Document généré le 18 oct. 2024 13:57

**The Trumpeter**
Journal of Ecosophy

# Hiding a Hurricane Under a Beach Umbrella: Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night's Ecological Latencies

María DeGuzmán

Volume 40, numéro 1, 2024

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113554ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1113554ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Athabasca University Press

ISSN

0832-6193 (imprimé)
1705-9429 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

DeGuzmán, M. (2024). Hiding a Hurricane Under a Beach Umbrella: Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night's Ecological Latencies. *The Trumpeter*, *40*(1), 22–48. https://doi.org/10.7202/1113554ar

Résumé de l'article

At first glance, Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night seems like a far cry from what Matthew M. Lambert has termed "Green Depression" literature. Philip Rahv's critique that Tender attempted to hide from a hurricane under a beach umbrella tagged it with the lingering perception that it was incongruously out of touch with its era's "climate." Revisiting Tender through the lens of Antonioni's 1960 film L'avventura that showcases a copy of Fitzgerald's novel, this article looks back on the novel itself to reveal the powerful undertow of its "ecological latencies," which were there all along in submerged and "dormant" form. The creation of this lens through which to view Tender Is the Night does not mean that this article aims to offer a comparative reading of Antonioni's film and Fitzgerald's novel. Side-by-side formal comparison is not the goal of this article. Rather, the article underscores a carefully staged yet critically overlooked reference in Antonioni's 1960s film itself—to Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night—in order to offer a completely new reading, an ecologically engaged one, of Fitzgerald's 1934 novel.

© María DeGuzmán, 2024

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

https://www.erudit.org/fr/

*The Trumpeter*
ISSN 1705-9429
Volume 40, No. 1 (2024)

# Hiding a Hurricane Under a Beach Umbrella: Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*'s Ecological Latencies

*María DeGuzmán*

## The Journey Undertaken Here

Inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's own interest in the rendition of spaces or environments evident across his novels and short stories and pertinent to his film industry work, this article revisits his 1934 novel *Tender Is the Night* through the lens of Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960 film *L'avventura*. This film showcases the appearance, on a sea-buffeted volcanic island off the coast of Sicily,[1] of a copy of *Tender* after its owner mysteriously disappears. This article practices a form of critical latency in reverse, from a relative future to a relative past, to approach Fitzgerald's 1934 novel. Written from the second decade of the ecocidal twenty-first century, this article creates a lens through which to examine *Tender's* ecological latencies via Antonioni's film shot in 1959, twenty-five years after the publication of *Tender*, and released in 1960, two years before the publication of Rachel Carson's nonfiction book *Silent Spring* emphasizing the ecological web of life and the harms done to it by DDT and other pesticides. Antonioni's *L'avventura* enacts significant themes and techniques from Fitzgerald's novel invested in the descriptive rendering of the spatial locations of its unfolding drama. The themes and techniques shared by Fitzgerald's novel and Antonioni's film revolve around questions of ecology, understood as a dialectic between inner and outer worlds, the human and the non-human, and are expressed largely through ecological metonymy.

The creation of this lens through which to view *Tender Is the Night* does not mean that this article aims to offer a formal comparative reading of Antonioni's film and Fitzgerald's novel. The goal of this article is not a side-by-side comparison via the customary analysis of film stills and dialogue, nor is this article chiefly concerned with the cinematographic even while it openly acknowledges this important aspect of the novel.[2] Rather, this article underscores a visually staged yet critically

This article is dedicated to the memory of my mother and to my late cat Purrl. My mother introduced me to *Tender Is the Night* and also to Antonioni's films. My cat accompanied me as I researched and wrote this article in what turned out to be the last year of his life.

[1] Michelangelo Antonioni, *L'avventura*, (New York: Cino del Duca, 1960).

[2] See, for example, Alan Bilton, "The Melancholy of Absence: Reassessing the Role of Film in *Tender Is the Night*," *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, 5 (2006): 28-53.

overlooked reference in Antonioni's 1960s film itself—to Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*—in order to offer a completely new reading, an ecologically engaged one, of Fitzgerald's 1934 novel. By "ecologically engaged," I take a cue from Timothy Morton's argument that the "idea of 'nature' [as radically separate from humans and from culture] is getting in the way of ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art."[3] Thus, by "ecologically engaged" I mean a reading that queries and troubles clear lines between "culture" and "nature" or between humans and the more-than-human. Rather, the "ecological" plumbs the entanglements and inextricabilities between these muddy, contested categories. And, it plumbs them in ways that may raise awareness, that may lead to greater ecosophical relational wisdom, but do not necessarily yield ready solutions, however much those may be desired.

This article looks back on the novel itself to reveal the powerful undertow of what I call its "ecological latencies," what was there all along in submerged and "dormant" form. My version of the term "ecological latencies" can be related to Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence." He defines "slow violence" as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[4] However, my concept of ecological latencies differs in that, while these latencies can result from slow violence, the entire focus is not on violence, either slow or fast, in terms of injury, abuse, damage, or destruction. Ecological latencies also involve processes that do not conform to human desires or to human attempts at control. Humans tend to view that which cannot be controlled as adverse, perverse, dangerous, and/or inhospitable. But, the adverse, perverse, dangerous, and inhospitable do not necessarily constitute a form of violence, however much we might dread them or treat them as something to avoid, to battle, or to denounce.

Furthermore, "ecological latencies" implies both hidden-ness and delay, a camouflage of consequences and a delayed reaction to them. In the most general sense, "latency," a term in use as early as the second and third decades of the seventeenth century[5] refers to both: 1. a condition of existence – that which is present but is hidden, concealed, or not yet active; and 2. a feature of timing in which there is a delay between stimulus and response. These notions are closely related if not dependent on one another. A delayed response likely ensues if a stimulus is hidden, concealed, not yet fully active, or undetected. Using the phrase "ecological latency" once

---

[3] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1. See also Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) on global warming as a hyperobject with a vast impact on how we live, think, and experience politics, ethics, and cultural production.

[4] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

[5] *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 944.

in his hefty thesis, medical and environmental anthropology scholar Takeshi Uesugi delves into some of these aspects pertaining to a delay between stimulus and response in his exploration of latency as "a common feature of poisoning" and of the delayed cultural and socio-political reaction apparent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' Agent Orange litigation and compensation movement, decades after the concentrated use by the US Armed Forces of the herbicide/chemical warfare weapon Agent Orange from 1962 to 1971 during the Vietnam War.[6] However, other aspects of "ecological latencies" that I am underscoring in this article, particularly the psychoanalytic ones, are not part of his study's purview. These are important analytical differences to note, especially for approaching Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, a novel that montages and blurs a consideration of many kinds of human-induced slow violence with a consideration of that which lies beyond the ready control of humans, first and foremost not only other humans but also the workings of the unconscious.

What is at stake in this analytical journey is an attempt to uncover the proto-ecological sensibilities constitutive of the content and method of Fitzgerald's *Tender*. As proto-ecological, not only does the novel trade in ecological latencies, it is, to a large extent, a novelistic example of those very latencies, of an earlier-stage registration of the Anthropocene. But, even though the novel might be considered earlier-stage in many respects, it anticipates contemporary directions in ecocriticism and environmental studies, for example those considering a dialectical approach between ecology and psychoanalysis.

## ***Tender*** **and Inclement "Weather"**

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *Tender Is the Night* is best known for its depiction of marital erosion and disintegration between Dick Diver, an ambitious US psychiatrist, and an alluring, enigmatic woman named Nicole Warren (also his patient). The doctor's affair with a young Hollywood actress, Rosemary Hoyt, both symptomizes and contributes to this erosion. This marital malaise is enmeshed in a network of competitive, ambivalent, and alcohol-fueled relations among a group of upper-middle and upper-class "Lost Generation" US expatriates living on the French Riviera, in Paris, and elsewhere during the decade after World War I. The novel, published on April 12, 1934 by the New York City publishing firm Charles Scribner's Sons, offered a complete version of the material serialized between January and April 1934 across four issues of *Scribner's Magazine*.[7] The novel took Fitzgerald more than seven years to write in locations on both sides

[6] See Takeshi Uesugi, "Delayed Reactions: 'Conjuring' Agent Orange in Twenty-First Century Vietnam" (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2011), 47, 178-180, and 194.

