



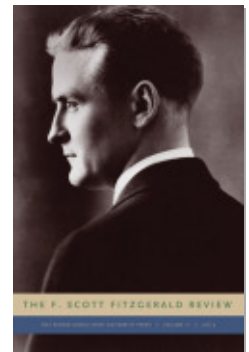
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The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review, Volume 11, 2013, pp. 99-115 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press



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“Like a star balanced with another star”

Lawrentian Relationships in *Tender Is the Night*

Heather Brown

In our ongoing search for new ways to understand the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, we sometimes turn to comparative readings. There is something exciting about the prospect of discovering the ways in which authors engage in conversations with each other through their writing, but the real value in this kind of exercise rests in the possibility that a comparative reading can change our view of a work in unexpected ways. This is the case with Fitzgerald and D. H. Lawrence. While this may seem like an unlikely connection at first, a familiarity with Lawrence can help illuminate some of the themes in Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*. In fact, there is plenty of evidence, inside and outside of the text, to suggest that Fitzgerald had Lawrence on his mind when he wrote his novel. In 1930, Fitzgerald declared himself a fan of Lawrence, recommending the author to Maxwell Perkins in a letter, writing, “Have you read *The Building of St. Michele*¹ + D. H. Lawrences *Fantasia of the Unconscious*? Don't miss either of them” (*Life in Letters* 181). Zelda Fitzgerald also mentions Lawrence to her husband in a request for him to send her something new to read in 1931, asking him not to send anything by Lawrence “or anybody who writes by dipping the broken threads of their heads into the ink of literary history” (Bryer and Barks 102), as if to say that she suspected he might send her Lawrence because of his growing interest in his work. In a 1940 letter to his daughter Scottie, Fitzgerald spoke of the quality of Lawrence's writing: “In the opinion of any real artist the inventor, which is to say Giotto or Leonardo, is infinitely superior to the finished Tintoretto, and the original D. H. Lawrence is infinitely greater than the Steinbecks” (*Letters* 73). Fitzgerald also declared that Lawrence should serve as a model for other writers: “Advice to young writers—Read Tolstoi, Marx and D.H. Lawrence and then read Tolstoi Marx and D.H. Lawrence” (*Notebooks* 322). What all of this indicates is that Fitzgerald viewed Lawrence as an important writer, as someone to emulate if possible, and so it is not surprising to

find bits of Lawrence tucked away in Fitzgerald's work. The similarities between these two authors are most evident when comparing *Tender Is the Night* to Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920).

While a few scholars have recognized that there is some relation between these authors, little has been done to examine how Lawrence can be used as a way to read Fitzgerald. Robert Wexelblatt, in a 1987 essay, argues against placing too much emphasis on the belief that Lawrence directly influenced Fitzgerald's ideas, but he asserts that there is value in reading *Tender Is the Night* with Lawrence as a guide because of the simple fact that Fitzgerald "had Lawrence on his mind as he reworked his book" (387). In an attempt to move away from an argument that relies too much on influence, Wexelblatt claims that, while Fitzgerald's novel does have similarities to ideas expressed by Lawrence, "it may be an error to assume that these are really, or wholly, Lawrence's ideas. Not unlike many of the rest of us, Fitzgerald tended to become attached to books which could present him with his own, more vagrant insights in systematized form" (378–79).² Specifically, Wexelblatt focuses on the connection between Lawrence's essay *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) and the themes in *Tender Is the Night*. Using the philosophies expressed in this essay, which, as his letter to Perkins indicates, Fitzgerald is known to have read in 1930, Wexelblatt performs an analysis of the novel using Lawrence to understand better some of the themes present in the work without suggesting that Fitzgerald necessarily came to these ideas after reading Lawrence. However, the specific themes that Wexelblatt sees as appearing in both Lawrence and Fitzgerald—"in our century, sex-roles have been stood on their heads, that woman has become 'active' and man 'passive'" (379)—are arguably better represented in *Women in Love* and not *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. After all, the novel, published two years before *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, is a characterization of many of the ideas expressed in the essay.

Whether or not Fitzgerald deliberately adopted elements of *Women in Love* when writing *Tender Is the Night* is difficult to prove, but Fitzgerald's interest in Lawrence, the stylistic similarities present in these novels, and the fact that both men were dealing with the same questions regarding the explosive changes taking place following World War I more than justify a comparative reading of these works. *Women in Love* was completed nearly a decade before *Tender Is the Night*, but the observations Lawrence makes about the negative and lasting effects of the war were still being explored by Fitzgerald when he wrote his novel. He may have even read *Women in Love* prior to, or during, composition. There is evidence that Fitzgerald was at least familiar with *Women in Love* as early as 1927 when he made a joke to Ernest Hemingway concerning the recent

success of *Men Without Women*: “(This tough talk is not really characteristic of me—it’s the influence of All the Sad Young Men Without Women In Love)” (*Life in Letters* 154). John Kuehl’s “Scott Fitzgerald’s Reading” (78) and Matthew J. Bruccoli’s *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (573, 576) also show us that Fitzgerald owned and likely read some of Lawrence’s other novels; and while *Women in Love* is not present among those listed, because the novel was an influential book during Fitzgerald’s lifetime, and considering his interest in Lawrence, it is difficult to imagine him having neglected this work. However, the best evidence of Lawrence’s connection to Fitzgerald is found in his writing and not in documented influence.

