Consumer Culture and the Performance of Identity in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night.*

by

Emma-Kate Schaake

A PROJECT

submitted to

Oregon State University

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in partial fulfillment of
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Dr. Elizabeth Sheehan

The 1920’s was a period of immense growth of consumer and celebrity culture, that brought changes in film, art and the creation and presentation of identity. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Tender is the Night reflects these changes, particularly with respect to how cultural shifts challenge prevailing views about individual autonomy and the distinctions between subjects and objects. Using a cultural theoretical lens, I examine how Fitzgerald uses elements of consumer culture to explore the performance of character. Ultimately, Fitzgerald sees a collapse between autonomous, creating subjects and controlled objects as a result of the ways that people both construct and perform their identity.

Key Words: English literature, Modernism, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Consumerism

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

______________________________
Emma-Kate Schaake
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Film and Fame

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a modernist writer best known for his perspective on the Jazz Age and the Roaring Twenties culture in America. With his fourth and final book completed during his lifetime, *Tender is the Night* (1934), Fitzgerald explores a modern culture shaped by the advancement and proliferation of consumer culture. The novel presents the modern cultural landscape and how the leading elite class maneuvered their position and identity through performance tailored to new standards of beauty, consumption, and artistic value. Aspects of consumer culture such as tanning, commercial purchases, and art were shaping aesthetics, but as Judith Brown argues, literature too helped “set the terms for what glamour was in the early twentieth century” (8). *Tender Is the Night* is an excellent example of a novel whose core values are structured by consumerism, for it fuels and shapes Fitzgerald’s exploration of what it means to be an individual during this age. The novel’s presentation of the Divers as elite performers challenges how consumer culture has shaped the development of personality and the self, as well as the understanding of art and aesthetic culture. Fitzgerald develops his characters to both exemplify the cultural moment and address the precarious nature of self-performance. The Divers’ upper class status is constructed through the emerging idea of celebrity and solidifies Fitzgerald’s such status is a performance that decreases the distinctions between people shaped by society, and those who have control over their identity. I will explore how multiple aspects of consumer culture seen in the novel—celebrity, film, performance, consumer products, and art—work blur the lines between being a created object and a creating subject.
This thesis is structured into four separate sections, building to the core argument in section four, Subject Versus Object. The three earlier sections establish how the surface elements of consumer culture shape the creation of identity in the modern world. The film industry introduces a changing idea of audience association, and helps define the Divers as celebrities performing the façade of their lives. Consumer purchases and practices align the characters with a self molded by outward influences but also reflect the toil present in their own occupation in creating their identity. In the final section, I take these three aspects of consumer culture and link them to the changes in the art world and ultimately personal performance. I have found that Fitzgerald’s novel does not simply conform to a simple understanding of personalities and characters as inextricably shaped by consumer culture, but instead sees a much more nuanced creation of identity that is the product of both outside forces and individual autonomous performance.

The novel begins with Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress visiting a popular vacation spot in the French Riviera with her mother Mrs. Elsie Speers. There she meets Nicole and Dick Diver who immediately charm her with the life they have carved for themselves. Dick is a charming and handsome psychologist and Rosemary falls in love with him despite the fact that he is married to Nicole. Nicole too charms Rosemary with her elegance, self-confidence and participation in the vast system of consumer culture. Throughout the course of Book One, Rosemary learns the lavish lifestyle of the Divers, which becomes central to her understanding of herself as a actress and the broader consumer world.

Book Two brings the readers into Dick and Nicole’s past, revealing how they meet under the strained circumstances of Nicole’s mental illness when Dick is studying at
a clinic in Switzerland. Nicole is a patient there, admitted for mental issues brought about by her father’s sexual abuse and a fear of men. Although advised against a relationship by a superior doctor and Nicole’s sister Baby Warren, Dick and Nicole marry and have two children. The narrative then switches back to where Book One left off and Dick is accused of infidelity with a previous patient. This revelation is deeply upsetting to Nicole who tries to drive their car off the road. Dick then meets up with Rosemary in Rome where they consummate their relationship, but he is torn between his love for her and for his wife. In Book Three, the Diver marriage comes to an end when Nicole asks for a divorce after her affair with Tommy Barban, an American and French mercenary soldier and friend of the Divers. The novel ends with Dick off to America where he presumably will never really settle down or resolve issues in his previous marriage or relationships.

As evidenced by the plot trajectory, the novel is focused on the deterioration of this upper class defined by the glamour of the age and the allure of consumer culture. For the purposes of looking at the cultural moment of Tender is the Night, I will be focusing on Book One, and specific passages relating to consumer purchases, identity, subjectivity, class, and setting. It is in Book One that the charm, celebrity and performance of the Divers are most central and therefore most useful in interpreting Fitzgerald’s construction of the age.

Tender is the Night was published in 1934, nine years after Fitzgerald’s most successful and undoubtedly most famous novel, The Great Gatsby. Overall, it was received as a disappointment by critics who had expected more from Fitzgerald following Gatsby (Barks 10). The book’s lukewarm reception may have been an error of timing, as it is a story about the glamorous 1920’s published after the crash of Wall Street during
the Great Depression. American novelist, poet, and literary critic Malcolm Cowley wrote in his 1951 introduction to the text that the novel “dealt with the fashionable life in the 1920’s at a time when most readers wanted to forget that they had ever been concerned with frivolities” (Bruccoli 206). It is the novel’s central preoccupation with these “frivolous” aspects of a fashionable life tied to appearance, performance, art, and consumerism that reveal Fitzgerald’s interpretation of the culture on which he was deemed an authority.

Fitzgerald himself created his life in the public eye, which is interesting to note given the Divers’ status as local celebrities and Rosemary’s occupation as an actress. Fitzgerald was as much a tantalizing public figure as he was a prolific modernist writer over the span of his career. Cultural historian Joshua Zeitz explains that with the publication of Fitzgerald’s first novel, This Side of Paradise, he became “the recognized spokesman of the younger generation—the dancing, flirting, frivoling, lightly philosophizing young America” (Zeitz 40). This spokesperson status continued throughout his career, due in part to his work and also to his own personal actions. Fitzgerald made fashionable fun central to his life, and such pursuits were also central to his legacy as a writer and public figure. Zelda and Scott’s drunken, riotous exploits around town, and the spectacle they made on their honeymoon in the revolving doors of the Biltmore Hotel, have long since become an infamous part of New York City lore (Wagner-Martin 145).

According to Fitzgerald, America was the world’s barometer for “what was fashionable and fun” with New York at the center (Douglas 13). Indeed, at the time of Zelda and Scott’s marriage in 1920, New York was the center for art and literature as “a
modern scene in action crying for comment, tantalizingly ready to express and be expressed” (Douglas 59). The New Yorker described New York as a “gymnasium of celebrities,” attractive to those who wanted to discover not who they were, but who they could appear to be (qtd. in Douglas 64). As Ann Douglas observes in her influential study of modern New York in the 1920’s, the city became the place for people who “needed the gaze of others to come alive” (Douglas 64). Both Fitzgerald and his characters in Tender is the Night are presumably among those who preferred the “role of the observed to that of the observer,” thriving in the spotlight of their lives (Douglas 64).