[7] This 1934 novel differs from the posthumous 1951 version. The 1934 novel begins on the French Riviera and moves backward in time through an extended flashback before moving forward again at a much faster pace. The 1951 version presents all events in chronological order. My analysis is based on the 1934 version.

of the Atlantic: on the French Riviera, in Paris, Cannes, Switzerland, Montgomery (AL), and, finally, in a rented Victorian house on the outskirts of Baltimore, Maryland. It was published during the climatological and socio-economic environmental disaster termed "the Dust Bowl" (1930 to 1936), in the middle of the Great Depression, during the rise of fascism across Europe and also in the United States, two years before the outbreak, on July 17, 1936, of the Spanish Civil War, widely considered a prelude to World War II, and less than three and half years before Hitler's blitzkrieg invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 and the commencement of World War II.

*Tender's* focus on people with power, privilege, and leisure combined with the timing of its publication prompted the much-quoted remark from literary critic Philip Rahv, a reviewer for the US Communist Party's newspaper *Daily Worker*: "Dear Mr. Fitzgerald, you can't hide from a hurricane under a beach umbrella."[8] Rahv was not alone in his criticism of the book or in his reasons for it. In the decades after it emerged, other critics also found its subject matter and structure disorienting. With regard to Rahv's critique, "a hurricane" connoted the Great Depression as well as the struggles, resistance, and uprisings of the proletariat against domination and repression by the capitalist ruling classes. The beach umbrella signified inadequate protection from "weather" understood not only as meteorological but, furthermore, as socio-economic and political forces with the capacity to re-arrange material conditions of existence.

In terms of literary responses to these conditions, the 1930s was the decade that witnessed a pronounced rise, even a flourishing, of working-class literature during the Proletarian literature movement as well as the development of what scholar Matthew M. Lambert termed "the Green Depression." By "Green Depression," Lambert refers to literature of the 1930s and 1940s concerned with the devastating effects of human actions on environments, the ecological significance of nonhuman nature, and connections between environmental exploitation and ethno-racial, socioeconomic, and gender inequalities.[9] Philip Rahv's reference to a "hurricane" as the kind of storm that *Tender* was, presumably, vainly attempting to hide from under a beach umbrella, struck a timely chord with audiences. The critique resonated in its historical moment, the mid 1930s, but also in immediately visceral ways for readers cognizant of the brutal impacts of hurricanes. According to environmental, atmospheric, oceanographic, and climate science specialists, "[t]he 1933 Atlantic hurricane season was extremely active, with 20 named storms and 11 hurricanes including 6 major … hurricanes occurring. The 1933 hurricane season also generated the most Accumulated Cyclone Energy (an integrated metric that accounts for

---

[8] Charles Scribner III, Intro to *Tender Is the Night* (1934; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), xiv.

[9] Matthew M. Lambert, *The Green Depression: American Ecoliterature in the 1930s and 1940s* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), 3-19.

frequency, intensity, and duration) of any Atlantic hurricane season on record."[10] The 1933 Atlantic hurricane season, unmatched for its ferocity until the year 2005, would have been fresh in memory for US eastern seaboard readers and others perusing reviews of *Tender*, published within the first four months of 1934. The critique that the novel amounted to an attempt to hide from a hurricane under a beach umbrella tagged it with the lingering perception that it was incongruously out of touch with the era's "climate" and with what its times were presaging.

From the mid 1930s onward, *Tender's* reception history would take the shape of a slowly rising slope. Ironically, this slope has inverted the slow and then quick dissipation of the American Dream—of youthful beauty, money, success, and happiness—chronicled in its pages about US expatriates as well as those who returned "home" after living a significant amount of time abroad. Its account of the demise of the American Dream, of "brave illusions"[11] more generally, and of a sense of infinite possibilities travelled that downward slope with accelerating velocity through *Tender's* various parts or "books," the first two relatively long, and the last one disproportionately short. Setting aside the saga of revisions to *Tender* during and after Fitzgerald's life, the fact that two versions of the novel exist in print, and that the "final" form of the novel remains an elusive conundrum of its complicated editing and publishing history, this novel's elongated and then foreshortened structure disoriented many readers and critics. It prompted them to be less receptive to it than to the 1925 *Great Gatsby's* short but grand drama of Jay Gatsby's meteoric rise and then precipitous extinction seen through the eyes of a narrator, Nick Carraway, more than sympathetic to Gatsby (see Cotyle).[12]

While, following their releases, both novels received mixed reviews and were deemed commercial disappointments (failures, even), *The Great Gatsby* was treated as a classic of "American literature" by the 1950s. Consequently, it has received a great deal of critical attention, including some from ecocriticism,[13] especially with a focus on what Jordan Leigh Forbes Cook calls "the ecological tragedy of the valley of ashes … between New York and West Egg," once the land of the Lenape Indigenous Peoples.[14] In contrast, a wider spectrum of critical reception and serious exploration of *Tender* is still unfolding as are the many modalities of that

---

[10] Philip J. Klotzbach, et al., "The Record-Breaking 1933 Atlantic Hurricane Season," *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 102, no. 3 (2021), 446.

[11] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (1934; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 75.

[12] William Cotyle, "The Great Carraway: A Queer Theory-Based Analysis of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby" (Master's Thesis, Ghent University, 2018), https://libstore.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/002/508/343/RUG01-002508343_2018_0001_AC.pdf.

[13] See, in particular, Chapter 4 of Matthew M. Lambert's book *The Green Depression*.

[14] Jordan Leigh Forbes Cook, "The Western Ecologies of F. Scott Fitzgerald" (Master's Thesis, University of Virginia, 2016): 11-12.

exploration, including films, television series, and other novels manifesting its impact or legacies. Thus far, vis-à-vis ecocriticism, *Tender Is the Night* has been profoundly overlooked. However, the intra-filmic context of its cameo appearance in Antonioni's 1960 film *L'avventura* proffers a compelling invitation to just such a mode of reading the novel.

## The Lens of Antonioni's *L'avventura* for Revisiting *Tender*

A large portion of *L'avventura* takes place not on *Tender's* "pleasant shore of the French Riviera, about half way between Marseilles and the Italian border,"[15] but, instead, on the craggy volcanic islands off the north coast of Sicily—the Aeolian or Lipari islands that include Panarea, Salina, Lipari, and others. However, as with Fitzgerald's *Tender*, the film focuses on a group of people from the upper-middle and upper classes. In *L'avventura*, this group embarks on a small-yacht pleasure cruise to these volcanic islands. A love triangle develops, with a mysterious twist, between one man, Sandro, and two women, Anna and Claudia. The latent love triangle surfaces through the sudden disappearance from the island of Anna and the subsequent search for her by the remaining members of the pleasure boat party, especially by Sandro and Claudia. These two eventually take up with each other in a relationship existentially burdened by the eerie absence of the woman they each supposedly loved and by their own guilt over being swept away from the rescue search by the current of their attraction to one another.

A third of the film's storyline unfolds on one of the volcanic islands. Much of the action involves various members of the pleasure cruise engaged in anxious, restless, bored, and frustrated half-hearted search for this missing companion, Anna. Multiple shots show characters wandering among a labyrinth of volcanic rocks on an island buffeted by wind and waves. The environment, seemingly inhospitable (though actually a roost for seabirds and home to flies, lizards, and rats, the latter from passing boats), functions as more than a metaphor for the lack of communication and ambivalence among these friends and between the couples. The environments of these islands, especially inhospitable-seeming to upper bourgeois human beings intent on visiting them, are not mere symbols of or for troubled human relationships, even while, of course, they can be read symbolically. These islands' terrain—the labyrinth of volcanic rocks and boulders—serves as a material, volcanic "touchstone" of the fact that the self-absorbed characters are uncomprehending of themselves, of other people, and, also, of the place where they have disembarked. The place, its terrain, its ecologies, matter as much as the relationships between the people themselves. Many shots feature hands groping the rocks in labored ascents up or descents down the steep and occasionally unstable slopes prone to rock slides, a terrain in some way echoing the multiple scenes in Fitzgerald's *Tender* that ominously focus on the rocky

[15] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 3.

precipices of the French Riviera and the summits and dramatic drops of the Swiss Alps. The promised pleasures of the "pleasure" cruise to the volcanic islands sought after for their dramatic rock formations and crystalline waters are marred by ambivalences, cross-purposes, alienation, miscommunication, and literal absence among the party-goers. The film presents the various characters' disconnections from one another as part and parcel of their profound narcissistic eco-illiteracy about or ignorance of the islands to which they have blithely cruised.[16]

The media theorist Gene Youngblood, author of the influential 1970 book *Expanded Cinema* (with an introduction by environmentalist, philosopher, architect, and designer R. Buckminster Fuller), observed, in audio commentary recorded in 1989, that Antonioni's *L'avventura* was a milestone of innovative film grammar.[17] Part of its milestone quality pertains to its use of topographical, geological, and "built" architectural environments deployed not merely as reflections of or metaphors for the ambivalences, hostilities, and miscommunications between the people, but, instead as, Youngblood argues, "metonym."[18] He defines metonym as "part for the whole," which confuses it with synecdoche, but his subsequent commentary suggests that he is actually referring to metonyms or metonymy.[19] Traditionally, metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of an object or concept is replaced with a word closely related to the original. Following Youngblood's initial reference to "metonym," I clarify and underscore that this film indeed operates in an ecological metonymic mode by delineating troubled human relations through physical environments of various kinds, suggesting these relationships and environments are more than closely related. It spatializes these relationships in and through environments, not merely in the symbolic mode of pathetic fallacy, but, instead, because the human relations are materially entangled with these environments and vice versa. In this metonymic mode, the environments—from volcanic islands to the bombed-out tower of the San Domenico church at the film's conclusion—refer to themselves as much as to the human relations.