Focusing on the thematic and stylistic qualities that these authors share can change the way we understand the relationships in *Tender Is the Night*. Using Lawrence as a guide requires a new way of reading the nature of Dick Diver’s fall, emphasizing the fact that it is linked to the failure of his relationship with his wife, Nicole. It can be argued that Nicole is the source of Dick’s destruction, whether intentionally or not, but with Lawrence in mind this argument is no longer as convincing. Lawrence articulated time and time again in his work that a healthy relationship required equality and a giving in to bodily desires. In terms of Lawrence, both Dick and Nicole are self-destructive because their actions work in opposition to the relationship itself. As neither character can successfully open up and work towards equality, Lawrence would argue that the Divers are doomed from the start.

In *Women in Love*, Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich enter into a hopeless relationship that has a great deal in common with the Divers’ marriage. In Lawrence’s novel, this couple falls apart because of two important elements: World War I and love battles. The war had a profound effect on Lawrence’s opinion of the state of relationships. He believed that the war systematically destroyed men, physically and mentally, but he also believed that surviving the war could, and should, result in a change for the better if handled properly. The war, as a traumatic, life-changing experience, could allow for people to open themselves up to the possibility of achieving the necessary equality in a relationship. Once a couple has become aware of the necessity of equality, they then must go through what Lawrence called “love battles” to maintain a balance in the relationship. The goal of these mental struggles is to make it impossible for either partner to dominate the other. Andrew Howe describes these love battles as a healthy type of conflict with a positive outcome, “as it allows for both dependence and independence to enter the relationship, leading to a more open and less stifling association” (439). A distinct lack of love battles, along with an inability to recover fully from the war, essentially determine the failure of Nicole and Dick’s relationship.

World War I is an ever-present force in both *Tender Is the Night* and *Women in Love*, although neither novel is explicitly about the war. In “Spengler and Apocalyptic Typology in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*,” Joan Kirkby briefly acknowledges the relevance of Lawrence in relation to *Tender Is the Night* by commenting on their similar treatment of the war and its aftermath. Kirkby explains that Fitzgerald’s novel is concerned not with the actual battles of the war but with “the age of transition after the first world war” (248) and how this affects the characters in the novel. This is also true of *Women in Love*, even though the novel may not seem to be overtly about the war because, despite the fact that the action takes place during the war, there is no mention of the war itself. Instead, the war is a silent force, always looming in the background, making it a war novel depicting the home front rather than the battlefield. For Lawrence, those on the home front felt the devastating effects of the war to a similar degree as those on the battlefield. In the case of *Women in Love*, the character most affected by the war is Rupert Birkin, who nearly dies of an illness apparently brought on by the bleak state of the world. Lawrence describes this ill state as “pure opposition to everything” (*Women in Love* 199). Birkin survives this trial by fire, but only barely, and it opens him up to the possibility of a healthy relationship with Ursula Brangwen. Dick experiences a similar trial. He must deal with his lack of participation in the war and an ever-changing world that he must now navigate, a task at which he arguably fails.

Women in Love and *Tender Is the Night* share as a common concern the degradation of society following the war, especially in the case of personal relationships. Kirkby emphasizes this connection between relationships and society in *Tender Is the Night*, arguing that Fitzgerald uses “personal crises and marital crises as figures for vast and impersonal historical crises,” and the “crisis of the Diver’s marriage reflects the crises in American values in the years after the war” (250). Here, Kirkby is associating the failure of the Divers’ marriage with the deterioration of American culture, paralleling Lawrence’s representation of Gudrun and Gerald’s failed love affair in *Women in Love* with the deterioration of British culture. These are both toxic relationships. Gerald is so utterly destroyed by his relationship that it causes his death, leaving Birkin to describe his lifeless body as a “[s]trange, congealed, icy substance—no more. No more!” (*Women in Love* 479). Dick’s decay is less immediate, as he is initially described as being set free by the failure of his relationship: “The case was finished. Doctor Diver was at liberty” (*Tender* 329). It is not until later that Fitzgerald reveals the true result of the wrecked relationship, highlighting Dick’s fall by having him physically experience his decay as he leaves the Riviera, officially marking the

end of his marriage: “‘I must go,’ he said. As he stood up he swayed a little; he did not feel well any more—his blood raced slow” (*Tender* 343). The comparison here is clear, as both men experience a freezing of the blood, albeit Gerald’s is more catastrophic.

