

# Beloved illness: transference love as romantic pathology in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*.

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## **Beloved Illness: Transference Love as Romantic Pathology in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night***

Pamela A. Boker

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

<sup>1</sup>Beloved Illness: Transference Love as Romantic Pathology in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*  
Pamela A. Boker I. When *Tender Is the Night* was first published, in 1933, literary critics praised Fitzgerald's "method of dealing with sickness material" in the novel.<sup>1</sup> More recently, however, critics have emphasized the author's superficial understanding of psychiatry. Among these is Jeffrey Berman, who convincingly establishes Fitzgerald's lack of knowledge about "the theoretical and clinical intricacies of transference love" and Dr. Diver's "disregard" of medical ethics.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on extensive professional and biographical

data to support his claim, Berman maintains that the novel is conspicuously devoid of usable clinical substance. The gaps in the story, the superficiality of the author's use of psychological terminology, and his ostensibly negative attitude toward the field of psychoanalysis all serve as warnings against interpreting the story as a true-to-life psychiatric study.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a wholehearted attempt to interpret the stories of Nicole Warren and Dick Diver as clinical case studies was more recently made by Charles R. Metzger in his full-length work, *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Psychiatric Novel* (1989). Like Berman, Metzger endeavors to test the accuracy of the novel's "psychiatric details and insights ... against the experience of actual clinical practice."<sup>4</sup> Although Metzger offers some valuable insights into Dick's and Nicole's characters, his insistence on transposing their stories into clinical case studies, in the face of Berman's testimony against the viability of doing so and that of George D. Murphy, *Literature and Medicine* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1992) 294-314 © 1992 by The Johns Hopkins University Press Pamela A. Boker 295 who observes that Fitzgerald "does not suggest any clear combination of causes ... for the velocity and extent of Dick's decline," has the effect of closing rather than opening the novel to stimulating thought.<sup>5</sup> In basing his analysis on the assumption that "Nicole's psychotic transference" was merely "construed as love for Dick," Metzger severs himself from what might be viewed as one of the novel's central and most poignant themes: that despite the transference-countertransference quality of their relationship, Nicole and Dick are passionately and genuinely in love, at least for a time.<sup>6</sup> And by separating the novel into two separate "cases," and in fact claiming that *Tender is the Night* is really two novels," Metzger loses sight of the novel's provocative psychiatric issue: the fusion through love not only of the identities of Dick and Nicole but also of psychoanalysis and "incalculable" human nature.<sup>7</sup> Despite the ongoing controversy over how the reader is to view Fitzgerald's treatment of the clinical and psychoanalytic rendering of his characters, the difficulty remains as to how either the literary critic or, particularly, the psychoanalyst can use the fictional aspects of the novel to gain insight into the intricate and delicate nature of the transference-countertransference love between a physician and a patient. The answer, I believe, is suggested by the clinical psychiatrist David I. Gottlieb, who proposes that *Tender is the Night* is indeed "a worthwhile book from a psychological and psychiatric point of view . . . because it can serve to teach psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and many other mental health practitioners something about human nature and something about personalities that cannot be found any other way!"<sup>8</sup> Hence, the question that needs to be asked at this point is not what psychoanalysis has to say about the novel, but what the novel, as fiction and as the product of a uniquely imaginative mind, has to say about the relationship between psychoanalysis and human nature or, more specifically, between psychiatry and love. It is precisely because Fitzgerald's treatment of a psychiatric theme is poetic rather than professional that we are able to derive valuable psychoanalytic significance from the novel. As this study shows, it was not Fitzgerald's psychiatric expertise that was primarily responsible for the novel's most profound psychological truths, but the acumen of his intuitive, romantic imagination that enabled him to recognize the pathological nature of all romantic love and to perceive that the magnificence of human passion as well as its restorative powers emanates precisely...

 Beloved Illness:  
Transference Love as  
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F. Scott Fitzgerald's  
*Tender Is the Night*

Pamela A. Baker

1

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