As with *Tender* through its descriptive passages, *L'avventura*, through its film grammar, produces a dialectic between external realities (the physical world, material conditions, collective social relations) and interior subjective realities (the psychological motivations, conflicts, mental, and spiritual struggles of the characters). The dialectic between external and internal realities is

[16] Luciana Bohne, co-founder of the journal *Film Criticism*, observes that Sandro, the main male protagonist and the architect among the party-goers, is unable to behold objects without relating them to his ego. On narcissism as depicted in Antonioni's 1960 film, see her article "The Discourse of Narcissism in *L'Avventura*," *Film Criticism*, 9, no. 1 (1984): 17-24.

[17] Gene Youngblood, "Audio Commentary," *L'avventura*, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (1960; New York, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2001), DVD, 0:50:00-0:50:14.

[18] Ibid., 0:03:58-0:04:35.

[19] Ibid., 0:03:55- 0:03:58.

established and developed via Antonioni's technique of presenting viewers with images containing observable environmental phenomena whose significance is not yet obvious or manifest: for example, waves washing into dark hollows between large, jagged rocks; a small boat passing inconspicuously out into the open ocean; and the main protagonists Claudia and Sandro back-dropped by eerily lit, wind-blown storm clouds and a dormant volcano across a darkened, choppy sea. This technique could be construed as foreshadowing. However, rather than casting a shadow of what is to come later, shots of environments (topographical, geological, built) in *L'avventura* seem to simply appear as literal (not metaphorical) matter of either the vanishing present moment or of "dead time," the apparently inactive present moment. Viewers see the images, but may not consciously register them because they have not yet grasped their import as part of a pattern of causes and consequences. The succession of images, at different rates (some slow, some fast), operates through latency, in this case, with a delay between sensation (sight and sound) and response connected to interpretation, meaning-making. The more the characters (especially Claudia), and the viewers along with them, become aware of this delay in "comprehension," the more anxiety increases, especially in the context of a shocking event: the sudden disappearance of Anna, a key member of the pleasure cruise party.

The ecological latencies of Antonioni's 1960 *L'avventura* are indebted to F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1934 *Tender Is the Night* both in thematic preoccupations and, to a significant extent, approaches, even while the pacing of the works is obviously quite different, with Fitzgerald's novel being fast-paced and heavily emplotted or event-filled in contrast with Antonioni's slower, open-ended, contemplative film.[20] However, it is precisely this meditative pacing that opens a time-based space for the film to dramatically showcase its indebtedness to *Tender*. Fitzgerald's *Tender* and the Bible are the only two books that materialize on the island. Claudia, the least self-absorbed character and the one most apprehensively aware of the world and other people, finds the two books, translated into Italian, in her missing friend's suitcase. Claudia hands the books to Anna's father when he appears on the island as part of the ongoing search for his missing daughter. Several camera shots linger on hands holding these books, angling them in such a way that viewers can glimpse their titles. The slow pacing of this scene and the minimal words exchanged between Claudia and Anna's father provide viewers with the space to reflect on what these books might mean in relation to Anna's disappearance and to the preoccupations of the film as a whole.

The most obvious connection to be made between *L'avventura* and *Tender* is that these two

[20] The differences in pacing between the novel and the film conform, in many ways, to Gilles Deleuze's distinctions between the movement image (*Tender*) and the time image (*L'avventura*) in his 1980s treatises on cinema. See *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1983) and *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1985). See, also, scholar and creative writer Umberto Eco's brief exploration in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 116-18, of the "openness" of *L'avventura* through its suspension of packed sequences of action and reaction, among other techniques.

works represent both the outward and inner lives of certain members of a group of relatively privileged people drifting aimlessly and, at times, self-destructively from one location to another in different yet similar post-world war contexts, late industrialism and late modernity or the great acceleration, eras impacting "ecology" in the broadest intersectional sense. This drifting symptomizes a post-war crisis of values where the old values are incommensurate with the "new" world in which they find themselves. For *Tender* the post-war is marked by World War I, which involved the wide-scale use of trench warfare and chemical weapons[21]; for *L'avventura*, the post-war pertains to the decades following the end of World War II, characterized by the strategic bombing of large civilian centers and the first use of nuclear weapons. Antonioni's film, like Fitzgerald's novel, could be said to be dramatizing the neurosis of a "lost generation," different generations but both damaged and lost as part of the aftermath of a shattering major war. Indeed, *L'avventura* melds a neo-realist approach, concerned with society and the physical world, and an interiorized post-neo-realist approach that plumbs psychological motivations and the lingering psychic effects of historically inherited traumas inflicted by ideology and war (hence, for instance, the many examples of fascist architecture in the second half of the film and the bombed-out church at its conclusion).

Despite the validity of reading the cameo appearance in *L'avventura* of Fitzgerald's *Tender* through the shared preoccupation with a "lost generation," the intra-filmic and meta-filmic importance of its presence in the first place, alongside such a culturally "major" book as the Bible, is not limited to this "lost generation" through-line. My article proposes a different emphasis, a different through-line, comprising both theme and technique. This new emphasis does not preclude the notion of "lost generations," but rather encompasses it while shifting our attention from strictly human-to-human relations toward human relations as embedded within, mediated by, and inseparable from ecologies plural—from relationships between living organisms (including humans) and physical environments.

In Fitzgerald's *Tender*, as with Antonioni's *L'avventura* that openly references *Tender* in the books scene, these ecological relations are characterized by latency, formally and content-wise. Furthermore, as already suggested in the analysis of *L'avventura*, the inspiration and model for the 1960 film's deployment of ecological latencies (emphasizing what was there all along in submerged and "dormant" form) was *Tender Is the Night*. This is not to say that Fitzgerald's novel served as the only source informing the themes and techniques of *L'avventura*'s ecological latencies, but it was indeed a primary one, so primary that it is exhibited to viewers. This

[21] Trevor Dodman, "Traumatic Topographies in *Tender Is the Night*," in *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 172-200.

demonstration places the 1960 *L'avventura* in a legacy relation to *Tender*.[22] Furthermore, it invites readers and viewers to revisit *Tender* for how the novel posits environments as a Möbius loop between "inner" and "outer" realities.