Beyond society’s role in the destruction of these relationships, there is a common concern with what Lawrence identified as the danger of mingling and merging, or the tendency of one partner to devour the other. Lawrence was very concerned with the potential loss of self that could result in a relationship—in his own life he was deathly afraid of this—so it is no surprise that he came up with a way to avoid such a fate: love battles. Through these battles, the couple achieves what Lawrence calls a star equilibrium in *Women in Love*, described by Birkin as “a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity—like a star balanced with another star . . . the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people—a bond” (152). Barry J. Scherr, in “Lawrence, Keats, and *Tender Is the Night*: Loss of Self and ‘Love Battle’ Motifs,” explains that *Tender Is the Night* is primarily concerned with this same issue: “the disastrous results of ‘mingling and merging’ . . . in male-female relationships . . . in which the two parties involved tend to lose their individual identity and selfhood, and psychologically and emotionally become one” (7). This could easily be a description of *Women in Love* as well, if it included male-male relationships along with male-female relationships.

To prove the presence of the love battle theme in *Tender Is the Night*, Scherr points to the moment in the novel when Dick specifically introduces the Lawrentian theme by describing World War I as a love battle, claiming that there was a “century of middle class love spent” on the battlefield, and that this was “the last love battle.” Following this observation, Abe North replies, “You want to hand this battle over to D. H. Lawrence” (*Tender* 68). Scherr considers this allusion to Lawrence to be an indication that Fitzgerald’s novel is concerned with the same love battles as represented in *Women in Love*. However, Dick’s understanding of a love battle references something beyond Lawrence’s concern with personal relationships, and there is much more than this single, direct allusion that suggests the importance of love battles in *Tender Is the Night*. The love battles in Lawrence’s novel are meant to be productive, not destructive; the whole point of a love battle in a relationship is to establish equality and maintain balance. When Dick identifies the Somme with love battles, there is an unmistakable inclusion of violence where Lawrence would not have it. According to Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Lawrence “reacted to the outbreak of world war and the eagerness of Englishmen to enlist in it, with mounting

terror,” and it “brought his rejection of the country to a head” (222), indicating that his rejection of the war stemmed from his discomfort with destructive violence and killing, especially under the pretext of national duty.³ Despite Dick’s desperate desire to make his companions understand his reaction to being on this spot, Rosemary and Abe are detached from his experience. Rosemary is simply waiting for Dick to tell her how to feel; and Abe, the only one of the three to have actually seen battle, is represented as playing like we might expect a child to play. All the while, Dick is isolated as he is overcome with a sadness that sticks in his throat. He struggles to explain why this was the “last great love battle,” not because it resulted in a Lawrencean equilibrium, but because, as Dick says, “All of my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love” (*Tender* 68). Abe’s suggestion that Dick hand this over to Lawrence is then less of an indicator that this is a reference to Lawrence and more about Abe’s lack of interest in Dick’s soul-searching; the comment feels more like a joke than an agreement. What this moment does provide is a clear indication that Fitzgerald was familiar with Lawrence’s conception of “love battles,” and that his readers would be aware of this term and its connection to Lawrence. It also sets up an opposition between the productive love battles between Birkin and Ursula that take place in Lawrence’s novel and the significant lack of them in *Tender Is the Night*.

In order to emphasize the necessity of love battles, Lawrence shows the destructive outcome of either avoiding these confrontations altogether or resorting to violence as a substitute. Violence in *Women in Love* is associated with the most destructive relationships. In fact, the two relationships that fail in the novel end with a violent act. When the novel begins, Birkin is desperately trying to escape a totally consuming relationship with Hermione Roddice. After a series of verbal rows, usually stemming from Hermione’s desperate urge to consume all of Birkin, the relationship is terminated when Hermione resorts to violence: “[I]n a flame that drenched down her body like fluid lightning, and gave her a perfect, unutterable consummation, unutterable satisfaction, she brought down the ball of jewel stone with all her force, crash on his head” (*Women in Love* 105). Birkin is stunned by this physical assault, but he does not retaliate, never once resorting to violence, and so he breaks away from the relationship, freeing him to pursue a positive relationship with Ursula. Hermione’s attempts to consume Birkin nearly destroy him, but an epiphany regarding the importance of love battles allows him to keep moving forward, while Hermione remains stagnant.