The Fitzgerald’s quickly rose to fame with their “capacity for carrying things off and carrying people away by their spontaneity, charm and good looks” (Zeitz 57). They existed within the emerging realm of celebrity and were well aware of their own social power. Fitzgerald told a reporter once, “Did you know that I am one of the most notorious young drinkers of the younger generation?” (Douglas 67). Launched into society together as public figures in literary and social circles, Scott and Zelda were quickly identified as the creator and muse, respectively, of the iconic flapper. There was a certain, palpable mythology and allure of American life that Fitzgerald captured. He attached himself so seamlessly to his work that he became the authority on young American women, critics of the time claiming “anything Mr. Fitzgerald might have to say on the subject…would be worth hearing” (qtd. in Zeitz 47). Links between his life and works are therefore not simply important because of character or plot, but in construction and essence. Scott once admitted, “I sometimes wonder whether the flapper made me or I made her,” illustrating how entrenched he was in the simultaneous, fluid positions of observer, writer and performer (qtd. in Zeitz 47). The Fitzgeralds are even now often
synonymous with the twenties, and as silent film star Lillian Gish said, they “didn’t make the twenties; they were the twenties” (qtd. in Zeitz 53).

Basic structural similarities can be drawn between Scott and Zelda and Dick and Nicole, who both captivated and enchanted people around them. Scott and Zelda “looked as though they had just stepped out of the sun; their youth was striking. *Everyone* wanted to meet them” (Zetiz 29). Similarly, Rosemary sees Villa Diana as “the centre of the world,” and she perceived that Dick was generating all the excitement (Fitzgerald 29).

As Douglas argues, Fitzgerald joined fellow writers including Ernest Hemingway and performers like Al Joston and Mae West who all created personas in their art of “look-alike, talk-alike, but nonetheless highly crafted and separate projections of themselves” (57). Such imitative artistic constructions challenge the distinctions among the projected self, the created object, and the reality underlying the mask of presentation.

Fitzgerald’s life runs parallel in many ways to the Divers because of his insistence on performance as a way to rise socially. As a writer, his works are designed to be presented to readers, just as the Divers’ lives are performed for an audience. Fitzgerald was aware of the importance of commercial success and his work became almost as much about his personal life as it was the content of his novels. He carried off a well-known façade, which he described himself as “a fake…but not a lie” (qtd. in Douglas 67).

Fitzgerald’s writing was often faulted for being “polished and flashy, deflecting the gaze from the meaning it should instead reveal” (Brown 56). This suggests that Fitzgerald, within the scope of modernist literature, does more than replicate the glamorous social scene, and as Judith Brown argues, his work evokes modernist glamour aesthetics in the form itself.
Fitzgerald’s description of his own façade as fake but not a lie is similar to Rosemary’s remark to Dick, “oh we’re such actors—you and I” (Fitzgerald 105). Rosemary is a literal actress in the budding film age and Dick is inherently an actor in his self-presentation, yet it is the irony that Rosemary is essentially learning how to be a celebrity from the Divers that highlights the implications of an empty personality in a glamorous modernist aesthetic. Rosemary must learn the desirable traits of celebrity which Brown defines as “charm, magnetism and fascination” rather than virtue and strength of character (Brown 100). Celebrity, as defined by Judith Brown in her book *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, is the “combined attributes of fame, wealth, public recognition, adulation and the remove from the prosaic routine of everyday life” (Brown 100). People began to identify much more closely with celebrities from simple surface traits, like hairstyle or clothing choice. Brown explains this “rich audience identification” with on screen celebrities as a “new attention to personality” but a personality that is void of subjective truth (Brown 100).

Brown explains that the personality of a celebrity was less of a true character, and more of a “screen effect,” a façade given to the audience through a camera lens presenting the actor’s appearance (Brown 100). In the first chapter of the novel, Mrs. McKisco immediately identifies Rosemary as an actress and says, “we know who you are…you’re Rosemary Hoyt” (Fitzgerald 7). She tells Rosemary “your skin is important,” illustrating the strong identification with celebrities based on merely surface qualities. Mrs. McKisco knows nothing of Rosemary’s character, but as a celebrity, she is automatically “perfectly marvelous” and she and her skin are viewed as worth more than the others’ (Fitzgerald 7).
Mrs. McKisco buys into the emerging ideas of celebrity, and as Brown argues, the concept of glamour is at the heart of this cult of personality void of any real meaning. Brown writes, “glamour is both a formal category and an experiential site of consumer desire” that “frames the pleasure that drive the art and culture of modernism” (Brown 1). Glamour is concerned with both material commodity and class, and it creates a recognizable modernist aesthetic. This glamour aesthetic—Chanel, bobbed hair, champagne, Hollywood—changes an individual character into a new personality constructed by societal standards and consumer culture. Nicole is an example of this new personality, a “modern fragmented subject” who seeks superficial repair from the constant pressure of shifts in “social, economic and political organization” (Brown 99). Personality has become surface and essentially a performance.

Though the Divers are not film stars, they perform in a manner that exudes the otherworldly qualities of personality, glamour, allure and charm. The glamorous celebrity emphasized “charm, poise and likeability,” resulting in a “cooly aloof and beautifully coiffed personality” distanced from others (Brown 100). Rosemary sees Dick as “kind and charming” with an “endless succession of magnificent possibilities” (Fitzgerald 16). Her understanding of his charm is identical to how audiences identified with film stars. “Based on the limited information made available by the media,” audiences found personal connection with anything from how hair was coiffed to how a cigarette was held, all of course, surface identifications that hover above a real depth of character (Brown 100).

The film medium was a new form of artistic presentation that reshaped audience participation and offered this media-proliferated culture of celebrity. According to the
definition of celebrity as fame, wealth and public recognition, which Brown uses, the
Divers are celebrities in their own lives and in the world of the text. It is through this idea of celebrity, a title both Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald held, that identity is once again widened and destabilized. Film changed how audiences could identify with celebrity and personality and how they could interact with this new type of art. According to Walter Benjamin, a still medium like a painting “invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations” (Benjamin 238). Film is entirely different in that it is constantly changing. As Benjamin explains, the quick frame and scene changes do not allow for the audience to ruminate and be absorbed by the work, but rather absorb each piece in passing because “it cannot be arrested” (Benjamin 238). These moving and changing images interrupt the “spectators’ process of association” (Benjamin 238). Benjamin argues there is a significant difference between a staged performance and a film because of these rapidly changing scenes. In a live action play, the performer can adjust to the audience because he is presenting in person, while a camera is the medium through which a film is presented.

The Divers seem to fall between a live play and a film, as they are performing “live” in front of their audience of friends, but are presented to their readers through the “camera lens” of Fitzgerald’s writing, which has the power to pick and choose what to present to the audience. This middle space means they are always removed from an entire autonomous control over their performance, yet never fully controlled by the constraints of the medium or audience. The audience takes the distanced “position of the critic” and identifies with the camera, or in this case, author, rather than the actor himself (Benjamin 238). The camera’s role in a film is to continually change its “position with respect to the
performance” and Fitzgerald too, guides his readership, directing them in three books revealing distinct information in each. Fitzgerald often shifts points of view, often switching from a distanced to a close third person narrator in a matter of sentences. This style reflects the same rapid scene changes that exist in film, making it difficult for the reader to identify with the characters from more than a distanced stance.