## *Tender's* Conversion of Psychoanalytic Latency into Narrative Method and Poetics for its Ecological Latencies

Let us now turn to how ecological latencies operate in Fitzgerald's *Tender* and how they manifest as inseparable from the text's obsession with psychoanalysis, the primary means by which the text understands the relation between inner and outer realities. As literary scholar Ronald Berman has observed, "Fitzgerald was from the beginning of his career interested in psychological phenomena and their explanation."[23] By "their explanation," he means psychoanalytic theory, pointing out adverbs and adjectives, such as "subconsciously" and "repressed," in Fitzgerald's prose taken from noun concepts from psychoanalytic theory. I claim that *Tender* literarily converts "latency" in the psychoanalytic sense into a narrative method and poetics for its ecological latencies. The psychoanalytic history of the concept of "latency" bears mentioning given Fitzgerald's personal and artistic investment in psychoanalysis. One of the most famous theorists of "latency" was Sigmund Freud who adapted German physician Wilhelm Fliess's concept of a "latency period" (conceived as a period of reduced sexuality) by including it among the five stages of psychosexual development leading to the adult personality that he, Freud, theorized.[24] According to Freud, during "the latency period," lasting approximately from

---

[22] This would not be the last time that Antonioni would reference Fitzgerald's work and/or life in one of his films. He would do so again in his 1982 film *Identificazione di una donna* (*Identification of a Woman*). That film contains a shot of a photograph of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald—writer, ballerina, painter, socialite, mother, and F. Scott's spouse [see Wagner-Martin, *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)]—hanging on the wall of the chief male protagonist, a middle-aged Italian filmmaker involved with an elusive society woman after his wife has left him. In the context of the film, Zelda's photograph specifically connotes an intelligent and willful woman who resists being reduced to some man's trophy wife or lover. More broadly, this photograph is part of a series of signifiers—a Giorgio Morandi still life drawing of hermetic bottles (that can be read as architectural façades), a cryptic warning delivered in an ice cream parlor, a large marine conch on display in a domestic setting, a movie script titled "Voices from the Other World," an unidentifiable animal in a tree, a newspaper article with the glaring headline "Expanding Sun Poses Threat to the Earth's Future," a dense fog engulfing two of the main characters seeking relief from being spied on by an unknown party, a farmhouse by night sinking into a Roman ruin populated by owls, anamorphosis in a surveillance mirror, a terrifying solitude on the open lagoon of Venice, and strains of eerie space-age music—all of which create and reinforce the sense not only of social alienation, but of subtle and threatening disconnections amongst humans and between them and the environments in which they find themselves, thus portending ecocatastrophe.

[23] Ronald Berman, "American Dreams and 'Winter Dreams': Fitzgerald and Freudian Psychology in the 1920s," *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 4 (2005): 49 from 49-64.

[24] Samuel Kaplan, "Scientific Proceedings: Panel Reports on the Latency Period," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 5, no. 3 (1957): 525-38.

age six to puberty, sexual energy is sublimated into other areas such as the development of intellectual pursuits and social skills. Latency in Freud's theory involves both a condition of existence (concealment of what is not yet fully active) and a feature of timing (delay).

Fitzgerald's *Tender* is steeped in psychoanalysis as is attested by the novel's dissection of sexual attraction and romantic love into developmental "stages"; its obsession with the powerful forces of transference and substitution as witnessed in the Nicole and Dick or "Dicole" relation as well as in other relations between the characters; its dramatization of variations on the Oedipal and Electra complexes (for example, Rosemary in relation to her mother and to Dick; Dick in relation to his father, etc.); its portrayals of a range of affectional and sexual orientations; its representation of the long-lasting psychological impacts of trauma (from child molestation, rape, incest, war trauma, and/or shellshock); its references to psychosomatic illnesses; and its exploration of both conscious and unconscious motivations. Not only does the novel directly name "Sigmund Freud" various times,[25] but, furthermore, it adopts Freud's theory of the topography of the psyche (the super-ego, the ego, and the id; the conscious and the unconscious). Most importantly, in *Tender*, Fitzgerald turns what Freud initially interchangeably called the "subconscious" or the "unconscious" (until he settled for the "unconscious") into more than a theme.

*Tender* turns the "unconscious," or that which lies "below" or "before" conscious perception, into a narrative method or technique accomplished largely through descriptive passages. This narrative technique operates via the latency effects of those descriptive passages themselves. As previously mentioned, latency involves the eventual emergence of something from something that was there all along in a "dormant" or preliminary form. This technique should be distinguished from foreshadowing to which it is closely related. Foreshadowing operates mostly in terms of sequential temporality: a narrative element foreshadows, or casts a shadow of, an event that will come to pass later on. But, in latency, that which becomes substantial later on already exists as substance (more than a shadow), only dormant or submerged, in a state that is difficult or tricky to detect, that evades our conscious perception, though we may sense it at the edges of perception, or maybe only sub- or un-consciously.

The distinction may not seem like much, but the implications are considerable. Foreshadowing exists largely through the deployment of symbolism or, if not symbolism wherein one element or event warns of or presages another, then via the shadow of an action or event that will take place later on. Latency, in contrast, represents the superposition of the present and the future, and, also of the past in addition to the present and future. Latency partakes in the material substance of what eventually materializes full-blown. It is the "matter" in a dormant or

[25] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 115 and 169.

submerged form.

As with foreshadowing from which it can be distinguished, latency, a much older term, is closely related to a couple of terms that gained currency in the 1880s[26]: "liminal" (at the threshold) and "subliminal" (below the threshold and thus imperceptible and/or below the threshold of conscious awareness). Given that latency denotes both a condition of existence in which an element is present but hidden, concealed, or not yet active and a feature of timing in which there is a delay between stimulus and response, the experience of the subliminal may, and often does, pertain to an encounter with the latent. However, latency is not contained by or limited to the subliminal, in that some aspects of what is latent are not so much hidden or concealed from view as they are dormant. Ironically, in fact, they may be very much in view, but just not in an active or crisis stage, yet—as with the repeatedly featured dormant volcano in Antonioni's *L'avventura*, for example.

Revisiting the claim that *Tender* turns that which lies "below" or "before" conscious perception into a narrative technique accomplished largely through the latency effects of descriptive passages, we can analyze these passages for what they do beyond the classic foreshadowing found in Gothic novels and realist novels, for example, and in addition to whatever feelings or sensations are being produced through fleeting and often seemingly scrambled inclusion of certain words, phrases, and images in the descriptions. This technique is especially characteristic of many of Nicole's letters to Dick,[27] which the narrative describes, through Dick's perspective, as "letters among whose helpless caesuras lurked darker rhythms."[28] These letters supposedly evidence Nicole's mental illness. However, going against the grain of the misogynistically-tinged assumption about the "helplessness" of the caesuras, this phrase perfectly describes the descriptive passages of *Tender* itself. Caesuras are traditionally defined as cuts, pauses, or breaks in the rhythmic flow of verse. These descriptive passages function as pauses or breaks from the dialogue and the restless, relatively fast-paced highly-plotted yet still chaotic plot that contrasts with *L'avventura's* much more open and lingering style. *Tender's* descriptive passages create spaces for "darker rhythms" to lurk amid the manifest luminosity of Fitzgerald's descriptions of environments (natural, altered, and built) on the French Riviera, in the Swiss Alps, in Paris, in Rome, and so on.

One of Fitzgerald's chief inspirations and sources for turning psychoanalytic latency into narrative method may well have been the writings, across various genres, of his wife Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald,

---

[26] Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles, "The Sublime: In Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis, *Modern Philology* 74, no. 3 (1977): 289-304.

[27] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 121-24.

[28] Ibid., 123.

a "borrowing" that, in many respects, amounted to theft, uncredited as it was except in the most cryptic and farcical manner with the word "Dicole" with which "he [Dick Diver] and Nicole had signed communications in the first days of love."[29] By the time the word is referenced, readers are already aware that Dick's and Nicole's union is disintegrating, not unlike that of the "real-life" F. Scott and Zelda whose relationship was deeply marred by, among other things, a patriarchal marital power imbalance around finances and creative crediting that included F. Scott's plagiarizing of material from Zelda's diaries and other writings.[30]

Although biographer Andrew Turnbull claims that F. Scott Fitzgerald's "tastes were incorrigibly American" and that "[h]e made no effort to improve his stumbling French, nor did he concern himself with French art, architecture, or theater,"[31] another source for Fitzgerald's conversion of psychoanalytic latency into narrative method and poetics for the ecological latencies of *Tender* may well have been André Breton, the French poet, writer, theorist of surrealism (consider, for example, his 1924 publication *Manifeste du surréalisme*), and one of the primary founders of surrealism.[32] Fitzgerald would not necessarily have had to actually read Breton in French to absorb, by osmosis, some of his well-publicized techniques. This absorption by osmosis of Breton's techniques likely took place in the context of Fitzgerald's close acquaintance with Gerald Murphy and his wife Sara Sherman Wiborg who were part of a large Parisian social circle that included many cutting-edge musicians, painters, photographers, and writers. Gerald and Sara were aware of Breton's philosophical and artistic experiments. And, Gerald was not just a friend to Fitzgerald. He was also a mentor, as Ronald Berman demonstrates in his 2012 book *Fitzgerald's Mentors: Edmund Wilson, H. L. Mencken, and Gerald Murphy*.[33]

Breton studied medicine, worked as a nurse in a military hospital during World War I, and was very interested in the psychotherapeutic practices of dream analysis and talk therapy of Sigmund Freud whom he met in 1921. Adapting many of Freud's ideas about the power of the unconscious over the conscious mind, dreams as mediated glimpses of inaccessible material stored over a lifetime in the unconscious,[34] and the need to develop techniques to overcome the unconscious editing (or defense mechanisms) of the ego, Breton elaborated a notion of surrealism as psychic

---

[29] Ibid., 103.

