



“Poor Lad’s Daydream” Story: *Tender Is the Night* and Other Novels

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the traditional mode and modern edition of “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story, as well as the reasons behind its evolution. Modern edition of “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story, represented by the early 20th century American novelist Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*, turns out to be different from its classic form in folktale. First, modern edition focuses on how poor lad’s daydream becomes disillusioned, and on the various setbacks he is confronted with, rather than how the fancy dream gets realized. What’s more, in modern edition, male’s disadvantageous position in marriage market fails to be improved as the story develops, and the masculine power and authority are not further reinforced. In addition, females in modern edition break away from the embarrassing position of “the second sex” and “the other”. They take more initiative and independence, and gain more and more power in the relationship between two sexes, instead of being passive, fragile and always needing male’s protection as showed in traditional folktales. In the end, the old folktale displays male’s victory, while modern edition expresses male’s anxiety. The reason why ancient “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story has various evolution in modern narration is that female’s social status has been improved, social gender has been reconstructed, marriage concepts has developed because of the social change, and male writers become confused and anxious because of the change of male-female relationship and the change of gender roles.

Key words: Fitzgerald; *Tender Is the Night*; Evolution of the story; Poor Lad’s Daydream

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INTRODUCTION

Sigmund Freud writes in his well-known paper *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* that:

Let us take the case of a poor orphan boy to whom you have given the address of some employer where he may perhaps find a job... The content of his fantasy will perhaps be something like this. He is given a job, finds favor with his new employer, makes himself indispensable in the business, first as his employer’s partner and then as his successor. (Freud, 2002, p.215)

Here Freud demonstrates one of the most typical daydreams of human beings, “poor (boy’s) lad’s daydream”, exactly. The main story, similar to the well-known Cinderella’s story can be viewed as the male-Cinderella story. It is acknowledged that original Cinderella story is popular with writers, readers, especially the female, and its modern editions are numerous, while the male-Cinderella story or “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story are only seen in folklore and fairy tales, and its modern edition differs from traditional mode to a great degree. Male writers in modern times are not keen on the old situation and ending. Instead, in their writings, poor lad’s daydreams are too often hindered by various setbacks and become difficult to achieve. This paper aims mainly to explore the traditional mode and modern evolution of “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story, as well as the reasons behind the evolution, taking *Tender Is the Night* by American novelist Fitzgerald of the early 20th century and some other “Poor Lad’s Daydream” stories as instances.

1. "POOR LAD'S DAYDREAM" STORY IN FOLKLORE

Similar to Cinderella story, there is a big gap between the two sexes in "Poor Lad's Daydream" stories in folklore and fairy tales, both in social status, wealth and in other aspects. But in the end the male makes his success through marriage, owing to his diligence, talent, or other extraordinary abilities, just like Cinderella who relies on fabulous beauty and kind-heartedness to achieve progress in the social ladder.

The plot of traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream" story is always set as follows. Poor lad takes an adventure or makes a living outside. Afterwards, he receives advice or assistance from sage or Master because of his braveness, intelligence, competence or good deeds he does, and then successfully marries the beautiful princess or the daughter of a Lord. Naturally, he inherits female's fortune, even the crown, and completely changes his lower social identity meanwhile, gaining both fame and wealth. Propp in his *Morphology of Folklore* sums up some constant factors in folklore or fairy tale, which he calls functions. The 31th function¹ of his thirty one functions has a precise relation with the ending of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story, which says that the hero is always awarded, gets married to princess, ascends to the throne and rules the country in the end (Propp, 1968, p.43).

Generally in traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream" story, the relationship between the two sexes is like this: Male is apparently inferior to female in both social status and "marriage market". But as story develops, female is always described as a passive, fragile one that needs male's protection; on the contrary, male is portrayed as a superman both mentally and physically, who always comes to female's rescue or handles the hardships female's country suffers. As is known to all,

"Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property." (Millett, 2000, p.33)

Obviously, traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream" story displays the victory of masculine power. Male can achieve as equal status as female through beneficial marriage and become the head of a family, the complete ruler of female's previous "kingdom" even though he is born humbly.