This emerging idea of celebrity, fueled by the film as a new artistic medium, can serve as a framework for *Tender is the Night* and its exploration of subjectivity and consumer culture. Nicole and Dick Diver exemplify the upper class as they perform their lives for the audience of their friends. Their identity is inextricably tied to their class status and consumer purchasing power, just as Fitzgerald’s writing success had as much to do with his celebrity persona as it did the content of his works. Fitzgerald uses these aspects of performance to question how consumer culture has changed subjectivity and personal identity.

**Purchasable Class Identity**

The Jazz Age transformed the United States marketplace and offered ways to change personal identity. Historian Liette Gidlow claims, “consumer culture was a defining element of public life in the 1920s, and the 1920s were a defining moment in the
development of consumer culture” (qtd. in Maxwell 312). Fitzgerald recognized this transformation and while he may have lived his life as an embodiment of the reckless spendthrift, his work often critiqued what he called “the most expensive orgy in history” (qtd. in Maxwell 312). *Tender is the Night* provides a commentary on how this new marketplace could shape identity. Donald Monk argues that style is as close as F. Scott Fitzgerald came to touting a philosophy and that he used style as a way to measure and create his characters. If that’s true, then Nicole and Dick are prime examples of characters created for their ability to live and perform a stylish life as the epitome of the leisure class (Monk 80). Nicole is especially illustrative as many passages focused on her are saturated with references to cultural trends and consumerism. She uses elements of consumerism, like tanning and purchasing to shape herself into a model of elitism. This section explores the Divers as representatives of the leading edge of the upper class, who use exploits of consumer culture to construct their identity according to changing ideas of malleable beauty, cosmopolitan tanning, and purchasing power. This upper class status builds on the emerging idea of celebrity and furthers Fitzgerald’s nuanced idea that such status is a performance that blurs the distinction between identity that is created by outside sources of commercial influence and identity that the self is autonomously creating.

During this period there were drastic changes to how the body was conceptualized and new idealized forms of beauty were introduced in consumer culture. Prior to this era, fashion and material alteration of the body through clothes, cosmetics or other purchasable products was often seen as dishonest. Zeitz explains fashionable practices were thought of as a “masquerade, in which we dress ourselves in the finest fashions of
society, use a language suited to the characters we assume…the part once assumed must be acted out, no matter at what expense to truth” (Zeitz 204). Similarly, in his sociological text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman explains that performance is in essence a mask that “we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to…the self we would like to be” (qtd. in Goffman 19). Everyday performance therefore veils the true self, which, if people are constantly performing doesn’t really exist. The real attitudes or beliefs of a person can be “ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior” (Goffman 2). People wearing makeup or other self-altering products could be seen as characters, more associated with an act, or an orchestrated artwork rather than a true individual. Makeup was a part of this performance, and in the 19th century was widely viewed as inherently wrong as it hid “ones own inner spirit” (Zeitz 204). However, the increasing presence of consumer goods and advertisements changed popular opinion. Instead of discouraging the use of external and artificial enhancements, many Americans began to cultivate their exterior façade with as much care, polish and calculated presentation as possible. Cosmetics promised to help one discover the “real you—not as you think you are—but as others see you” (Zeitz 205). In other words, how you presented yourself became more important. Fitzgerald uses characters like Nicole, participating in consumer culture to shape her identity, to illustrate the perceived inevitability of performance. He thereby underscores Goffman’s argument that a “true self” is impossible given the constant state of performance and presentation.

As makeup became more widely used, ideas of conventional beauty were naturally called into question. “Conventional,” “traditional,” and “classic” became tired
words that could no longer be associated with a face painted with rouge and lipstick. Instead, this outward presentation focused on this new kind of beauty that created the most “self-possessed, poised and efficient” version of the self (Zeitz 205). In many ways, this outward upkeep and construction was akin to the artist’s process, as people were choosing paints and materials to create the piece.

It was the task of the consumer, advertising culture, and the magazine industry to keep women in line with these new fashion trends to prevent those sculptural slips and challenge the standards of the “natural.” Literary scholar Susan Keller explains that commercialism began to develop the body into an “infinity malleable fashion accessory,” molded by products, like an artist would sculpt clay (130). Clothing and beauty product purchases were presented as means for self-alteration. The increased presence of consumer advertising culture told women what to buy and what to wear in order to achieve the looks of the season. *Vogue* products and ads specifically targeted affluent women whose purchases created an identity dependent on financial flexibility.

A new concept for the fashionably elite touted in *Vogue* was cosmopolitan tanning. This new practice furthered the concept of malleable beauty as especially important for both outward appearance and class status. Within the ever growing sphere of consumerism, tanning came to the forefront in the mass produced magazine culture as a way for light-skinned women to further alter their bodies and appearance to create a façade of high class cultural elitism. By the summers of the late 1920s, tanning was a fashionable self-alteration that ran along a particularly precarious line threatening traditional conceptions of beauty hierarchy. Fair skin was praised for centuries in Europe and the Americas for its associations with the wealthy, leisure classes who did not have
toil in agrarian occupations (Keller 134). As the industrial revolution at the turn of the century slowly moved the working class to jobs in factories and offices, suntans became less associated with hard labor. By the 1920s, tanning had become an activity for the leisure class that represented health and high class. Tan skin was an embodied display of the wealth of the American upper classes and was concurrent with images circulating in media like women’s magazines suggesting that beauty was something to be obtained, constructed and inherently commercialized.

*Vogue* was one of many fashion authorities that compiled the particular rules for a cosmopolitan tan, although it was torn between “grudgingly accepting this new fad and denying it as a crime against the tradition of beauty” (Keller 137). Tanning is essentially a façade, a temporary covering of color that symbolizes a certain status and serves as part of one’s ensemble that should be matched with everything from jewels to expensive cars. Tanning was a “display ones of conspicuous consumption of leisure time” that “anchored tanning to a register of consumption” (Keller 139). Articles depicted how to avoid sunspots, uneven color and lines in order to carefully follow the trend.
In this image from *Vogue*, the woman on the bottom left has the straps of her dress pulled off her back for the delicately crafted tan. Similarly, Nicole follows suit for proper beach and tanning etiquette as a constructed persona of the stylish, “glamourized image of the twenties fashionable female, swathed in Chanel, sunburnt on the tennis court, reclining on the liner and answering to the name of ‘flapper’” (Breward 199). When Rosemary first sees Nicole, it is her pose and the details of her outward appearance, very similar to the woman in the *Vogue* ad, that strike her.

Nearest her, on the other side, a young woman lay under a roof of umbrellas making out a list of things from a book open on the sand. Her bathing suit was pulled off her shoulders and her back, a ruddy orange brown, set off by a string of creamy pearls, shone in the sun. (Fitzgerald 6)

Her bathing suit is pulled off her shoulders, like the woman in the ad, in order to achieve the flawless tan, which must be “evenly browned because the sun-tan’s charm is ruined if it becomes reddened” (“The Burning Question”). Tanning is inextricably tied to an upper
class identity, as Nicole exemplifies with her creamy pearls set off against her ruddy orange back. Nicole also displays her wealth by lying in the section of beach that uses umbrella coverings, under an entire roof of them. She clearly has the proper understanding of beach and tanning etiquette and she has the monetary means to pull it off. Similarly, the women in the ad have staked out their space on the sand with their blanket, towels and bag. The woman in the corner here is separated from the two women with her, distanced and looking down at herself, like Nicole is looking down, flipping though a “book open on the sand” (Fitzgerald 6). Both the woman pictured and Nicole possess a sense of wanting to be separate from the rest, yet their poses are in style, showing their expertise in performing their lives. The beach towel pictured encloses the women and their accessories, suggesting a kind of stage that would be worth looking at, just as Rosemary is drawn to see Nicole, especially after she forms a “vague antipathy” for the gossiping women that have solidified themselves as socially below Nicole and her company (Fitzgerald 6).