[30] For much more on these issues, see Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1970).

[31] Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 164.

[32] See André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1924).

[33] Ronald Berman, *Fitzgerald's Mentors: Edmund Wilson, H. L. Mencken, and Gerald Murphy* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

[34] On the much harder-to-access latent material of dreams versus their more readily accessible manifest content, see Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, authorized translation of third edition with introduction by A. A. Brill (London: George Allen & Company, Ltd., 1913). The book was originally published in German in 1900.

automatism with the aim to express verbally, visually, or in another form the functioning of thought in the absence of control from reason and exempt from aesthetic or ethical concerns. The idea was to express not only the conscious mind accessible to rationality, but, most especially, the unconscious, presumably "irrational" and probably socially taboo one and, furthermore, to layer consensus reality, often termed "everyday" reality, with the unfettered or less fettered dream world.

This layering of the conscious with the unconscious, the more or less consensus "everyday" manifest reality with the hidden or latent world of dreams and the unconscious, is what F. Scott Fitzgerald does in *Tender*, even overtly pointing to the technique in one of his descriptions of Dick Diver's behavior: "… his presence walking around this block was an intrusion. But, Dick's necessity of behaving as he did was a projection of some submerged reality … ."[35] The Freudian phrase "projection of some submerged reality" is followed by a surreal description of Dick as a dandy-like mannequin: "his collar molded plastically to his neck, his red hair cut exactly, his hand holding his small briefcase like a dandy."[36] The entire description of Dick's visit to the Muette neighborhood of Paris, location of the film studio where Rosemary Hoyt works, superimposes internal realities upon external ones with psychoanalytic and Bretonian surrealist touches, appealing to various senses simultaneously: optic and haptic (for example, in the phrase "molded plastically").

With this awareness of *Tender's* conversion of psychoanalytic latency into narrative method and sensorial poetics, let us examine some key passages from *Tender* involving ecological latencies, what was there all along in submerged and "dormant" form with respect to relationships not only amongst humans and between humans and other life forms, but, more comprehensively, between humans and various environments. A close inspection of the descriptive passages dedicated to these relationships reveals the very dynamic attributed to Nicole's letters "among whose helpless caesuras lurked darker rhythms."[37] Within the aestheticizing prose, the darker rhythms subtly and effectively introduce the sinister, volatile sides of that taken for pleasant "nature." For example, the presumably idyllic garden, initially presented as a space of health and repose, is transformed, through sly descriptive language, into a product of successive human invasions, conquests, and colonization of land. In this process of describing, gardens are revealed to be locations produced through power struggles and assertions of dominance between individuals and between civilizations. In some cases, they are sites of blight, perhaps due to humans chemically meddling with the plants. Herbicides, for instance, have been implicated in

---

[35] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 91.

[36] Ibid., 91.

[37] Ibid., 123.

blight. The settler colonial violence and capitalist plantation system hierarchies lurk behind the fetishization of "green." Furthermore, the threatening properties of otherwise life-giving water become apparent in the form of rainstorms, floods, overwhelming depths masked by sunshine, rip currents, and undertow. Traces of the cumulative effects of the Capitalocene (discussed by Andreas Malm and others) as derived from and extending the ecological effects of the colonial plantation—hence according to Donna Haraway, the Plantationocene—are registered at the very heart of these sometimes picturesque, sometimes sublime, scenarios.[38]

## Beware "the brutal sunshine"

The opening passages of *Tender* describe Gausse's hotel (modelled on Antibes's Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc built in the 1870s) and grounds on the French Riviera "halfway between Marseilles and the Italian border."[39] The initial adjectives for the hotel and beach associate them with romantic optimism and an Orientalized tranquility, the latter referencing Arab influence on the South of France[40]: "a large, proud, rose-colored hotel" and "its bright tan prayer rug of a beach."[41] But, the very next page raises the warmth of the scene to uncomfortable temperatures. Rosemary and her mother who have just arrived at the hotel experience heat (not warmth) and boredom: "sea and sky appeared below them in a thin, hot line."[42] The language about Rosemary's movements around the hotel insinuates a type of struggle or battle, introducing sinister undercurrents beneath the colorful and seemingly peaceful prefatory tones: "the hot light clipped close her [Rosemary's] shadow" and it is "too bright to see."[43] The verb "clipped," most of whose significations conjure violence or adversarial advantage taken of someone, stealthily loads this descriptive portion with conflict. The language of struggle, vaguely suggestive of a battle or war between combatants, continues when the Mediterranean is described as yielding "up its pigments, moment by moment, to the brutal sunshine" and when "below the balustrade

---

[38] See Andreas Malm, "The View from Dominica: Anthropocene or Capitalocene?," *The UNESCO Courier: Many Voices, One World* (2018-2): https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/view-dominica-anthropocene-capitalocene, and also Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: making kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159-65.

[39] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 3.

[40] For Fitzgerald's remarks on traces of Arabic culture along the French Riviera, see Fitzgerald, "How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year," in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47.

[41] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 3.

[42] Ibid., 4.

[43] Ibid., 4.

[of the hotel] a faded Buick cooked on the hotel drive."[44] Both within and beneath the promise of pleasure is displeasure, even pain, in the heat and too much sun. Furthermore, a car, the quintessential man-made "machine in the garden" (to reference Leo Marx's book by that title),[45] disrupts the initial picturesque image of the French Riviera with which the novel opens: "pleasant shore," "deferential palms" cooling the hotel's "flushed façade," and "short dazzling beach."[46] This image of "cooking" in relation to cars and gasoline exhaust will again rear its ugly head in the Paris section of Book 1 in several sentences far more direct about the all-encompassing ecological effects: "In the square, as they came out, a suspended mass of gasoline exhaust cooked slowly in the July sun. It was a terrible thing—unlike pure heat it held no promise of rural escape, but suggested only roads choked with the same foul asthma."[47]

Back to the first few pages of *Tender*, the car cooking on "the hotel drive" and the Mediterranean surrendering its pigments to "the brutal sunshine" contain suggestions of what we now understand to be heat islands and, furthermore, "global" warming produced by fossil fuel pollution and fossil-fuel-powered war. Fossil fuel pollution and war are conditions not only unpleasant, but also potentially fatal. And, by being associated with human activity (the invention of the car, the "art" of war), "fatality" is depicted as imbricated in some form of human agency and not just about non-human forces at work in "nature." The less than two-page description of hotel and grounds combines the pleasurable and the very unpleasant, morphing, by degrees, a temperate paradise into a purgatorial or even hellish torrid zone that results from a combination of human-induced activity, the industrial manufacturing of cars dependent on fossil fuels that produce grease and fumes (hence the "cooking"), and from the blazing Mediterranean sunshine, the heat of which is a factor that simultaneously exists beyond human activity but also within its sphere—earth's atmosphere heated up by the sun and by carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas produced through the burning of fossil fuels. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere and, in turn, contribute to global warming. These introductory descriptions intimate the awful unpleasantness lurking within the pleasant and stealthily populate the narrative present with the ghosts of the recent past (World War I in relation to the temporal setting of the novel's commencement) as well as the far past (consider the comparison of the beach to a prayer rug) and the apparition of a war-torn, climate-changed future already arriving. These ecological latencies produce poignant contradictory sensations in readers: dread in the midst of escapist relaxation.

---

[44] Ibid., 4.

[45] See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[46] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 3.

[47] Ibid., 86.

