was shown when he “ left a note for Maria Wallis signed “” Dicole,” the word with which he and Nicole had signed communications in the first days of love” (Fitzgerald 113). At one point, the Divers were so dependent on each other that it was normal for them to combine their names, as if they were one. However, as time went

on, the marriage became strained and dishonest. The relationship became unenjoyable for Dick, and the lack of control over Nicole reflected his lack of control over his own life. Once Nicole started to become more independent and confident without Dick, the relationship became rocky.

Although Dick felt trapped in his relationship with Nicole, his reaction to her decision to leave him was slightly unexpected. Even though he was not completely happy in their relationship, it was not easy for Dick to understand that not only did Nicole not want him anymore, but she also no longer needed him for support. This sudden lack of control over Nicole reflected Diver's lack of control over his own life. Dick Diver's attempt to save his marriage with Nicole was his last attempt at gaining some form of power in his life. Nicole's choice to marry Tommy Barban showed Dick Diver that she had control over her life, something Diver was desperate for.

The Diver's divorce changed the identities of both Dick and Nicole. Through their separation, Dick lost more of his identity, whereas Nicole found her identity. Dick lost the belief that he was important to someone and could act as the hero or father figure. Because of this, he falls into a depression, and even Nicole tells him " You've made a failure of your life" (Fitzgerald 334) This contributed to Dick Diver's loss of role in his family and society.

However, Nicole found her identity through her separation from Dick. This separation proved Nicole's strength to herself and others. She finally felt like an independent, self-sufficient, and valuable woman. Formerly, Nicole had felt as though " every word had seemed to have an overtone of some other meaning, soon to be resolved under circumstances that Dick would determine" (Fitzgerald 280). Now that Nicole is no longer relying on Dick, she

can form her own thoughts and opinions and live a life true to herself.

Freeing herself from Dick Diver's restraint means that Nicole can live without the burden of their relationship. She can personally grow in the healthy relationship she deserves.

Dick Diver's rejection of the belief that each person's fate is inevitable alters his worldview. It is clear that Diver's future was not what he expected by any means. Although Dick Diver felt powerful at times as a result of his family status and his significance to weak women in unhealthy relationships, Diver could not handle his fate. Diver became a perfectionist, trying to change his destiny in hopes of avoiding surprises or unhappiness. However, Diver could not release the notion that it is impossible to completely control your future. Every choice, action, feeling, and decision is inevitable. As Dick's life starts to change, his struggle to hold on to the past becomes impossible, and he feels as if he has completely lost his identity. Ultimately Dick cannot stop his self-destruction until he can become less controlling. By the time he realizes this, it is already too late.

Dick Diver was bound to ruin his reputation and social perfection because of his attempts to alter his fate. While attempting to become a flawless member of society, Diver ruins his job, marriage, friendships, and in turn, his identity. Not only does Diver destroy every valuable thing in his life, but he also ruins his sense of security in life and pride. Diver suffers many consequences and loses the chance to become the virtuous, respected man he dreamed of being. Diver's act of perfection becomes faulty when people start to see who he truly is. Because he has lost his identity, Diver's public failure transforms him into someone new. Diver's confusion about life makes



his identity jumbled and unclear. He lost his sense of self and is a completely changed person from the Diver we were first introduced to at the beginning of the novel.

Alcohol acts as a distraction that keeps Dick Diver from coping with his identity. Diver drinks large amounts of alcohol to fit in with society and uses it to numb his feelings of worry. Dick's complete hopelessness and desire to be apart of society causes him to be reckless and excessive. Dick turns into an alcoholic, completely changing how he is seen by society. Diver becomes more violent and pitiful. Diver goes from a put together man that does not drink to an uncontrollable drunk. He allows alcohol to take over his identity and define who he is.

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver struggles to find his identity. Throughout the novel, Diver is constantly distracted by personal and communal obstacles. He struggles to avoid succumbing to society's pressure to be perfect, while navigating through divorce, affairs, and alcoholism. Fitzgerald uses identity as a theme, stressing that loss of identity can cause loss of sanity, which Diver clearly displayed. Through his struggle to find himself, Dick Diver slips into bad habits, becoming controlling and unrealistic. These characteristics become apart of his identity, and ultimately, Diver shows how easily a person's identity can slip away.