Gerald and Gudrun’s relationship is more destructive than this; it is defined by violent acts toward each other and animals. Discussing the relevance of

violent acts against animals in the novel, Howe argues that “the human power dynamic is both constructed and explained by the introduction of animals as object-receptacles of violence” (430). Gerald and Gudrun’s tumultuous love affair begins and ends in violence. The relationship moves from a curious friendship to an intoxicating obsession as the two try to catch a pet rabbit, violently injuring it in the process. Gudrun fails to hold the rabbit, but when Gerald succeeds she is visibly pleased with the pain both the rabbit and Gerald suffer as they wrestle: “Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. . . . It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeves in a final convulsion” (241). This intense scene parallels the final fight between the two lovers: “[Gudrun] raised her clenched hand high, and brought it down, with a great downward stroke, over the face and on the breast of Gerald. . . . He took the throat of Gudrun between his hands, that were hard and indomitably powerful” (471). When the violence ends, Gerald leaves Gudrun dazed but alive, while he heads towards his own death. Rather than taking part in intellectual love battles, as Birkin will eventually do with Ursula, Gerald and Gudrun use violence as a way to distract from the fact that both of them want nothing more than to consume the other completely. Although Gerald and Gudrun do manage to avoid merging, which would result in a total loss of self, their attempt to substitute violence for love battles leads to the devastating end of their relationship and Gerald’s death.

The central relationship in *Tender Is the Night* is very similar to Gerald and Gudrun’s in this respect. Both relationships fail because of a lack of love battles, but the major difference is that Dick and Nicole fall prey to the awful merging and loss of self against which Lawrence warned. As Scherr points out, “the ‘mingling and merging’ nature of the relationship between Dick and Nicole Driver is superbly symbolized by the epithet ‘Dicole’” (12). The fusion of the names here emphasizes the fact that both parties lose their separate identities in this relationship. Scherr claims that Fitzgerald places the blame on Nicole for “ruining Dick’s potential” (13) because she forces the loss of self on him, making him subservient to her. However, Scherr’s acknowledgment that *Women in Love* carries the same themes as *Tender Is the Night* should suggest that the blame could only be placed on the relationship itself. Neither Dick nor Nicole is to blame individually, as both of them play a part in the failure of the relationship. In fact, if we must accuse one partner more than the other, Lawrence would find fault in Dick over Nicole because he refuses to take part in a love battle with her. Scherr admits that Dick “has no desire to engage in a creative conflict of ‘love battle’ with Nicole,” but he once again places the blame on Nicole,

claiming that this avoidance occurs at the end of the novel because Nicole “no longer needs him” (14). However, there is little evidence in Fitzgerald’s novel that Dick is ever willing to engage in a love battle, at the end of the relationship or otherwise, and Nicole does not seem to do much to force Dick into a subservient position. On the contrary, he seems to place himself there willingly. If Nicole were as powerless as Dick believes she is, then she would be wholly incapable of possessing him.

One of the causes of Dick’s refusal, or inability, to engage in the necessary love battles with Nicole is the looming effects of the war. He is incapable of honestly dealing with the changes that follow the war, pushing him to seek a relationship where he feels in control. As stated earlier, both *Women in Love* and *Tender Is the Night* focus on World War I indirectly. In Lawrence’s novel, the war wages on in the background, never specifically referenced but there all the same. Fitzgerald treats the war in a similar manner, but in *Tender Is the Night* the war is in the past not the present. The war makes it impossible for Dick to achieve a relationship of equality due to his self-diagnosed non-combatant shell-shock. Tiffany Joseph takes this point one step further in “‘Non-Combatant’s Shell-Shock’: Trauma and Gender in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*,” arguing that we should think of Dick as “not just shell shocked, but shocked—shocked by his own fading career, shocked by the suddenly untenable ideal of masculinity, shocked by the postwar world itself” (71). This is most apparent when Dick attempts to sort through his feelings while touring the battlefield with Rosemary and Abe. He realizes that the war destroyed everything he knew about the world, but he is unable to recover from this shock. Lawrence’s personal observations about the war further illuminate Dick’s trauma. He believed that the war was a great source of pain for men, as they were “tortured and virtually put to death by the war,” while those who did not experience the war were trapped in the atmosphere of the “day after, cold, bleak, empty, blank, meaningless” (“Risen Lord” 572–73).

