

Transference and Counter-transference in Fitzgerald's '*Tender is the Night*'

Suman Swati

Research Scholar

&

Dr. Shuchi Srivastava

Associate Professor

Department of Humanities

NIT Bhopal

Abstract

To invoke psychoanalysis as a method is to enter into a contentious debate as to what literature is. Psychoanalytic criticism assumes the existence of subjects possessing depth and complexity. It is being used as a method for reading texts-specially as a humanistic practice of contextualizing and locating the unconscious, repetitions, condensations and displacements not just of characters, but of the complex networks that encompass, shape and inform the texts as whole. 'Transference' is the mechanism used by psychoanalysts to cure hysterics, establishing a parental relationship between patient and analyst. In 'Tender is the Night', Fitzgerald has used this mechanism where Nicole's resentment or antagonism towards her father in the past is reactivated but directed against the psychoanalyst and her husband, Dick Diver. Just as a psychiatric patient may experience 'transference', a clinical practitioner may experience a 'counter-transference'. In the novel, Dick Diver's interactions with Nicole are motivated in part by her unconscious activation of his 'counter-transference'.

Keywords: Psychoanalyst, patient, transference, Freud, counter-transference

Introduction

The term 'transference' originates from Psychodynamic Therapy where it is defined as a patient's unconscious conflicts that can cause problems in everyday life. It is where the individual transfers feelings and attitudes from a person or situation in the past on to a person or situation in the present and where the process is likely to be, at least to some degree, inappropriate to the present. Transference is a phenomenon characterized by unconscious redirection of feelings from one person to another. One definition of transference is "the inappropriate repetition in the present of a relationship that was important in a person's childhood" (Kapelovitz). Another definition is "the direction of feelings and desires and especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood toward anew object" (Webster's

New Collegiate Dictionary). Counter-transference is defined as redirection of a therapist's feelings toward a patient, or more generally, as a therapist's emotional entanglement with the patient.

Transference was described by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who acknowledged its importance for psychoanalysis for better understanding of the patient's feelings. It tends to prolong the stopped-time effect trauma has on victims, and because it is more or less under the control of the analyst, it represents yet another way in which he/she might take control of the story. There is always a level of transference and counter-transference, as therapy is a relationship. To cure hysterics, psychoanalysts rely heavily on the mechanism of transference, establishing a parental relationship with the patient: a patient sees her/his doctor in the role of a person who has traumatized her/him in the past, usually a parent; the doctor stoically insists that she/he must help herself/himself and find her/his own cure, push her/his own analyses of events as far as they will go. It is an accepted and important part of the psychoanalytic script, and one that provides insight into the general process of constructing a case history and more generally, telling a story. As one textbook affirms, "Hysterical patients make contact immediately, and it is reparative contact they seek[.....] The crux of the treatment of the hysterical personality is the transference". Freud himself wrote that under the mechanism of transference, the patient "gives up her symptoms or pays no attention to them; indeed, she declares that she is well". In analyzing and finally dismissing her symptoms, she cures herself. It is up to the psychiatrist to manage the situation-to manipulate the patient's script-so as to effect that final liberation. He should use his own counter-transference, the parental role he inevitably must play, to help her remember and discuss, rather than repeat, the trauma of the past.

Tender is the Night, is perhaps the best, certainly the most satisfying, of Fitzgerald's novels. The central character is a psychiatrist, Dick Diver, working at the time of "the great Freud" as Dick describes him (from the time of the First World War through the 1920s). Moreover, Dick is married to a former patient, Nicole, who, it emerges, has had a sexual relationship with her father. It is interesting to read how Fitzgerald uses the psychological ideas existent in the 1920s in the writing of his novel - transference, for example, is directly referred to in the feelings that Nicole has for Dick, the handsome doctor, when she first sees him at the clinic. Also of interest, to some at least, is the parallel between the story in the book and the lives of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Thus Scott's alcoholism and Zelda's psychological break-down are mirrored in the story of the Divers (Berman, 1985).

The novel is in three parts or books. The first introduces the reader to a small, exclusive group of rich and sociable Americans on the shores of the Mediterranean. They are seen through the eyes of an 18 year-old starlet, Rosemary Hoyt, who is on vacation with her mother. Rosemary immediately falls in love with Dick Diver, the charming central character

in the group, and is taken up into his and his wife Nicole's magic circle of friends and acquaintances.