## Nicole's Garden

The description of Nicole's garden further develops the ecological latencies of *Tender's* opening. As with the description of Gausse's hotel and grounds, the section on Nicole's garden begins with the agreeable and descends, by degrees, below a smooth surface into complicated and alarming currents. This movement is hinted at even in the first paragraph of the garden scene. Phrases go from "feeling good from the rosy wine at lunch" and "went out into her lovely grassless garden" to "the cliff falling by ledges into the sea."[48] In precious little time, the seemingly safe enclosure of the garden gives way to a precipitous cliff, to the threat of serious bodily injury or death by falling over the edge, a thematic that Antonioni's *L'avventura* highlights, particularly in the volcanic island episode. But, so as not to lose the curious building tensions, the description backs away from this looming precipice and follows Nicole as she wanders around her garden. The continuing description evokes pictures of a profuse and complex environment with different kinds of trees (lemon, fig, eucalyptus, pine), flowers (peonies, nasturtiums, iris, tulips, roses), vegetables (in the vegetable portion of the garden), and even a menagerie of animals (pigeons, rabbits, and a parrot). The garden—that can be read as a quintessential Provençal Mediterranean garden of the South of France—is bursting with life.

Taking this profusion as merely "natural" masks a complex sedimentation of human histories affecting the composition of the garden. In terms of the trees invoked, all but "an enormous pine, the biggest tree in the garden"[49] are the product of successive human invasions and colonization of the territory in question, transplantations of humans, fauna, and flora, and human alterations to the landscape. For example, lemon trees are considered to have originated in South and Southeast Asia,[50] introduced to southern Italy by at least the second century (AD), if not earlier, cultivated in Iran and Egypt in the eighth century, and spread around the Mediterranean by Arab conquests as well as through trade networks between Jewish communities. Fig trees are supposedly native to northern India, Asiatic Turkey, and the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa but were spread further westward along the Mediterranean by the seafaring ancient Greeks of the seventh and six centuries BC and by Arabs more than a thousand years later in the tenth century. Eucalyptus trees whose name literally means "hidden" (arguably yet another conceptual trace of ecological latencies) have their origin in New Guinea, parts of Indonesia, Mindanao (the southern part of the Philippines), and especially Australia where they compose three-quarters of Australian forest. Eucalypts were transplanted to many parts of the world—

---

[48] Ibid., 25.

[49] Ibid., 25.

[50] Manuel Talon, Guohong Albert Wu, Frederick G. Gmitter, Daniel S. Rokhsar, "Chapter 2: The Origin of Citrus," in *The Genus Citrus*, eds. Manuel Talon, Marco Caruso, and Fred G. Gmitter (Cambridge, UK: Woodhead Publishing, 2020), 9-31.

Asia, Africa, South America, North America (notably California), and Europe (especially southern Europe)—during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, mostly by British and Anglo-American imperial subjects who, according to Brett M. Bennett (a specialist in the intersections of environmental, global, and science history), unrealistically viewed eucalyptus as "El Dorado of forestry": "for over 150 years people believed eucalypts could cure tropical diseases while also providing a source of continuously renewable wealth … ."[51]

*Tender Is the Night's* descriptions subtly reference the landscape-reshaping projects of empires. In the garden scene, Nicole is described as standing in "the ancient hill village of Tarmes," her arms folded "high enough for the artificial camellia on her shoulder to touch her cheek."[52] A conqueror of sorts, her face "hard, almost stern, save for the soft gleam of piteous doubt that looked from her green eyes,"[53] she surveys the results of other people's conquests as well as some of her own: nasturtiums, iris, "kaleidoscopic peonies massed in pink clouds, black and brown tulips and fragile mauve-stemmed roses, transparent like sugar flowers in a confectioner's window."[54] None of the flowers are native to the South of France. Peonies originated in China, nasturtiums in South America, irises in Syria, and both tulips and roses in Central Asia. Most of them are associated with love (especially, though not exclusively, romantic love) and have a long history of medicinal uses, with those peonies "massed in pink clouds" literally named after the Greek god of medicine and healing "Paeon" or "Paean." Nicole's garden seems to be largely dedicated to flowers associated with love and botanical medicine for healing wounds and palliating many illnesses. However, when Rosemary's mother, Mrs. Speers, appreciatively exclaims about the garden's beauty, Dick Diver responds satirically, re-introducing "darker rhythms" into the delightful prospect of the garden:

> "Nicole's garden," said Dick. "She won't let it alone—she nags it all the time, worries about its diseases. Any day now I expect to have her come down with Powdery Mildew or Fly Speck, or Late Blight."[55]

Dick then turns his attention to his extra-marital interest, Rosemary, saying that he will save her reason by giving her a hat to wear on the beach (presumably to preserve her from heatstroke) and proceeds to steer his guests away "from the garden to the terrace, where he poured a

[51] Brett M. Bennett, "The El Dorado of Forestry: The Eucalyptus in India, South Africa, and Thailand, 1850-2000," *International Review of Social History*, 55, S18 (2010): 27 of 27-50.

[52] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 26 and 25.

[53] Ibid., 25.

[54] Ibid., 26.

[55] Ibid., 28.

cocktail."[56] Dick's words and gestures symptomize his ambivalent, cooled relationship with his wife and her accomplishments and his developing erotic attachment to Rosemary, consummated, in the delayed fashion of latency, hundreds of pages later in Rome, heart of the Roman Empire, a model for other empires including that of the United States, and once again evoking the long accumulating history of imperial warfare, conquest, and colonization, and the violence, extraction, exploitation, genocides, and ecocides at the root of these imperial enterprises.[57]

The conclusion of the garden scene further underscores the ever-present medium of alcohol—planted and fermented grains, fruits, and/or vegetables, after all—governing, fueling, and marring many of the relationships among the characters. Alcohol is a poisonous elixir derived from human gardening or agricultural activity. From an ecological angle with implications for the mental and physical health of the characters themselves, both as individuals and in relation to one another, Dick's response, with its mention of mildew, fly speck, and blight, shifts attention away from the garden as a source of pleasure, respite, and health toward it as a space of intoxication (in a negative sense), disease, spoilage, and physical deterioration. Dick's rhetorical transference of plant ills to Nicole herself manifests his attempted re-assertion of professional and patriarchal power over her as her psychiatrist husband. He casts her as the neurotic wife continuous with a picture of diseased "nature" that he simultaneously attributes to her own view of her garden while projecting its diseases on to her person in the form of a joke.[58]

As Dick's bid for power and control over Nicole wanes—and, speaking "matterphorically" to borrow literary critic and eco-theorist Lowell Duckert's terminology for the collapse of "matter, materiality and metaphor,"[59] his cable car descends while hers ascends—his botanical descriptions of her reverse themselves to reflect the power shift. In Book 3, Dick, aware that he is losing Nicole to Tommy Barban, compares her to trees with the densest, hardest wood: "Nicole is now made of—of Georgia pine, which is the hardest wood known, except lignum vitae from New Zealand."[60] The last major garden scene features Nicole going through her garden fantasizing about having an extra-marital affair: "Other women have had lovers … Why shouldn't I?"[61] In the marital power struggle between Dick and Nicole, Nicole begins to dis-engage from his

---

[56] Ibid., 28.

[57] Ibid., 213.

[58] See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960).

[59] Anne Harris, "Pyromena: Fire's Doing," in *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 38.

[60] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 276.

[61] Ibid., 276-77.

influence and assert a psychological dominance of her own, adding to her rule, however limited, not only over her garden, but over her hitherto controlling spouse. Are Fitzgerald's ecological latencies bordering on a form of proto eco-feminism here as they more unequivocally are in Antonioni's 1960 *L'avventura*, or are they merely further underscoring patriarchal panic over shifting gender roles post-World War I? There is certainly cause for debate beyond the scope of this article. Ambivalent, contradictory impulses seem to be at work here, as in so many aspects of *Tender*.

## Plantation System Green

Ricocheting from Nicole's garden back and forth in narrative time, Fitzgerald's prose sows its ecological latencies through the color most associated with vegetation's new life and with possibility in his oeuvre and in a wider cultural sense: green. The ecological latencies of the prose bear on human relations both with their physical environments and with one another. This green streak runs from "the soft gleam of piteous doubt that looked from her [Nicole's] green eyes"[62] to "the fuzzy green light of the vegetable garden,"[63] beyond which Dick cuts a path as if at cross-purposes with her, to the stain of Jules Peterson's blood on the "green coverlet" of the bed in Rosemary's Paris hotel room.[64] The presence of a murdered black man bleeding from a gunshot wound "refracts"—the verb and noun forms of this word both appear on these pages—the sense of life and anticipation associated with "green" into the bloodstains of violence and their attempted cover-up by a group of upper middle and upper-class Anglo-Americans who only care how press coverage of the discovery of this black man's body in their rooms might "smear" their reputations.[65]

The racialized capitalist socioeconomic dynamics that lead up to Peterson's murder, represented as animosity between blacks betrayed by Peterson "in the position of the friendly Indian who had helped a white,"[66] encapsulate and reiterate settler colonial violence and the hierarchies of the plantation system. In fact, this scenario could be read as a satirical illustration of the inextricabilities of the Capitalocene with the logics of the plantation system, where the Capitalocene as Plantationocene is shown to be a merely camouflaged continuation of the plantation system perfectly encoded in the alluring color "green," the green of the plantation

[62] Ibid., 25.