The Divers’ assume their role, their position on the beach and their tan skin to separate themselves as more naturally belonging and elite. The tan is merely an extension of the constructed façade and a display of their conspicuous consumption. Their leisurely life on the sand is therefore far from the relaxed ideal that the Divers look to present. Instead it is a “sign of rigorous control of the body” that creates the appearance of naturally occupying an elite class position (Keller 138). This rigorous control suggests the physical and emotional elements that the Divers must control in order to maintain their class facade or at least to keep a sense of autonomy in their self-presentation.
On the beach, Rosemary understands these cultural assumptions of appearance in the Divers as a reflection of their elevated class position and immediately sees this community as one on “which it would be presumptuous to intrude” (Fitzgerald 5). The twentieth century has often been categorized in terms of culture, art and society as the age of mass—mass-consumption, mass-production and mass-media. Fashion magazines and Hollywood films were platforms to dispel fashion trends and idealizations to a wider audience than ever before and were catalysts for the increasing self-referentiality of fashion publicity. Reimagined business practices were seen in advertisements published in fashion magazines and the advances in mass clothing production that “prioritized particular strands of society as fashion leaders” (Breward 183). The Divers are among those fashion leaders who exploit the current consumer market.

Nicole is especially poised to mold and construct herself in this class because of her gender. Consumer culture advertisements were overwhelmingly aimed at women, who were shown that applying products gave them the ability to change how others viewed them, and how they viewed themselves. Nicole exemplifies the woman participating in this time-consuming practice, dedicated to the consumer market to solidify her status. In this scene, Rosemary goes along with Nicole on a shopping trip and is in awe of how Nicole purchases with gusto. The narrator relates:

She bought a dozen bathing suits, a rubber alligator, a travelling chess set of gold and ivory, big linen handkerchiefs for Abe, two chamois leather jackets of kingfisher blue and burning bush from Hermes—bought all these things not a bit like a high-class courtesan buying underwear and jewels, which were after all professional equipment and insurance—but with an entirely different point of
view. Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil. For her sake the trains began their run at Chicago and traversed the round belly of the continent to California; chicle factories fumed and link belts grew link by link in factories; men mixed toothpaste in vats and drew mouthwash out of copper hogshead; girls canned tomatoes quickly in August… (Fitzgerald 55)

Nicole participates in a capitalist, consumer culture, “not a bit like a high-class courtesan” in the way she purchases for herself, her family and friends. The word courtesan, dating from the mid 16th century, literally means court mistress but was later referred to as “a woman of the town, a prostitute” (OED). The narrator is separating the type of consumer purchases Nicole makes from those of a courtesan yet they are in effect both participating in the commodity market for identity and security purposes. Nevertheless, how such participation affects each of them is notably different. By comparing Nicole to a courtesan, Fitzgerald is drawing together the subtle differences between occupation and profession and directing the readers to ask whose labor is at stake in this system. The courtesan works for her underwear and jewels that are the necessary for her profession, as do the workers in Chicago and California in creating the products Nicole buys. Nicole purchasing products that are made possible by the toil of others, but her identity is shaped just as much by this occupation of buying as the works are in their physical profession (Fitzgerald 55). Through both the courtesan and Nicole use their purchases for identity, it is the fundamental difference of the outward toil that creates this elite status. She has an “entirely different point of view” and her purchases are the result of the “ingenuity and toil” of the larger capitalist system at work to secure her status, but also the tools and product of her own performance.
The Divers exert their own agency in their life construction and calculated performance, working to achieve the status they emulate. The meanings of these commercial objects are fixed to the associations they create with status and wealth. Her extensive purchases for life on the beach may seem superfluous, yet they are in fact anything but. The dozen bathing suits and chamois leather jackets Nicole buys, in a seemingly excessive or purposeless manner, identify her as a participant in the “gaudiest spree in history,” and give her those status symbols that express her position (qtd in Douglas 471). The rubber alligator becomes more than a life raft in the ocean. It also maintains and keeps afloat the Divers’ elite status. Whether Nicole is conscious of her impact or not, her purchases not only elevate her status, but also keep the entire processes of capitalism, dependent on production and purchases, thundering onward.

The Divers utilize their consumer purchasing power to construct and maintain their status in the upper class. Women like Nicole were expected to adhere to new standards of beauty and self-construction and Nicole obeys by doing everything from browning in the sun to purchasing rubber alligators. This suggests that by not toiling for her purchases, but instead being the recipient of another’s profession, she gives up agency. All of this outward participation in consumer culture perpetuates the Divers’ performance of their lives for their audience. The Divers’ class status is central to the novel, redefining what it means to be elite. Their class is inextricable from a consumer culture fueled by advertising and purchases. As I explore below, Nicole especially illustrates the self-shaped by culture—tanning, purchasing and conspicuous consumption—rather than through individual autonomy.
**Place and Identity**

The Divers work to solidify their identity through self-presentation, body alterations, and conspicuous consumption as well as by tying themselves to a particular place. As we have seen, celebrity identity, tan skin and products do work to create an elevated class status, but one that can only ever really be a façade. In the French Riviera, the Divers physically construct much of their vacation spot, altering the land to alter themselves. Every aspect of the Divers’ lives on the French Riviera is in accordance with social expectations fortified by consumer culture. It is through their separation from others and their reliance on the setting that they seek to secure their identity. However, questions of belonging conflict with the Divers self-construction, and the place actually unmoors the travelers’ identity, rather than solidifies it. As the Divers seek to solidify their identity on the French Riviera, constructing the world around them, their position on the beach separates them from others, questions their indigenous legitimacy, and ultimately loosens their ties to any one identity. This rather fluid concept of their class and national identity place mirrors the volatility of identity in celebrity consumer culture. In this section focusing on place, I will further explore Fitzgerald’s ideas of this malleability and the degree to which a person has control over their identity.

A large part of the change in consumer culture and class status for the Divers was aided by a rise in leisure travel. During the first half of the twentieth century, there was rapid growth in transit systems impacting everything from the prominence of personal automobiles to public trains, ships, and planes. Travel pushed the boundaries between city and state lines and allowed Americans to “go abroad all with greater ease and speed” (Clarke 332). Although cars became more available for working families, travel was still
“inextricably bound up with economic concerns” and thus the wealthy had the most opportunity for wider travel (Clarke 332). The wealthy elites in America and Europe “simply traveled to wherever the climate was currently temperate, which resulted in a peripatetic social season” (Keller 132). Very wealthy Americans on the East Coast of the U.S often lived in New York City in autumn, the French South in winter, Newport in summer and the New York country in spring. Nicole and Dick Diver follow closely in the footsteps of Gerald and Sarah Murphy, expatriates and friends of the Fitzgeralds who popularized the French Riviera as a summer, rather than winter, vacation spot for the elite. Breaking from the traditional social rules, the French Riviera soon gained appeal as a space for a “new, more relaxed cosmopolitan lifestyle” (Keller 133). Fitzgerald himself acknowledged the importance of Tender is the Night’s setting saying, “one could get away with more on the summer Riviera” (qtd. in Bouzonviller 266). The novel’s setting in the Riviera aids the presentation of upper class elite and acts as yet another integral piece of the Diver’s identity and how they construct their outward appearance.