In *Women in Love*, Birkin struggles with the war and the changing world, but he never stops fighting, and he uses this determination to create a healthy relationship with Ursula. Dick does the opposite; he uses his relationship to deal with the war. Joseph suggests that this experience with the war is part of the reason Dick is drawn to Nicole in the first place. She argues, “Dick’s marriage to Nicole, then, might be seen as an attempt to replace what he has lost by not being a combatant in the war, a way of reasserting his masculinity by reclaiming his status as manly hero” (71). Of course, this strategy fails, and Dick is left even more emasculated after his split with Nicole. Lawrence would argue that Dick’s

fall was inevitable because he relied upon a woman to acquire masculinity. This is an impossible task in Lawrence's view because he believed women, especially postwar brides, contributed greatly to the unfortunate ascendance of the neuter male following the war. Lawrence criticized what marriage had become, claiming that men "marry from the known self, taking the woman as an extension of our knowledge—an extension of our known self. And then, almost invariably, comes the jolt and the crucifixion" ("On Being a Man" 619). In other words, a man should not rely on a woman to define or complete him. The way to avoid this, according to Lawrence, rested in love battles. If, as Joseph indicates, Dick uses his marriage to Nicole as a way to maintain his masculinity, then this attempt at substitution, along with his abstaining from love battles, is central to understanding the reason the marriage fails.

In stark contrast to the Divers, Birkin and Ursula exhibit all of the qualities necessary to achieve success in their relationship. They spend most of the novel battling against one another, but their struggles are productive. Their relationship does not fall prey to misplaced violence, avoidance, or total reliance on the other. They work toward achieving the perfect equilibrium through a series of love battles. After breaking away from Hermione, Birkin acknowledges the need for a relationship of this nature: "[H]e wanted a further conjunction, where man had being and woman had being, two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other, balancing each other like two poles of one force, like two angels, or two demons" (199). In Ursula, Birkin finds a woman who can make this conjunction possible. The kind of marriage he desires is not the traditional one where the man or the woman forfeits a part of him/herself. To attain this equilibrium, Birkin and Ursula both must come to terms with the fact that neither can dominate the other. Birkin formally proposes this idea of a perfect relationship to Ursula early on, explaining that what he needs is the root "beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does *not* meet and mingle, and never can" (*Women in Love* 145). Ursula is initially confused by this notion because she believes that it means Birkin does not love her. So she battles with him, and eventually he allows himself to say what she needs to hear to convince her: "Yes,—my love, yes . . . I love you then—I love you" (154). This honest admission, because Birkin does truly love her, helps Ursula to see his vision of an equilibrium, but for now she has won the battle by forcing him to stop at love. Later, they argue again over the philosophical side of Birkin's vision, as Ursula struggles with the idea that there is something more than love. However, and this is very important, there is eventually a breaking point where both parties recognize the advantage of these

love battles. Ursula acknowledges that their love battles are “all for the good” (310). Immediately after their most intense battle, they have sex for the first time, giving into their bodily desires and throwing aside social restrictions. For Lawrence, this is the ultimate breakthrough, as the presence of these love battles is a positive move toward equilibrium.

There is no such breakthrough for Dick and Nicole because they never engage in any true love battles. The most memorable fight the couple has results in violence and is driven by jealousy rather than a desire to work toward an understanding of one another. When Nicole receives a letter that accuses Dick of seducing a patient’s young daughter, she confronts her husband; but rather than seeing the argument as a personal matter, Dick can only think of Nicole as a patient. Dick is aware of this problem, admitting the “dualism in his views of her—that of the husband, that of the psychiatrist—was increasingly paralysing his faculties” (*Tender* 210), but he is still unwilling to battle with Nicole. Instead, he tries to brush off the issue as quickly as possible and act as if it never happened. It is clear by Nicole’s silence that she is unhappy with this resolution, but Dick can only interpret this behavior as something akin to a patient’s irrational mood swing. Lawrence would see this moment as an opportunity to have a love battle like the one Birkin and Ursula share before their breakthrough, but Dick is set firmly against this because he has no interest in reaching a true equilibrium with Nicole.

Nicole’s jealousy is rooted in her desire to possess Dick completely, making a love battle all the more necessary for the sake of the relationship, but Dick refuses to engage in an honest conversation with his wife. She obviously believes the letter, at least partially, as indicated by the short conversation with her husband. Dick tries to exonerate himself by dismissing the letter’s authority, arguing that “[t]he letter is deranged. . . . I had no relations of any kind with that girl. I didn’t even like her,” but Nicole’s cold response shows us that she does not buy his argument: “Yes, I’ve tried thinking that” (209). Nicole doubts her husband’s fidelity, which Lawrence would see as an issue of dominance. She wants to know that she has complete possession of Dick, so she is threatened by the accusation that an outsider has entered their relationship. Dick’s reaction to the letter is motivated by his desire to control Nicole by telling her how to respond to the situation. He immediately tries to shift the blame to her: “Suppose we don’t have any nonsense, Nicole” (209). Dick’s response is designed to diffuse the situation and avoid any kind of productive discussion.