[63] Ibid., 26.

[64] Ibid., 109-10.

[65] Ibid., 110.

[66] Ibid., 106.

economy's vegetation and the color of money, especially US money. Consider the US paper currency printed in green since the 1860s and referred to as "greenbacks." The hotel room's "green coverlet" in this scene can be construed to connote just such a plantation system—not only as something of the past, but, especially as it stretches into the present and future, telegraphed in Nicole's haunting phrase: "spreads with red blood on them."[67] In this closing scene of Book 1, the green streak reveals the extent to which the ecological latencies of *Tender* include not only the relation of humans to more-than-human-nature, but also to each other, especially with regard to ethno-racial, socioeconomic, and gender inequalities with long histories persisting into the present.

Taken as a whole, however, the stance of the novel on these inequalities is ambiguous, highly unstable. It certainly exposes these inequalities, but the exposure does not qualify as an exposé of inequity given how the novel's marginalization of the already marginalized tends to reinforce biases around ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, and class, as is evident in a sentence such as this one from Book 2: "The young man was a Latin with the eyes of a stuffed deer; the girl was Nicole."[68] Here "a Latin" is reduced to a dead and stuffed deer and a woman is reduced to a girl. *Tender's* descriptions of Jules Peterson and other black characters are characterized by racialized stereotyping. Consider this sentence, for example: "Jules Peterson, a small respectable Negro, on the suave model that heels the Republican party in the border States, followed."[69] We would do well to remember, as scholar Garrett Bridger Gilmore points out, that Fitzgerald identified as "the last son of a fallen Maryland planter family"; that, in his youth he romanticized the Confederacy's "Lost Cause"; and that much of his work exists in a disconcerting relationship to the legacy of slavery.[70] In *Tender*, a critique of the Plantationocene co-exists with complicity in it.[71]

## Anxious Hydraulics and Hydrology

Moving onwards from Book 1 to Book 2 of *Tender*, much of this second book takes place in Switzerland, a country historically associated with control, orderliness, precision (Swiss watches and toys), invigorating mountain sports, fresh air, health for body and mind, and a reprieve from

[67] Ibid., 112.

[68] Ibid., 148.

[69] Ibid., 106.

[70] Garrett Bridger Gilmore, "Refracting Blackness: Slavery and Fitzgerald's Historical Consciousness," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 70/71, no. 2 (Spring 2017/2018): 183-203.

[71] See also Robert Forrey, "Negroes in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald," *Phylon*, 28, no. 3 (3rd qtr., 1967), 293-98 in which he argues that blacks in Fitzgerald's works are almost always cast as menial characters referred to disparagingly and whose function is "to create comic effect" (293).

war through diplomatic neutrality, as William Blazek and Laura Rattray have pointed out.[72] The novel draws on all these associations. However, in keeping with the dread-inducing ecological latencies, Switzerland is described as "an island, washed on one side by the waves of thunder around Gorizia and on another by the cataracts along the Somme and the Aisne."[73] The presumed peaceful Switzerland is surrounded by thunder and cataracts, storm clouds and torrents of water. Despite its status as a relative haven of neutrality and retreat for the wealthy, readers are told that "no one had missed the long trains of blinded or one-legged men, or dying trunks, that crossed each other between the bright lakes of Constance and Neuchâtel."[74] The harmful results of armed conflict that especially strike the already impoverished and the working classes are present on the borders and even within Switzerland, land of mountains, lakes, and waterfalls that, on first glance, connote environmental wealth, health, renewal, and transcendence.

As Book 2 unfolds, water in all forms—a hydraulic funicular or cable car, a mountain torrent, rain, thunderclouds, or even the bright lakes of mirrored light—assumes sinister qualities, accruing worrisome resonances that produce a drowning sensation, making Book 2 as much about dissolution and death as about the pursuit of ambition and romantic fulfillment. The hydraulic funicular has the capacity to stir those new to it into a mystical "suspension between the blues of two heavens."[75] However, the explanation of its hydraulics introduces anxiety about the wisdom of this ingenious invention: "As water gushed from the chamber under the car … a complimentary car was now taking on mountain water at the top and would pull the lightened car up by gravity, as soon as the brakes were released"[76] and, later on, "the music was drowned by the rushing water released from the hydraulic chamber."[77] An overheard conversation suggests that the cable inspection is no longer as thorough as it once was, introducing the notion of entropy in relation to the cables themselves but also in relation to capitalist business management where cost-cutting measures to accumulate ever-more capital results in a lack of "rigid inspections of cables."[78]

Beyond the material specificity of this descriptive section, the hydraulic funicular parallels the Freudian hydraulics of the Dick and Nicole's relationship, especially in Books 2 and 3, where to

---

[72] See William Blazek and Laura Rattray, "Sanatorium Society: The 'Good' Place in *Tender Is the Night*," Chapter 3 of *Twenty-First Century Readings of Tender Is the Night* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 50-60.

[73] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 115.

[74] Ibid., 115.

[75] Ibid., 149.

[76] Ibid., 147.

[77] Ibid., 149.

[78] Ibid., 147.

the extent that she rises or recovers from her trauma, Dick descends. These dynamics unfold in latent fashion with the implication that Nicole has hidden reserves of strength despite her apparent “helplessness”: “Nicole had a better hold on him now and she held it; she turned coquette and walked away, leaving him as suspended as in the funicular of the afternoon.”[79] Nicole’s hidden reserves of strength become fully evident in Book 3, often in relation to water. When Dick attempts to show off for Rosemary five years after their first meeting, he fails three times at his stunt during aquaplaning, a precursor to the water sport of skiing, with a man on his shoulders. Nicole’s panic for his safety turns to contempt, signaling that she has placed herself above him.[80] Then her latent potential for assuming an identity separate from his manifests abruptly when she definitively cuts loose from him, “sobbing coolly”: “And suddenly, in the space of two minutes she achieved her victory …cut the cord forever.”[81] Under the sign of water, she births herself.

The exploration of hydraulics, especially as these are overwhelmed by hydrological cycles, continues in Book 2 with thunderstorms and flashfloods—scenarios picked up and adapted to the Lipari islands in Antonioni’s *L’avventura* where the storm scenes further expose the ecological ignorance of the pleasure-cruise party and also underscore class differences in perspective and modes of living when they are forced to take shelter in a fisherman’s hut filled with faded old photographs. In *Tender*, two thousand feet up in the mountains above Montreux and Vevey and with the glamorous prospect of a “necklace and bracelet of lights” and “a dim pendant of Lausanne,” Nicole’s and Dick’s burgeoning romance gets pelted by a fierce storm from “hail-bearing clouds”[82] releasing all the water they have been gathering while the lovers were becoming more deeply entangled:

> Then the storm came swiftly, first falling from the heavens, then doubly falling in torrents from the mountains and washing loud down the roads and stone ditches; with it came a dark, frightening sky and savage filaments of lightning and world-splitting thunder, while ragged, destroying clouds fled along past the hotel. Mountains and lake disappeared—the hotel crouched amid tumult, chaos and darkness.[83]

Beyond the indebtedness of *Tender* to Gothicism and dark Romanticism, the description of the storm is significant for its combination of the ecological and the psychological, serving as a

[79] Ibid., 155.

[80] Ibid., 282-85.

[81] Ibid., 302.

[82] Ibid., 155.