Rosemary's relationship to the Divers, Dick in particular, is the central theme of Book 1. Dick at first treats her 'love' for him lightly and refuses her dramatic offer of her body. But then he finds that he has fallen in love with her and is thrown off balance, the careful balance that he has set up for himself. Book 1 ends when Rosemary (and the reader) discovers Nicole's secret, finding her acting in a deranged manner in a hotel bathroom.

Book 2 is about Dick in his early years, first poised at the age of 26, in 'the very acme of bachelorhood', on the shores of Europe, about to make his name as a bright young psychiatrist. He returns to the Swiss clinic where Nicole had first seen him and is encouraged by Franz, his friend and colleague, to help her work through the transference that she has developed to him. He is also told about her seduction by her father. He becomes attracted to her and, when he acknowledges this to the head of the clinic, it is decided that it is best for him to leave. However, he meets Nicole again on a trip to the mountains when she is much recovered, they confess their love for each other and thus step over the doctor-patient boundary and get married.

The central theme of Book 2 is the relationship between Dick and Nicole. Nicole has recurrent breakdowns - only briefly alluded to in the book. They have two children. They travel. Dick sporadically and ineffectually tries to write. The problems in their relationship become apparent. There is a horrifying episode where Nicole causes the car in which she, Dick and the children are travelling, to crash by wrenching away the wheel. Dick begins drinking. He goes off on his own for a while and meets Rosemary again, now 'grown up', and their affair is consummated in a sexual union. But the balance of power has shifted between them and this section ends with Dick in Rome, getting horribly drunk, fighting with a taxi-driver, punching a policeman and being held in jail. Quite a contrast from the cool, poised and clever man we first met on the Riviera.

In the final section of the novel we see Dick's decline - his continued and increased drinking, his departure from the clinic and, most significantly, the break-up of his relationship with Nicole. In fact, Nicole leaves him for another man and we then lose sight of Dick as he leaves Europe and returns to America, drifting into obscure jobs and relationships in various small towns.

Nicole is a schizophrenic patient hospitalized in Dohmle's clinic in Zurich. She falls in love with Dick at the first sight. Before returning to the clinic at Zurich, Dr. Diver had received some 50 letters from Nicole and, in a light way, replied to some of them. He falls in with his colleague Franz's, suggestion that he should help the patient by cultivating the 'transference'. He is attracted to Nicole by her beauty and her vulnerability. But when this becomes obvious and Franz warns him about it, Dick says that he has only one plan "and that's to be a good psychologist - maybe the greatest one that ever lived" (TITN, 132). At this point Dick has the

chance to regain the ground he has lost and "work through the transference" or turn his attention elsewhere.

"Necessarily he must absent himself from felicity a while-in dreams he saw her walking on the clinic path swinging her wide straw hat..." (TITN, 144). "He wheeled off his bicycle, feeling Nicole's eyes following him, feeling her helplessness first love, feeling it twist around inside him. He went three hundred yards up the slope to the other hotel, he engaged a room and found himself washing without a memory of the intervening ten minutes, only a sort of drunken flush pierced with voices, unimportant voices that did not know how much he was loved" (TITN, 150).

The cause of the outbreak of her mental illness is a result of the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. Her Oedipal desire has been projected onto Dick as romantic feelings. Since the emotional transference to Dick is regarded as advantageous for her therapy, her doctors decide to employ the transference as a therapeutic technique. Doctor diver, "a man of fine character" (TITN,156), is expected to correctly deal with the transference and lead his patient to recovery. But instead he allows the relationship to develop as though he had no capacity to do otherwise. However, in fact he can't dissolve the transference. Additionally, the resulting counter-transference emotionally involves him in an entangled relationship with Nicole.

Like transference, counter-transference often involves the projection or displacement of unconscious feelings and wishes, only in this case the focus is on the analyst's, not the patient's perceptions within the therapeutic relationship. Dick, as a psychiatrist, is aware of the danger in transference, but he is ignorant of its influence on himself and never analyzes his emotional reactions to it. Counter-transference has aroused romantic feelings in him, disturbed his sense of reality and endangered the relationship between the doctor and patient.