In the 1920’s, the French Riviera was a space for the elite leisure class to escape the doldrums of their lives. The style they practiced, in everything from dress to scene, exemplified the culture proliferated by a growing consumer culture. The Divers and their friends populate the French Riviera, a spot that was glorified in an April 1928 Vogue article as “The Coast of Azure and Gold” whose “modes, mansions and manners of life…make it an enchanting destination” (D’Ayen). Vogue’s description of the beach encompasses the elite that frequent it, with azure and gold suggesting fine gold jewelry, rather than perhaps more colloquial choices of “blue” and “yellow.” Azure is a shade of bright blue often used to describe a summer sky and comes from the French “azur” of the
same color, and in French, the French Riviera translates to Cote d’Azur, quite literally “next to the blue.” As an adjective, azure can mean serene, also aligned with the popularity of the Riviera. For Vogue, the beach is literally colored blue and gold, but also connotes the rich, serene lifestyle of the elite leisure class people who frequent it.

The Divers epitomize the allure of the French Riviera in all ways mentioned in Vogue. Their modes, mansions, and manners of life are integral to their continued performance as the social elite. The novel opens on the beach in front of Gausse’s Hotel, which had become “a summer resort of notable and fashionable people” (Fitzgerald 3). There is a certain foreign allure and elitism to the part of French Riviera frequented by those in the leisure class like Nicole and Dick Diver. The opening paragraph describes the location that Rosemary and her mother Mrs. Speers have come to as “proud,” with “deferential palms” and a “short, dazzling beach” (Fitzgerald 3). Even the palms and other flora on the beach are admiring and reverent of the dazzling scene, as Rosemary herself is when she meets the Divers. The beach is situated “halfway between Marseilles and the Italian border” and it is this separation that allows the beach to be a somewhat undiscovered and elite haven for the Divers and other rich leisured explorers to cultivate (Fitzgerald 3). The “littoral” coastal life they have is separated from the “true Provençal France,” just as a celebrities and performers like the Divers are presenting only a façade of themselves (Fitzgerald 3).

Their toil for elite fashion is clearly seen in how they alter the beach to suit their needs and to capitalize on the style necessary for their performance. Goffman describes what he calls “the front” or the “part of an individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the
performance” (22). One aspect of this front is the setting, which includes all manner of scenery, props and décor that create the “stage” for an individual performance. A setting is mostly static geographically so the performers begin their act when they “have brought themselves to the appropriate place” (Goffman 22). The Divers have solidified their setting distinctly on the Riviera, presenting their props: pearls, suntans, and umbrellas under the Riviera sun, which all become integral to how they are viewed.

The Divers embrace a stylish life, but they have also literally constructed their world. When discussing other foreign visitors on the beach, Nicole proudly claims that the beach is “Our beach, that Dick made out of a pebble pile” (Fitzgerald 20). This references both the lavish life they have created for themselves by physical alteration and the fashionable aesthetic that the Divers bring to the beach just by being there. The suggestion that Dick made the beach from nothing but a pile of pebbles is inextricably tied to the capitalist culture, the working your way up from nothing mentality that was driving industrialism and consumerism back in the United States. Nicole has a pride in “our beach,” claiming that because they made it what it is, they have an automatic claim to its substance and those who inhabit it (Fitzgerald 20). Abe North also recognizes the Divers’ claim in the beach by saying “they have to like it… they invented it” (17). Nicole claims they alone are responsible for the success of the hotel and the beach, because they persuaded the staff to stay open for the “season” and because of their presence with their fellow Americans who have flocked to the sun, to this “Coast of Azure and Gold.” The notable, fashionable people flock to this part of the Riviera where the natural is overcome by the fashionable and “purified by an incorruptible style” of Fitzgerald’s own making (Monk 78).
Within this “style,” the Divers build a house, play an integral role in the success of the hotel and claim to have brought the beach up from a pebble pile, but the layout of the beach itself also works to secure the elite roles they are performing. In this scene at the beginning of the novel, Rosemary comes across the Divers and their friends on the beach. The narrative is told from her perspective as she observes the beach and how the people are arranged according to class status indicated by tan skin color.

Obviously each family possessed the strip of sand immediately in front of its umbrella; besides there was much visiting and talking back and forth—the atmosphere of a community upon which it would be presumptuous to intrude. Farther up, where the beach was strewn with pebbles and dead sea-weed, sat a group with flesh as white as her own. They lay under small hand-parasols and were obviously less indigenous to the place. (Fitzgerald 5)

The narrator uses “obviously” twice in this small section, suggesting the rules and formalities of this constructed society are understood and unhesitatingly obeyed. The Divers’ portion of the beach is free of the unsightly pebbles and dead seaweed of the lower class visitors. They are separated from the others and their group seems one upon which it would be “presumptuous to intrude” (Fitzgerald 5). Each family possesses, owns rather than visits, the land they sit on, connoting both their wealth and the hold they have on where they are. Those under the small hand-parasols have flesh as white as Rosemary’s, because they are unaccustomed to the leisure life under the hot Riviera sun. These are the people who are described as “less indigenous” to the place, suggesting that the Divers and their friends under the umbrellas are somehow more a part of the life on the beach.
Being indigenous suggests a natural belonging in a place of origin, but in fact, Dick and Nicole, like all the other travelers to this beach on the French Riviera, are distinctly non-natives. They are Americans, but as Rosemary notes “something made them unlike the Americans they had known as of late” (Fitzgerald 6). Rather than inheriting their status like traditional aristocratic royalty, this new elite class with the Divers at the helm, have constructed their life and therefore their status. By aligning themselves with what elite consumer culture has told them is appropriate behavior, the Divers and their friends don’t actually increase their own belonging but confuse their identity between where they come from and where they are now. This suggests that though they seem to belong, perhaps there is no such thing as being truly indigenous, and that place cannot anchor identity. The Divers’ class position is clear from their position on the beach, but the French Riviera actually unmoors them from a stable identity. Rosemary assumes they are American, but knows they are distinctly different somehow, whether by outward appearance or action. Therefore, they are struggling to be either American or native to the Riviera.

Campion, a friend of Albert McKisco, is another character that seems to exist between distinct categories of nationality. He is described with an “indeterminate nationality” though he spoke “English with a slow Oxford drawl” (Fitzgerald 5). His presence here on the French Riviera has muddied the distinction of nationalities. All those in the Divers’ social circle strive to be both elite and indigenous, which is inherently unattainable here on the French Riviera. It is this assumption of being indigenous that is at the heart of the Divers’ performance in the imitation of the Europeans. Fitzgerald explains that McKisco’s “contacts with the princely classes in
America had impressed upon him their uncertain and fumbling snobbery…all lifted from the English” (Fitzgerald 36). The Divers are not English royalty, nor typical Americans, nor native to the French Riviera, so they are stuck living a performance of hierarchy somehow devoted to all three.