Dick’s avoidance pushes Nicole to act rashly, eventually resorting to violence when a love battle becomes impossible. Nicole attempts to get a response from

Dick by openly accusing him of infidelity: “Don’t you think I saw that girl look at you—that little dark girl. Oh, this is farcical—a child, no more than fifteen. Don’t you think I saw?” Dick, still dodging any real confrontation, explains to Nicole that her view of things is simply a delusion, but Nicole refuses to accept his dismissal and smartly replies, “It’s always a delusion when I see what you don’t want me to see.” Nicole is right, and Dick knows it, as her words produce in him a “sense of guilt as in one of those nightmares where we are accused of a crime which we recognize as something undeniably experienced” (212). However, Dick still rejects Nicole’s perspective, and the matter is dropped once again. With no chance of a love battle, Nicole becomes violent, deliberately causing the car to crash on the family’s drive home. This violence should be met with as much discomfort as the violence in *Women in Love*, as it is clear that it comes out of sheer desperation to resolve a conflict that cannot be resolved. Just as Gerald is reduced to strangling Gudrun when he realizes he cannot possess her, Nicole tries to destroy everything in an attempt to get some reaction from Dick. After the accident she screams in delight, “You were scared, weren’t you? . . . You wanted to live!” (215). While Nicole gets the response she was looking for, it does not lead to anything productive. In fact, this episode only pushes Dick further away, as he goes on a trip in order to continue avoiding love battles with Nicole, a point he makes perfectly clear when he says, “I don’t want to go away with Nicole. I want to go away alone. This last thing knocked me sideways” (216).

Notably, the trip Dick takes is filled with violence. First, he learns of Abe’s death—“*Abe North beaten to death*” (223)—a shocking discovery that leaves him with the sense that everything is ending. Second, Dick is informed of his father’s passing—“Your father died peacefully tonight” (226)—causing an immediate feeling of regret within him. And finally, Dick ends his excursion away from Nicole by starting a fight in Italy that results in his severe beating and arrest. The fight itself appears to be motivated by his growing frustration and feelings of hopelessness concerning his relationships with Nicole and Rosemary. It seems that wherever Dick goes, violence follows, a fact that Lawrence would recognize as an indication of his inability to experience any true love battles.

Just as in *Women in Love*, violence cannot be a part of a healthy love battle, even if the violence is experienced indirectly. There are several acts of violence in *Tender Is the Night* that, on the surface, seem as though they have little to do with the Divers. However, these incidents are absolutely connected to the Divers, and, like the violence in Lawrence’s novel, these moments track the

evolution of the relationship as it moves toward its inevitable end. There is even a suggestion that the violence surrounding the Divers is caused by the Divers. This is apparent early in the novel when Tommy Barban explains his feelings for the couple: "When I'm in a rut I come to see the Divers, because then I know that in a few weeks I'll want to go to war. . . . [T]hey make me want to go to war" (*Tender* 39). This reaction is exactly what Dick is hoping for when he throws the party at the beginning of the novel. Describing the party to Nicole, he says, "I want to give a really *bad* party. I mean it. I want to give a party where there's a brawl and seductions and people going home with their feelings hurt and women passed out in the *cabinet de toilette*" (35). The brawl that Dick gets does not occur at the party itself, but it is caused by the events that take place there. The duel between Tommy and McKisco happens because Tommy feels bound by honor to conceal Nicole's illness; his motivation is his love for Nicole. Later, Dick admits to Rosemary that his complicated marriage was to blame for the duel. Yet, despite the fact that they are central to the conflict, Dick and Nicole do not witness this violence firsthand, and instead we view the moment through Rosemary and Campion's eyes. Campion is left "gasping on his back in the shrubbery, the only causality of the duel," while Rosemary is "hysterical with laughter," a reaction that helps us to understand the utter pointlessness of an event that could have resulted in death (*Tender* 61).

Later in the novel, the Divers are present to witness the violence taking place around them. The shooting at the train station comes at a time when both Nicole and Dick are represented as having love interests outside of their marriage. It is revealed that Abe has asked Nicole to meet him at the station prior to his departure, and although the reason is never explained, we do learn that while they are not lovers, "up to this morning Nicole had liked Abe better than anyone except Dick—and he had been heavy, belly-frightened, with love for her for years" (*Tender* 94). During a tense conversation between the two, Nicole leaves Abe for a moment to speak with a woman, Maria Wallis, who, moments later, shoots a man. After Maria commits the murder, the Divers turn it into a chance to fight for dominance, as Nicole wants to phone the woman's sister, while Dick is convinced he can help by rushing off to speak to the police. Nicole succeeds, but moments later she and Rosemary depend on Dick to "make a moral comment on the matter and not leave it to them" (*Tender* 98), but he says nothing, as he is lost in his own thoughts of a possible affair with Rosemary. The seriousness of this act of violence is immediately overshadowed by the private concerns of the Divers, a fact that Fitzgerald makes all too clear as the chapter comes to an end: "Then, as if nothing had happened, the lives of the Divers and their friends

flowed out into the street. However, everything had happened. . . . The shots had entered into all their lives: echoes of violence followed them out on to the pavement” (99). The Diver marriage, seemingly so perfect on the outside, is falling apart. This violent moment in the novel is significant because it occurs while Dick is contemplating the next stage of his relationship with Rosemary, stopping him from having a love battle with Nicole. He simply allows her to gain dominance over him because he is, admittedly, more interested in “showing off for Rosemary” (*Tender* 97).