[83] Ibid., 156.

warning of forces beyond the control of topographical engineering, architecture, and the attempt to control psychological outcomes, as in, for example, Dick's presumptuous management of Nicole as one of his "cases." The description strongly anticipates environmental melancholia currently the subject of many scholarly investigations.[84]

While drawing on features of Gothicism and dark Romanticism, the novel's ecological latencies are not confined to the tropes of either. The descriptions often confound patterns of Gothicism and Romanticism by combining Naturalist touches and Modernist experiments with perspective, scale, and consciousness, as in the following passage:

> After it [the cable car] cleared the low roofs, the skies of Vaud, Valais, Swiss Savoy, and Geneva spread around the passengers in cyclorama. On the centre of the lake, cooled by the piercing current of the Rhône, lay the true centre of the Western World. Upon it floated swans like boats and boats like swans, both lost in the nothingness of the heartless beauty. It was a bright day, with sun glittering on the grass beach below and the white courts of the Kursal. The figures on the courts threw no shadows.[85]

The aerial view of the bright lakes affords a sublime prospect with none of the "shadows" of the Gothic or dark Romanticism. Yet, brilliantly, this is one of the darkest passages in the novel, brimming with latencies that inspire existential dread. Suspended in air on several levels, the passage tracks in multiple directions simultaneously. For example, it can be read to offer a veiled critique not only of capitalism, but, moreover of the Capitalocene that re-organizes "nature" and relations between humans and their environments. This passage represents the Capitalocene, via the naming of "the Western World," as preserving resorts and retreats catering to the wealthy while it uses up vast portions of the planet. It can also be interpreted to implicate the very sunshine in a plot to cover up the sinister sides of "nature" in the most expansive sense. Such latencies are suggested in the phrase indebted to a Naturalist sensibility about nature's seeming indifference to suffering similar to that found in Stephen Crane's 1898 short story "The Open Boat": "both lost in the nothingness of the heartless beauty."[86] The phrase is also quintessentially Modernist, following literary scholar Kevin Bell's argument that "Modernism is distinguished … by its ongoing encounter with the presence of its own nothingness."[87] Fitzgerald's phrase proposes both a present lost-ness and a future loss embedded within the present. "Nothingness"

---

[84] See, for example, Renee Lertzman, *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[85] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 147-48.

[86] Ibid., 147.

[87] Kevin Bell, *Ashes Taken for Fire: Aesthetic Modernism and the Critique of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 9.

within the present experience of sublime beauty suggests the other side of phenomenal appearance latently there all along in matter: death and dis-appearance (in this order or in reverse order). This conjuring of dis-appearance—that *Tender* is iconized for in Antonioni's 1960 *L'avventura*—gestures to both physical death, as with Dick's father, and to mental depression, as with Dick himself in Book 3, lost "in the heart of the Finger Lakes Section" of New York state.[88]

Before Dick's return to the United States in Book 3, readers come upon his earlier return to the US in the wake of his father's death. Dick's passage back to Europe after burying his father presages the representation of his repatriation in the United States as a series of diminishing returns that quite literally diminish him.[89] The voyage back to Europe after his father's burial and the later return to the American "homeland," taken together, foil centuries of mythic associations about the fresh New World versus the tired Old World. At the end of Book 3, upstate New York echoes the Old World, disappointingly, in the colonially-imposed names of its towns and lakes. In Book 2 the emphasis falls on neither shore of the Atlantic, but instead, in a potentially subversively ironic manner, on the ocean between—on the act of breaking off from the land and being swept out to sea, "no longer sure of anything."[90] Here a "sea-change" predominates over any verities associated with land in a way that the entire volcanic island section of *L'avventura* amplifies many times over with its shots of the ocean surrounding the island in the wake of Anna's disappearance. In *Tender*, in contrast to the ending of *The Great Gatsby*, the boat is not "beating against the current."[91] It and its passengers are being sucked out to sea:

> The pier and its faces slide by and for a moment the boat is a piece accidently split off from them; the faces become remote, voiceless, the pier is one of many blurs along the water front. The harbor flows swiftly to the sea.[92]

On planet Earth, sea levels began to rise in the late 1800s with the massive burning of coal and other fossil fuels for energy during the Industrial Revolution. We do not have to wait until post World War II or twenty-first century fiction to consider how novels narratively anticipated and/or began to register the challenges of the Anthropocene.[93] Rather than hiding from a hurricane

---

[88] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 315.

[89] First, Dick goes to Buffalo, New York where his father died. Then, he moves to a series of small towns. For a time, he winds up in another Geneva, not Switzerland's lakeside hub of diplomacy and banking, but, instead, a tiny city in the Finger Lakes region of New York. From there he wanders between even smaller towns, his precise location becoming unknown to Nicole or to readers. His existence reduces to this summary: "he is *almost certainly* in that section of the country, in one town or another [emphasis mine]" (Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 315).

[90] Ibid., 205.

[91] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; reprint, New York: Collier Books MacMillan Publishing Co., 1986), 182.

[92] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 205.

[93] See Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in the Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville, VA: University

under a beach umbrella, *Tender Is the Night* conceals a "hurricane" between its covers that pulls readers out to sea on the powerful rip currents generated by its own disturbing ecological latencies.

Readers way well wonder whether *Tender Is the Night* offers any salutary "ecological" responses, for example, around deep-structure sustainability, to the unsettling ecological latencies that riddle the novel from start to finish. Perhaps the mournful dread the novel conveys within the currents of its aesthetically responsive, evocative prose may offer the seeds for more ethical relations to both external and internal realities and environments. Readers may be dismayed that its portrayals of "nature" are not more uniformly affirming of the so-called "natural world" and that they hardly ever occur separately from the human characters. No doubt, in many ways, they could be read as more anthropocentric than "ecological" according to many contemporary evaluative criteria honed in the face of the kind of evidence of humans' destruction of planet Earth's biodiversity presented in Elizabeth Kolbert's 2014 book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.[94] However, perhaps it would be wise to keep in mind the portrayal of the human condition described by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a book published four years before *Tender Is the Night*:

> We have given the answer … to the three sources from which our [human] suffering comes: the superior power of nature, the feebleness of our own bodies and the inadequacy of the regulations which adjust the mutual relationships of human beings in the family, the state and society. … We shall never completely master nature [in which he includes "our own psychical constitution"]; and our bodily organism, itself a part of that nature, will always remain a transient structure with a limited capacity for adaptation and achievement.[95]

Fitzgerald's descriptions of environments—found, altered, and built—and the human relations within them correspond to and resonate with Freud's description of the three sources of human suffering and unhappiness. The center of gravity of Fitzgerald's "ecological latencies" is Freudian or Freudian psychoanalytic. Thus, they could be categorized as species-centric and problematic in all the ways of patriarchal Freudianism, with the phrase "we shall never completely master nature" likely ringing most problematically for anyone ecologically minded. After all, why should we humans presume to master nature or anything, for that matter? Suffice it to say that, historically, attempted mastery has proven to be a huge part of the reason we are living in

---

of Virginia Press, 2015).

[94] See Elizabth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014).

[95] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 37.

ecologically catastrophic times. However, returning to the passage from Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the inclusion of human psyches and bodies in the category "nature" could be read as a reminder that catch-all terms such as "pathetic fallacy" do not do justice to the complexities of the intersections between ecology and psychology in *Tender Is the Night*. The passage might also serve as an incentive to broaden and deepen the exploration of this intersection to other works by Fitzgerald and by countless other writers, artists, and cultural producers.

Much of this exploration will revolve around the examination of reckonings with both insidious and spectacular loss, grief, melancholia, and anxious yet necessary re-conceptualizations of responsibility and agency in the face of finitude. By finitude, I mean finite resources, our own our mammalian "creaturely" mortality (food for worms), and our lack of ultimate control. In *Tender*, this lack of ultimate control is something Dick cannot accept, particularly in relation to his patient and wife Nicole, who eventually rebels against how she has been reduced to an ornamental "shell" or "cracked egg" and made to play, for years, "planet" to his sun, with volatile results.[96] These necessary re-conceptualizations have provided and will provide some means for dealing with and addressing the ecocidal consequences of denial, a denial aided and abetted by what F. Scott Fitzgerald aptly termed "brave illusions."[97] Later, in the early 1970s, psychoanalytically-trained cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker would identify these "brave illusions" with the narcissistic heroics and vainglory of immortality projects including empire building.[98] What must be confronted are the ways in which these immortality projects dismiss or sacrifice, rather than sustain and nurture, complex and fragile webs of life that form the very basis of any viable "ecology."

[96] Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, 120, 177, and 289.

[97] Some of this work is already underway in terms of psychoanalysis itself. See Cosimo Schinaia, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology: The Unconscious and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

[98] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (1973; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 152-56 and 207. For Becker, the ruinous side of immortality projects was encapsulated in, for example, ancient Rome and its blood-soaked soil. Rome is precisely where Dick instigates a horrible fight with an Italian taxi driver and Antonioni's film *L'avventura* opens before transporting its viewers to the volcanic Lipari islands.