Many aspects of consumer culture promised malleability through commercial purchases, and travel was another practice of the elite class that worked to confuse identity. The Divers construct their lives in the French Riviera in accordance with style rules for their class, but just as beauty products cannot inherently alter a person, the beach cannot solidify identity. The Divers’ construction of the beach and their place in it are integral aspects of their performance, but as we have seen with the emerging celebrity class in the film industry, this constructed personality is only a façade. Next, I create a culmination of these surface explorations of consumer culture in what it means to be a person, a subject, rather than an object controlled by artistic aesthetics.
Subject Versus Object

Fitzgerald uses Nicole to challenge the relationship between subject and object in a world concerned with the malleability of these two states as the distinctions between them are challenged by consumer culture and art. On the one hand, identity as influenced by consumer culture suggests a loss of personal autonomy, but on the other hand Nicole and the Divers challenge a self that is strictly created by outward influences. As we have seen Nicole participates in the capitalist market system, but her occupation in making such purchases is as much a part of her identity as the products she buys. Tanning, purchases and their beach location are all societally expected ways to create and display their identity as members of the elite upper class. Their class status makes them close to film celebrities but this facade of personality is the product of both their autonomy and Fitzgerald’s choices in point of view. I next will take these surface explorations of identity shaped by consumer culture to connect to the greater art world and how the Divers’ identity is both a creation of their own, and created by outside sources.

*Tender Is the Night* comments on the collapse between subject and object, as it presents Nicole as a central character caught between the two states of being. It also traces the shift in ideas of what defines an object, which was occurring in the art world and extends to the performance that Nicole herself creates. Finally Fitzgerald uses the Divers’ performance to illuminate the close relationship between sources of consumer culture that shape identity and a person’s own individual autonomy. In this section, I explore relationship between a performer and audience, and an object and its viewer, ultimately drawing out the nuanced understanding that Fitzgerald has of the creation of identity.
Nicole Diver is a performer, beautiful and revered by her friends and audience, yet she is also described as a woman molded and sculpted like a piece of art, an object for display. Early on in the novel, Nicole is reading on the beach, looking through a recipe book for chicken Maryland, and the descriptions of her physique and character here are central to understanding Fitzgerald’s commentary on subject and object.

She was about twenty-four Rosemary guessed—her face could have been described in terms of conventional prettiness, but the effect was that it had been made first on the heroic scale with strong structure and marking, as if the features and vividness of brow and coloring, everything we associate with temperament and character had been molded with a Rodinesque intention, and then chiseled away in the direction of prettiness to a point where a single slip would have irreparably diminished its force and quality. With the mouth the sculptor had taken desperate chances—it was the cupid’s bow of a magazine cover, yet it shared the distinction of the rest. (Fitzgerald 17)

Fitzgerald suggests that there are links amongst heroic scale, prettiness, brow, coloring, character and temperament, which implies that these entities are dependent on one another within the construction of identity. This illustrates the societal assumptions that, for example, one who has conventional prettiness also has a certain temperament. This rigid scale of characteristics seemingly leaves no room for personal control. Nicole’s inner character is defined by her outward appearance in a seemingly unchangeable equation of $a=b$. Nicole has been sculpted by an artist and she is static, presented as she is for consumption by viewers who will read her “brow” and “character” accordingly as interdependent traits. Such traits suggest that Nicole cannot understand or present herself
differently if the associations are already created, which runs counter to the pervading ideas of self-alteration seen in consumer culture and advertising.

If Fitzgerald has suggested that Nicole’s outward “prettiness” determines her inward “character” then she seems to lose her autonomy as a subject. However, on closer inspection, subject and object may not be as different as they seem. One basic definition of subject and object draws the distinction between the two by action and inaction. In a sentence, for example, the subject is what is doing the action while the object is what the action is being done to. Thus, according to the Oxford English Dictionary “object” is defined as “a material thing that can be seen and touched” (OED). Yet a subject also is defined as “someone or something under a person’s rule or control,” rather than an autonomous being (OED). This definition then draws a connection between subject and object suggesting perhaps that the two are not so fundamentally different. In the case of a character, the key differences between objecthood and subjecthood would seem to lie between the autonomy and control of a person’s self. However, if a subject is by definition under the rule of another, is being a subject really much different than being an object fully controlled by artistic license? By describing Nicole not as a subject capable of a distinction between her appearance and her character but as an object sculpted, Fitzgerald calls into question the very idea of Nicole’s agency in constructing herself.

Fitzgerald makes a shift in narrative voice in this passage, addressing his readers collectively as “we,” associating them with the standards by which Nicole is measured in society. This implies a united, ubiquitous understanding of the values of “prettiness” “temperament” and “character” that are placed on Nicole. Readers are separated from Nicole in the scene, taking on a critic’s perspective regarding her inward and outward
character. Each of these societal values are to be understood, not only by the readers, but also by those within the text. “We” are meant to view Nicole as Rosemary does, observe her at a distance, taking in her sculpted aspects rather than the flexibility and changeability of a living, breathing, human subject. Nicole is clearly an object on display.

The narrator’s perspective is often ambiguous, seeming at times to speak from Rosemary’s perspective as a close third person narration and at others from an omniscient and distanced third person perspective. This ambiguity underscores that Rosemary, the narrator and “we,” all are observing Nicole in implicitly the same way. Moreover, what supposedly shapes all those perspectives, thanks to a rise in consumer culture in 1920’s, are the changed ideas of “conventional prettiness” and beauty achievable through commercial purchases. It is precisely those new conventions that, in tandem with changes in the art world, are central to how Nicole is portrayed as an object and subject simultaneously.

This passage introduces Nicole as an object and pairs her with Fitzgerald’s broader exploration of artistic objects. In the same paragraph, the narrator claims that Nicole is molded with a “Rodinesque intention” and has the “cupids bow of a magazine cover” (Fitzgerald 17). By associating both of these seemingly incongruent descriptions with the same woman—one classic highbrow art, and the other mass-market commercialism—Fitzgerald is calling into question the very conventions that he assumes the readers, the “we” will agree on. The character, prettiness and temperament of Nicole and her artistic and commercial influences of Rodin and the magazine cover are all conventions the “we” are to take as they are. Yet by generally addressing the readers as a homogenous mass, a similarly thinking “we,” Fitzgerald is asking us to understand that
blanket associations of temperament, appearance, and character are socially constructed. It is worth looking closer at what each of these artistic and commercial influences really mean, both to reveal more about Nicole and the cultural moment of her construction.

The first cultural association given to Nicole, to Rodin, is interesting because of the style, impact, and reproduction of his works. Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) was an influential French sculptor who was commissioned by the French government and supported by critics for much of his sculpting career (Vincent). He found influence, often erotic, from classic works such as Dante’s *Inferno*. One of his most famous works, *The Thinker*, cast in Bronze between 1881 and 1882 was originally a depiction of Dante, but has colloquially become a symbol for a broad range of thinkers and philosophers in general (de Young). Because of the medium of bronze and marble, his work was often extremely complex and took years to complete. For example, *The Gates of Hell*, depicting a scene from *Inferno*, has 180 separate figures. It was commissioned in 1880 but Rodin continued to work on it for 37 years until his death in 1917 (Vincent).