The last instance of violence experienced by those around the Divers marks a temporary end to Dick’s affair. Rosemary discovers a dead body in her hotel room, and Dick rushes to the rescue in order to save Rosemary from any possible scandal. When the scene comes to a close, Dick discovers Nicole has reacted badly to the sight of the bloody sheets. Although the Divers do not cause this incident, and they do not use it as a chance to fight for dominance, it is noteworthy that the death of another man is immediately glossed over in favor of this new drama in the couple’s history. This event is also the conclusion of the first section of the novel, emphasizing its importance. The novel changes direction at this time, and in the following section we learn how the Divers formed their relationship. Once again, we are reminded that the violence in the novel is connected to the Divers. However, as in *Women in Love*, all of this violence cannot take the place of the necessary love battles that Dick and Nicole fail to have. One gets the feeling that the violence in the novel seeps into the narrative at times when the Divers could potentially be engaging in the productive love battles that Birkin and Ursula have in Lawrence’s novel. The violence acts as a distraction to ensure that the Divers remain dishonest about the state of their relationship.

Ultimately, Scherr explains the failing relationship of the Divers as a limitation on the part of Fitzgerald, who could not portray anything but unhealthy mingling and merging. This does not, however, account for the relationship that Nicole forms with Tommy at the end of the novel. This relationship acts as a counter to the Diver marriage, and although we are not offered much insight into how they progress as a couple in the future, the beginning of their affair, according to Lawrence’s view of things, indicates that they are headed toward success. Lawrence was convinced that societal rules forced men and women to abandon, or ignore, their bodily desires, so if two people could do away with these conventions and listen to only their bodies, this was a sign that they were opening themselves up to one another and the possibility of a balanced relationship.⁴ Nicole and Tommy, by allowing their lust to take over, are able

to connect on a physical and mental level that Nicole and Dick cannot. The moment that Nicole chooses to pursue an affair with Tommy shows that she is no longer willing to be subject to Dick's control. She comes to her decision after her frustration with Dick has reached a high point, unable to stomach watching him attempt to charm Rosemary again. After a solitary drive home that allows her to appreciate a newfound independence brewing within her, she writes Tommy a "short provocative letter" (*Tender* 316).

As Nicole is preparing for her date with Tommy, she physically, ritualistically, prepares her body for sex, realizing the significance of the act: "She bathed and anointed herself and covered her body with a layer of powder. . . . She put on the first ankle-length day dress that she had owned for five years, and crossed herself reverently with Chanel Sixteen. When Tommy drove up at one o'clock she had made her person into the trimmest of gardens" (317). Nicole is aware of how crucial it is for her to give in to her desires, as Fitzgerald tells us that she had spent the summer "stimulated by watching people do exactly what they were tempted to do and pay no penalty for it" (318). When Tommy and Nicole allow their bodies to take the lead, Fitzgerald's description of their physical intimacy has much in common with Lawrence, reminding us once again of the connection between these writers. As they kiss, Fitzgerald writes, "Their cheeks touched and then their lips and she gasped, half with passion for him half with the sudden surprise of its force" (320).

Similarly, when the couple moves to a hotel, their sexual encounter is described in the following way: "Before they finished the brandy they suddenly moved together and met standing up; then they were sitting on the bed and he kissed her hardy knees. Struggling a little still, like a decapitated animal, she forgot about Dick and her new white eyes, forgot Tommy himself and sank deeper into the minutes and the moment" (321). Compare this moment to Lawrence's description of Ursula and Birkin having sex for the first time: "She traced with her hands the line of his loins and thighs, at the back, and a living fire ran through her, from him, darkly. It was a dark flood of electric passion she released from him, drew into herself. . . . It was a perfect passing away for both of them" (*Women in Love* 313–14). Both Fitzgerald and Lawrence describe the lovers as letting go of external barriers and lapsing out of consciousness as they enter into an equal partnership free from the compulsion to dominate the other. There is also a concrete similarity between the two descriptions, as both scenes portray the rubbing of legs to indicate a sexual encounter. Lawrence very carefully crafted these scenes to represent what should be valued in a relationship, and Fitzgerald seems to be doing the same thing with his descriptions of Nicole and Tommy in a way that is opposed to Nicole and Dick.