"The voice fell low, sank into her breast and stretched the tight bodice over her heart as she came close. He felt the young lips, her body sighing in relief against the arm growing stronger to hold her. There were now no more plans than if Dick had arbitrarily made some indissoluble mixture, with atoms joined and inseparable; you could throw it all out but never again could they fit back into atomic scale. As he held her and tasted her, and as she curved in further and further toward 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" (TITN,155).

Dr. Diver's interactions with Nicole are motivated in part by her unconscious activation of his counter- transference: his "professional" behavior with her grows more and more inappropriate as she inadvertently triggers his drive to meet his own love and power needs. Recognizing the danger of Dick's apparent "sentimental involvement" with his own patient, both Franz and Dr. Dohmler, the clinic's director, attempt to set him straight. As an experienced psychiatrist and Chief Administrator of the clinic, Dr. Dohmler reminds Dr.

Diver of the necessity of acting professionally in Nicole's best interests, despite any temptation she might pose to Dick: "I have nothing to do with your personal reactions," said Dr. Dohmler." But I have much to do with the fact that this so-called 'transference'" he darted a short ironic look at Franz which the latter returned in kind, "must be terminated" (TITN,139). Increasingly concerned about Dick's degree of personal involvement with Nicole, Dohmler considers the possibility of separating the pair. Dick concedes that Nicole's infatuation with him constitutes "a situation" only to be reminded vehemently again by Dohmler that "it is a professional situation" (TITN,140). Before the doctors agree that Dick must gently sever his relationship with Nicole, Dick speculates aloud over the possibility of marrying her. Franz is so dismayed by this fantasy that he cannot curb an uncharacteristic outburst in which he declares that it would be "better never to see her again" (TITN,140).

Since Diver wants, above all, 'to be loved,' it is not surprising that he grows narcissistically involved with Nicole's sexualized transference, which prompts her to flirt with him. "You don't think I've got any common sense-before I was sick I didn't have any, but I have now. And if I don't know you're the most attractive man I ever met you must think I'm still crazy. It's my hard luck, all right-but don't pretend I don't *know*-I know everything about you and me" (TITN,154). Dick becomes more and more dependent on Nicole's attention-and less and less certain of his relation to her" (TITN,135).

Evidently, Dick does suffer some conflict over his attachment to his beautiful young patient. On a rational basis- and with the input of his esteemed colleagues-he perhaps perceives that his interest in Nicole is decidedly personal and therefore selfish and unprofessional as well. "If I hadn't been sick would you-I mean, would I have been the sort of girl you might have-oh, slush, you know what I mean" (TITN,154). He was in for it now, possessed by a vast irrationality. She was so near that he felt his breathing change but again his training came to his aid in a boy's laugh and a trite remark. "You're teasing yourself, my dear. Once I knew a man who fell in love with his nurse-" (TITN,154).The anecdote rambles on, punctuated by their footsteps.

However it is his inability to resolve his internal confusion about Nicole that leads him to increase his involvement with her. He encourages her attention and enters a relationship with her unwisely, on the unsound basis of her transferent vulnerability with-and affection for him. Their relationship originates on a very uncertain basis. Dick's unsuccessful, and perhaps even insincere, effort to discourage Nicole's infatuation while she is his patient has a lasting and deteriorating impact on her. For Nicole, Dick Diver is psychologically ill-equipped to provide the unthreatening, nurturing environment she needs following her father's sexual exploitation. Almost as soon as Dick arrives on the scene, Nicole's transference triggers her unconscious efforts "to reassure herself of her irresistibility" in her favorite doctor's eyes and "to exaggerate her readiness for sexual surrender" (Berman 74). Dick's counter-transference, which derives from their initial therapeutic relationship, shapes their life together.

Significantly, the close of the novel illuminates the role of counter-transference in Dick's deteriorating relationship with Nicole. Their marriage disintegrates; it becomes clear that Nicole can only recover once she is free of Dick, her transferred father figure. Dick realizes that they both must separate for both their sakes. His hold is broken, the transference is broken. He goes away. From his high terrace Dick, released forever into the liberty of the lost, and loneliness of the self-knowing, the knowledge that life is too little left for living, at last "raised his right hand and with a papal cross he blessed the beach" TITN,(314). Nicole marries Tommy Barban. The 'transference' is transferred from Dick to Tommy. Nicole is not in love in a healthy or normal sense; she has simply found a new protector.