To be “modeled with a Rodineqsue intention” then connotes precision, dedication, classical influence and artistic expertise from one of the world’s most famous sculptors. As Rodin spent years perfecting the 180 figures in *The Gates of Hell*, so too, it would seem, did the sculptor in creating Nicole. Rodin’s works were also often large, full-scale depictions of his influences, so Nicole’s “heroic scale” also references a creation of intensity and importance.

On the other hand, Nicole also is associated with more “low-brow” objects in publishing and magazines. This advertisement from *Vogue* during the summer of 1928 for tanning and Ponds products is an example of the emerging, prolific use of product
advertisement in the publication industry. The woman in the ad has the “cupids bow” lip, perfectly drawn, lush and shaped with the ridge and outline that became a beauty ideal. Nicole too is described with this feature, at odds with the more “heroic scale,” the Rodinesque qualities of the rest of her face.

Fig 2- Mason, Kendall Jane. “Secrets of a Smart Sun-Tan” Vogue. Condé Nast, 20 July 1929

The woman pictured in the advertisement is very much a modern woman, adorned and creating herself within the constraints of the new beauty regimens. She has dark painted lips, evenly toned skin, shadowed eyelids, large shining earrings and a head with every hair in place. The model’s face is stiff, unmoving, unemotional, and has now become an object captured in a photograph. She is frozen and consumed just like the
product she is advertising. Like Nicole she is perfected and “chiseled” in the terms of “conventional prettiness.” The layout of the products in the bottom corners depicts her bureau, full of the appropriate bottles of Ponds that “every skin” needs and more jewelry to complete the picture of this woman adhering to these new norms (Mason). These products then offer self-control and manipulation as a counter to objecthood. As discussed earlier, changing fashions, proliferated by consumer publications encouraged women to change their outward appearance. If Fitzgerald is suggesting that outward beauty is connected to inward temperament, then it would seem that these products could give Nicole some agency through the ability to alter both her outward and inward character.

If Nicole has aspects of classic literature, famous artistic influence and craft as well as mass-market commercialization, then the terms of her description, that is her “temperament and character” as well as her “prettiness,” are called into question. Just as Nicole seems to call into question the distinction between subject and object, Rodin and Vogue seem to converge in Nicole during an age of increasing mass consumption. Rodin, sculpting The Thinker and The Gates of Hell from Inferno would arguably have different opinions of what his work is meant to stand for, than would a Vogue advertisement for Ponds cream. The two are seemingly opposite in aesthetic artistic value, yet Fitzgerald uses both as ways to describe Nicole and how “we” are supposed to understand her from her surface beauty and seemingly arbitrary ideas of prettiness, temperament and character. Suggesting that The Thinker and a Vogue advertisement are “a single slip” away from each other raises questions of artistic value that are placed on objects. Nicole can be both a body formed with commercial products and an object constructed with classical,
intentional mastery, and so it seems no definitive values can be placed on her. Nicole is at once an independent subject who can change herself with products and an object sculpted and judged by another. Her very being, as constructed by Fitzgerald, questions whether it is really even possible to define characteristics of prettiness, beauty, and outward appearance. The advertisement for Dorothy Gray lotion below claims “unquestionably a skin of golden tan is smarter than ever before” but by juxtaposing commercial culture and classical art, Fitzgerald is asking his readers to do just that: to question (“A Golden Tan”).

Fig. 3- "The Thinker." *De Young Legion of Honor.* Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2014.  Web. 24 Sept. 2014.
Nicole’s status as both an object and a subject can also be seen in tracing the artistic value within objects themselves. With the inauguration of what Walter Benjamin called the “Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” ideas of the value of art shifted. The period began the proliferation, commodification and distribution of everything from books and magazines to art and film. In the process, Benjamin suggests, aesthetic values changed. Historically, “in principle, a work of art has always been reproducible,” and as objects, these pieces of art are constructions that can be imitated in both theory and practice (Benjamin 218). However, by “1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that…permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public” (Benjamin 219). Though art has
always been, according to Benjamin, reproducible, the “mechanical age,” defined by the increase of photography and film, proliferated art and distributed it to more people than ever before.

Benjamin’s argument focuses on the broadening impact of art through unlimited mechanization, which substituted a “plurality of copies for a unique existence,” rather than small limited copies of certain works, yet his points can translate to the mediums referenced in Tender is the Night. Everyone who purchased Vogue could hold in their hands an exact copy of the original that the editor possessed. Similarly Tender is the Night began with 7,600 copies in print in April of 1934, followed by another batch of 5,075 and 2,520 copies later that spring, each round of publication of the same edition extending the scope of the text’s impact (Tate 209). The 17 The Thinker statues are exact sized casting, virtually indistinguishable from what Rodin himself touched so they are neither unlimited productions like Vogue and Tender but rather a gray area between the two, which Benjamin doesn’t address. Rodin then has an even more apt connection to Nicole, as she too exists in a gray area between subject and object.

Reproduction and proliferation of these works of art in this time period can be understood as creating the desire within the contemporary masses to bring things “‘closer’ spatially and humanly” or to in other words “get a hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” (Benjamin 223). Would, for example, a Rodin sculpture have the same impact if there were more of them to see, like the duplicated magazine covers with the same cupid’s bow lip? Interestingly however, Rodin’s The Thinker has actually been replicated numerous times, including at least 17 full size castings installed at universities and art museums worldwide. Many of these would have
existed during the time of Fitzgerald’s writing, including the one installed outside the Pantheon in Paris in 1906, which now resides in the Rodin Museum in Paris. Consumer driven magazines, art and literature all underwent a similar process of reproduction and proliferation, regardless of the medium. Therefore, is “serious” art like that of Rodin’s sculptures really that much different from the consumer market driven, culturally mass produced works like magazines?

Although on the surface, a subject performing and an object on display might not seem similar Fitzgerald uses the Divers to draw a connection between the understanding of subjects in performance and consumer and art objects on view. Both performer and object have an interdependent relationship with an audience and a viewer. The subject/object is given meaning, and reciprocally, the audience/viewer too gains meaning in the viewing experience. Erving Goffman explains “when an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess” (17). Similarly, Anne Anlin Cheng argues in her book Second Skin that viewing, much like a physical performance, is a mutual relationship between the object and the viewer, in which both have agency and a stake in this reciprocal act. Seeing is not “a mastery of surface. We do not master by seeing; we ourselves are altered when we look” (Cheng 21). In other words, both the object being viewed and the person doing the viewing are subject to change. There are no set meanings attached to surfaces, objects, or people, so it is through the process of performing and viewing that meaning is created. Therefore, it is performing subjects,
using tools of presentation at their disposal, including commercial products for surface changes, that affects how they are viewed.

The Divers are essentially performers; they present their own lives how they want to be viewed and by the importance others subscribe to them. This interpretation by others is an integral part of performance and in fact the Divers’ lives and relationship with each other are essential to their friends. At the dinner party when Violet McKisco sees an aspect of Nicole that was meant to be hidden, Abe North tells Rosemary the extent to which the Divers play a role in the lives of others. The significance of their impact seems hidden within the act of performance.