¹ The 31st function includes 1. A bride and a kingdom are awarded at once, or the hero receives half the kingdom at first, and the whole kingdom upon the death of the parents. 2. Sometimes the hero simply marries without obtaining a throne, since his bride is not a princess. 3. Sometimes, on the contrary, only accession to the throne is mentioned. See Vladimir Propp (1968). *Morphology of the folk tale*. (Laurence Scott, Trans.). New York: The American Folklore Society and Indiana University. (Original work published 1928).

2. MODERN EDITION OF "POOR LAD'S DAYDREAM" STORY AND AN ANALYSIS OF STORY ELEMENTS

Tender Is the Night written by American novelist Fitzgerald of the early 20th century possesses the structure of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story. The interrelationship between male and female in the novel subverts the traditional mode in patriarchal society that men are superior to women. In this novel men are no longer condescending masters, and women are no longer subordinate to men and controlled by men. Conversely, men are inferior to women in social rank, birth, fortune, etc. *Tender Is the Night* illustrates the story after poor lad's daydream being realized. At the very beginning of the story, the hero Dick, a psychiatrist from lower-middle class, has already been married with Nicole, the sick from upper class and a daughter of a millionaire. It seems that this young man with strong ambition, strict integrity and pursuit of perfection has rewarded by fortune and achieved his daydream. However, as the story develops, the poor young man who once determined to "be a good psychologist maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived" (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.132) spoils his career during the careful care of his insane wife, and loses his virtues of "self-control and self-discipline" (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.19). On the one hand, he wants to obey the moral standards in patriarchal society, acting as Nicole's psychologist and wonderful husband, as well as the young actress Rosemary's father-like cross-age friend; on the other hand, he wishes to satisfy his internal lust, becoming Rosemary's secret lover and keeping taking advantage of the Warren fortunes. Ultimately, his dreams are all disillusioned—his wife has an affair and his lover finds another man. As a result, he has no choice but to leave his wife and children, and wanders among towns as an obscure doctor. It is obviously seen that fortune has taken back the previous rewards, turning his superficially realized daydream into a nightmare.

The modern edition of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story like *Tender Is the Night* is differently characterized, in contrast to that in fairy tales and folklores. Different from portraying the process of realizing daydream in traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream", the modern edition at the very beginning tells the readers that the hero has upgraded his social status, increased his wealth and started his upper-class glorious life by marrying the heroine. However, the subsequent story develops diversely from the traditional daydream story. Fitzgerald pays more attention to the varying setbacks the poor lad has confronted with and the increasing power female has obtained in the interrelationship.

First, in terms of the arrangement of the plot and the ending of the story, modern editions of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story express how the daydream becomes disillusioned instead of how the daydream comes true.

Tender Is the Night, obviously, explores how the hero is further and further away from the critical point—the realization of daydream, after he has already reached that point. To begin with, the hero Dick fails to gain as equal status as the heroine, and to become the ruler of her “kingdom” through marriage. Instead, he is only regarded as, just as Nicole’s sister Barbee says, “a doctor the Warrens bought for Nicole” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.152). He attends to not solely his wife suffered from mental disease but also his two children. What’s more, in the beginning it is introduced that the apparently happy marriage is intruded by a gorgeous, confident and decisive young actress Rosemary. Consequently, Dick is so intrigued by this charming and active young lady that he can not peacefully maintain his marriage life with Nicole, which is glamorous and wealthy outside but lifeless and restrained inside. “Nicole was his girl—too often he was sick at heart about her, yet she was his girl. Time with Rosemary was self-indulgence...” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.213). It is clear that the situation Dick being stuck into is further away from the ideal poor lad’s daydream. In the end, Dick fails in both sides: Rosemary later becomes an old stager in love and Dick turns out to be one of her lovers despite his strong obsession with her, while his wife Nicole recovers from a patient dependent on her husband to an independent female with adequate courage to hold the belief that “none of whom she need obey or even love” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.294). Actually, what thoroughly smashes Dick’s fancy daydream is that Nicole has an affair and puts forward a divorce with him. It can be concluded here that the traditional “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story usually ends with hero’s happy marriage and higher social position, whereas the story in this novel ends with hero’s broken marriage and self-imposed exile.