Conclusion

Transference is "the new editions of the old conflicts" (Freud 454). Freud mentions about the attitudes that doctors should take: "It is out of the question for us to yield to the patient's demands deriving from the transference; it would be absurd for us to reject them in an unfriendly, still more in an indignant, manner. We overcome the transference by pointing out to the patient that his feelings do not arise from the present situation and do not apply to the person or the doctor, but that they are repeating something that happened to him earlier." (443-444)

According to Jung's explanation about counter-transference, "the unconscious infection brings with it the therapeutic possibility-which should not be underestimated -of the illness being transferred to the doctor" (12). What is most important for dealing with counter-transference is that the doctor gains enough insight into his own unconscious process to analyze when the unconscious contents are activated. Analysts must be ready for the psychological infection when counter-transference occurs. Dick's problem is that he misunderstood his romantic feelings as authentic, not the feelings arising in a fictional relationship of transference and counter-transference, and yields to Nicole's desire, charged with Oedipal complex, and translated into affection for Dick. On the other hand, Dick's romantic emotions that well up in his heart are transferred and induced by his patient. Also, the image of Dick projected by Nicole is not the same as the reality; the image created by Nicole is a projection of Dick's ideals. In the letters to Dick, she writes about her imagined Dick and her wishes: "I thought when I saw you in your uniform you were so handsome. Then I thought Je m'en fiche French too and German.... However, you seem quieter than the others, all soft like a big cat" (TITN,121), and "I wish someone were in love with me like boys were ages ago before I was sick"(TITN,24).

Her affection for Dick, is not real but fictitious. However, her fictionalized romantic passion urges Dick to cross the line between fiction and reality. He has to live in a counter-transferential situation or live a fictionalized reality different from real life, which means that the doctor has to suffer the illness transferred from the patient. One of his colleague, Franz Gregorovich warned him, "What! And devote half your life to being doctor and nurse and

all” (TITN,140). But then he is resolved to accept the fictionalized romantic relationship and return her affections. Dick attempts to live the present oblivious to his own past in a fictional situation of transference and counter-transference, in Nicole’s illusions.

Following these psychological explanations, we can understand that feelings evoked by transference and counter-transference must be treated as fictionalized emotions, metaphors of original desire. After separating from Dick, Nicole marries Tommy Barban, her friend and a soldier. Dick has actually been released from the counter-transference by the forced removal of his love. However, in their doctor-patient relationship based on the projections of each other’s unconscious contents, both of them were forced to make their utmost efforts and sacrifice part of their real selves to maintain the fictional relationship.

Fitzgerald has created a whole fictional story out of a psychological concept, the reality which he was going through and has done justice to the theme as well as the concept. The novel, *Tender is the Night*, itself can explain this phenomenon completely and clearly.

Works cited:

- Burton E. Mary. “The Counter-Transference of Dr. Diver”. ELH. The John Hopkins University Press. Vol 38 no. 3 (1971) 459-471
- Cokal Susann. “Caught in the Wrong Story: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Structure in *Tender is the Night*”. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47.1 (2005): 75-100. Print
- Fitzgerald. F. Scott. *Tender is the Night* 1934. Reprint. New York: Scribner, 2003 Print
- Freud Sigmund. *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychology*. Trans. And ed. James Strachey. London:George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1971
- Fryer Sarah Beebe. “Fitzgerald’s New Women, Harbingers of Change” UMI Research Press, London. 1988. 71-91
- Jung Carl C *The Psychology of the Transference*, 16 vols. Trans. R.F.C. Hull.NY: Bollingen Inc., 1954
- Mizener Arthur. *The Far side of Paradise, A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. The Riverside Press. Cambridge 1965 Second Edition
- Murao Junko. “The Return of Forgotten Memory and the Collapse of Dick Diver”. *Memoirs of Osaka Institute of Technology, Series B* 57.2 (2012) 59-72. Print
- Marzillier John. *Reading Scott Fitzgerald: Literature and the Psychology of Narcissism. . Reformulation*, ACAT News Winter, 1997