—The fact of The Divers together is more important to their friends than many of them realize. Of course it’s done at a certain sacrifice—sometimes they seem just rather charming figures in a ballet, and worth just the attention you give a ballet, but it’s more than that. (Fitzgerald 43)

Here Abe North categorizes “The Divers” as a single entity, giving them the capital letters of a formal title. He pairs them together into one object rather than two distinct subjects and they are presented in a way that resembles commercial products or works of art like The Thinker or Ponds cream. He says they are mere characters in a ballet, separated by a stage and a choreographed performance. Cheng argues that in performance, ornamentation creates questions of what “that ‘style’ itself is doing in relation to the supposed ‘real’ body that it covers” (Cheng 19). The choreography of dancers on a ballet stage is in itself a style, a practiced façade that further distances the “real” dancers from the audience.
The reciprocal relationship between the Divers and their audience of friends can be understood as mutually sustaining. They are presented as a delicate, precarious construction to be protected. Goffman’s “dramaturgical loyalty” encompasses the moral and social obligations that all parties in a performance adhere to. What he calls “the teammates,” or all participating members of the reciprocal performance, “must act as if they have accepted certain moral obligations. They must not betray the secrets of the team when between performances—whether from self-interest, principle or lack of discretion” (Goffman 212). Nicole and Dick’s relationship has become more “important…than many of them realize” because their friends as the audience have attached meaning to the Divers through the act of watching them (Fitzgerald 43).

Characters close to the Divers, like the McKiscos, the Norths and Tommy Barban are obvious participants in the dramaturgical loyalty construct. When Mrs. McKisco sees Nicole having a mental breakdown in the bathroom of the Divers home at a dinner party, Tommy Barban insists that she doesn’t share what she saw, asserting that “teammate” loyalty to maintain the Diver’s façade. Mrs. McKisco goes as far as to ask “are they so sacred?” highlighting the Diver’s agency, control and influence in their lives (Fitzgerald 43). Barban insists the Divers’ personal lives not be discussed in adherence to that same reciprocal loyalty and a tactful “discretion” that defines a performance-audience relationship. The Divers are revered as sacred objects and as subjects, they are in turn inextricably, “the object of the gaze” (Cheng 52). This implies that the performance façade could be destroyed easily and that the friends have that strong dramaturgical loyalty to the Divers for a reciprocal relationship of security for Divers and the audience themselves.
The audience places importance on “The Divers” which categorizes their performance as a representative object standing in for cultural meaning. Just as the novel’s narrator asks the “we” to view Nicole according to standards of society, the Divers’ performance also adheres to these societal norms. Nicole is sculpted and chiseled into conventional prettiness that “we” all read and understand. Similarly, the Divers are charming figures on the surface whose external bodies associate them with cultural inscriptions that they perform.

When they could be cast off as superfluous, “charming figures in a ballet,” it is in fact this very reduction of their worth that holds significance for the “audience” (Fitzgerald 43). By positioning the Divers as stage performers, Abe distances them from the rest of their society until they are more like objects of admiration and sources of stability, rather than living, flexible and alterable people. In performance, the Divers adhere to the “specific codes of cultural coherence,” just as Nicole embodies two separate art influences. Importantly, both the performance and Nicole’s outward appearance rely on the interpretation of others, aligning both as subjects and objects.

In referencing ballet, it is implied that certain works of art and performances are inherently worth more attention and therefore demand less or more from their viewers. How much viewers need to pay attention or how distracted they may be, perhaps as watching a ballet, changes the reception and understanding of a work of art. Benjamin traces the industrial development that alters the production and reproduction of art, and presents how such changes have also transformed the viewing of art. This reproducibility broadened the reach of individual pieces of art and “the greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation” (Benjamin 239). He
says there is a fundamental difference between a distracted and a fully concentrated viewer that changes how a work is received and understood. He argues, “A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it…In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art” (Benjamin 239). Similarly it is suggested that the Divers’ distracted audience, who give them the piecemeal attention given to a ballet, are absorbing the performance, rather than being absorbed, consumed by it. The agency for creating impact shifts from the work of art to the audience and viewers themselves.

Fitzgerald’s creation of Nicole as a character resembling both a subject and an object reflects the cultural tensions surrounding art during the age of mechanical reproduction. Nicole cannot simply be read as subject or object, but rather a convergence of the two, just as her appearance brings together art and consumer culture to suggest that they are not as different as they may seem. Views and reception of classic art changed during the time, with growing publication and replication capacity. By aligning Nicole with both Rodin and Vogue, Fitzgerald asks his readers to question characters that are either fully static or completely malleable, suggesting the nuances in the forms of performance that are part of life, art and literature. Performance is not simply a façade of a stylized body wholly constructed by consumer culture. Performance is a representation of culture that relies on an audience, just as a work of art necessitates a viewer, a film needs its camera and a novel demands its reader for interpretation and meaning.

Conclusion
In *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald analyzes the cultural moment of the 1920’s to question the malleability of identity and how character can ever truly be defined. The novel’s characters are products of consumer culture and Nicole especially is shaped by developments in advertising, art, and class expectations. Fitzgerald was attentive to the widespread influence of various forms of consumer culture and how it constructed individual agency. *Tender* offers a nuanced exploration of how identity is both autonomously constructed and influenced by consumer culture. I presented the precarious and unmoored aspects of an identity shaped by consumer culture, which are all a part of Fitzgerald’s exploration of what it means to be an autonomous subject versus a controlled object. Through film, beauty products, tanning practices, conspicuous consumption, place, and art, we have seen Fitzgerald’s exploration of identity within 1920’s culture.

The emerging film industry created an entirely new way for character to exist as a façade, presented in a strategic view to an audience. Fitzgerald shows the reciprocal relationship between audience and performer and how perhaps, as Goffman argues, there really is no true self. Instead, there is the self that is presented through a lens revealing only what is meant to be seen. With films came celebrity, a class idolized yet further distanced from an objective truth and void of an authentic personality. The fact that the Divers exist between performing in a live play and a camera-guided film, introduces Fitzgerald’s nuanced understanding of identity. The Divers’ identity is then created both by how others view them and how they present themselves.

The Divers are celebrities in their own right and they maintain their high-class status through the toil of a capitalist system. Consumer culture has apparently affected their character façade and their lifestyle. Looking at the cultural moment, flush with
advertisements of proper beauty purchases and lifestyle practices, offers insight into how this modernist identity was created. Attending to the emergence of a new fashionable leisure class also suggests that their position and construction on the beach is an attempt to a secure identity that can neither be indigenous or truly defined.

Nicole is described as an object constructed and molded like a piece of artwork, during a time of change in the production and distribution of works of art. Fitzgerald’s comparisons of Nicole both to highbrow art and consumer culture reveals that perhaps these two categories are not as opposing as they may seem. Nicole’s identity is a product created by her society and viewed as an object on display, a status she challenges with her own individual autonomy.

Fitzgerald explores the nuances of subject and object through multiple modes of consumer culture that shape a person’s identity. He neither condemns nor endorses the high-class consumerism of the Divers, but instead reveals that a search for malleability and self-authorization are integral to their performance. These surface aspects of consumer culture, paired with standards for art at the time, call into question what it means to be a person and a subject, rather than an object controlled by artistic aesthetics. As such, the Divers, especially Nicole, are characters exemplary of their time, caught between creating their own identity and being shaped by demands of art aesthetics and consumer culture.
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