The descriptions Lawrence and Fitzgerald offer of doomed relationships further expose the differences between the two kinds of relationships. Describing Dick and Nicole kissing, Fitzgerald writes, “As he held her and tasted her, and as she curved in further and further towards him, with her own lips, new to herself, drowned and engulfed in love, yet solaced and triumphant, he was thankful to have an existence at all, if only as a reflection in her wet eyes” (173–74). Similarly, describing Gudrun and Gerald having sex, Lawrence writes, “As he drew nearer to her, he plunged deeper into her enveloping soft warmth, a wonderful creative heat that penetrated his veins and gave him life again. He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength” (344). As opposed to the equilibrium in the first descriptions, these two examples both focus on the fact that at least one person in the bond is becoming lost in the other, making their very existence dependent on their partner. This is why Nicole and Dick and Gudrun and Gerald fail at maintaining a healthy relationship. This is why they feel the need to rely on domination. In the case of the Divers, Nicole feels a sense of helplessness caused by her mental trauma, allowing her to accept Dick’s control, and while Dick also feels consumed by Nicole and her condition, he refuses to do anything that would possibly place Nicole on an equal footing with him. This is where Tommy differs most from Dick.

Dick constantly keeps Nicole at a distance, on a lower level than himself, but Tommy treats her as an equal. He is willing to push her, to battle her, as he does not want to be consumed by her. Although a seemingly unimportant moment, this is represented perfectly in Tommy’s comment about Nicole’s eyes. Rather than showering her with compliments, Tommy quickly establishes how he is different from Dick by pointing out something that Nicole never noticed about herself, her “white crook’s eyes” (*Tender* 319). This comment jolts Nicole out of the romance of the moment, forcing her to adjust to the reality of the situation. As their conversation progresses, Fitzgerald has each move away from the other in their mind before coming together momentarily. Rather than being completely consumed by each other the entire time, they instead move back and forth, in and out of the moment, maintaining their individuality but standing on equal ground. This is most evident in Nicole, as she admits that Tommy is becoming a part of her, but that she will not let go of who she was before Tommy. This is a fact that Tommy has no trouble accepting. He has no interest in taming Nicole. He wants to see her in her “natural state” and resents Dick for trying to alter it (*Tender* 320). Tommy sees the value in their independence, their differences, and their conflicts, just as Birkin and Ursula come to value their own love battles. And later, when we are offered our last glimpse at the

couple, Fitzgerald shows us that Tommy is completely accepting of Nicole's past and present life: "When she said, as she often did, 'I love Dick and I'll never forget him,' Tommy answered, 'Of course not—why should you?'" (343).

There is every indication that this equilibrium will continue as the relationship progresses. Even the violence that may, at this point, be expected from Tommy is lessened by Nicole's presence. After watching the sailors fighting below the hotel window, Tommy observes, "this place seems to have outlived its usefulness" (323). The violence is separate from the couple and does not alter their behavior in the way that it would with Nicole and Dick. Although Fitzgerald waits until the end of the novel to show us a true Lawrentian relationship, it seems to come in the form of Nicole and Tommy. Therefore, the blame for the Divers' failed relationship does not rest in Fitzgerald's inability to imagine a healthy relationship; their marriage fails because it relies on the destruction of the individual to form the identity of the couple. Tommy and Nicole do not seem to be headed in this direction. If the start of their relationship is a reliable glimpse into their future, they have plenty of productive love battles ahead of them, even if they stem from something as small as Nicole's white crook's eyes. They challenge one another, as Birkin and Ursula do. Just before Birkin and Ursula begin their relationship, Ursula considers their future, realizing that from now on "[i]t was a fight to the death between them—or to new life" (*Women in Love* 143). This is where Tommy and Nicole are when we last see them.

Recognizing commonalities between *Tender Is the Night* and *Women in Love* offers us a new way of conceptualizing the relationships in Fitzgerald's novel. As Fitzgerald found himself faced with the difficulty of representing relationships in a society desolated by the war, it is no wonder that he would look to Lawrence, who had already navigated this problem in his own work. To put these authors' works in dialogue with one another requires an understanding of Lawrence's philosophy of interpersonal relationships. By doing so, we can read Dick Diver's fall as inextricably tied to his failed marriage.

Notes

1. *The Story of San Michele* (1929), by Axel Munthe.
2. Wexelblatt is responding to Robert Sklar's assertion, in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoön* (259), that Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* was as important to the conception of *Tender Is the Night* as Zelda's mental illness.
3. Kinkead-Weekes explains that Lawrence viewed destructive violence as particularly harmful because it results in domination as a "[m]urderous impulse" that has "sprung from hollowness, lack of center, dependency, rejection" (225).

4. Lawrence consistently expressed this belief in desire, arguing, "If we gave free rein, or a free course, to our living flow of desire, we shouldn't go far wrong" (*Reflections* 343).

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