What’s more, differing from the traditional “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story, in modern edition, male’s inferior position in “marriage market” fails to be improved to a superior one as the story develops, and its masculine power and authority does not be further reinforced. If the balance of “power” said by British philosopher Thomas Hobbes is demonstrated at the beginning of the story, the powers hero and heroine possess in the successive story becomes more and more out-of-balance. Hobbes believes that

The power of a man, to take it universally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good, and is either original or instrumental. Natural power is the eminence of the facilities of body, or mind; as extraordinary strength, form, prudence, arts, eloquence, liberality, nobility. Instrumental are those powers which, acquired by these, or by fortune, are means and instruments to acquire more; as riches, reputation, friends, and the secret working of God, which men call good luck. (Hobbes, 1651, p.53)

In this novel the hero is endowed with “natural power” like extraordinary talent and courage, just as the heroine with “natural power” like “nobility” and exquisite “form”, and these two “powers” are previously equivalent.

However, as the story moves on the hero not solely fails to receive “means and instruments to acquire more” such as “riches”, “reputation” to help him “like the motion of heavy bodies, which, the further they go, make still the more haste” (Hobbes, 1651, p.53), but also loses his original “natural power” such as vigorous features, super talent and enterprising ideal. All that is left in his life is decadence and boredom, his vigor perishing and spirit degenerating. He drinks excessively, kisses female patients at will, gets beaten by police and sent into prison, breaks up with his cooperator, etc. Under the circumstances, he totally loses his virtues of “self-control and self-discipline”, and he even says to himself that “I guess I’m the Black Death... I don’t seem to bring people happiness any more” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.219). Dick in readers’ or in Rosemary’s eyes at the beginning of the novel is almost perfect—young, handsome, wealthy, as if he has showed his “power” to the most extent. However, all these are spurious. Actually, the extravagant married life Dick lives is supported by the Warrens to a large degree and his clinic is also funded by the Warrens. He “had been swallowed up like a gigolo, and somehow permitted his arsenal to be locked up in the Warren safety-deposit vaults” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.201), and “was constantly inundated by a trickling of goods and money” (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.170). In other words, after marrying Dick loses his “arsenal” (Hobbes’ “natural power” is acceptable here) by virtue of which he wins his marriage. It is his wife Nicole who owns the initiative in the marriage life, thus, he will be dethroned and deserted by his wife like the Warren’s puppet king. Therefore his self-imposed exile can be understood as a way of saving male’s final dignity. The hero may initially acts as a role of assisting and saving the heroine, or handling the hardships in female’s kingdom, but soon he becomes incapable of being the strong and even turns out to be someone who needs salvation.

In addition, females are no longer passive, fragile and always needing male’s protection as shown in the traditional “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story.

In general, the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence. Just as their social position is vicarious and achieved (often on a temporary or marginal basis) through males, their relation to the economy is also typically vicarious or tangential. (Millett, 2000, p.40)

Even though the heroine in “Poor Lad’s Daydream” story is lucky enough to be the rich heiress, inescapably, “she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.” (Beauvoir, 1953, p.16). In *Tender Is the Night* things change. One of the two heroines in the novel is an heiress of a millionaire and the other one is a totally independent professional woman. Both of them need not rely financially on man and marriage. They break away from the embarrassing position of “the

second sex" and "the other", showing more initiative and independence. As to Nicole, she transforms from the one who is subordinate to Dick into the one who examines him with her own eyes, and finds that Dick's "awful faculty of being right seemed to have deserted him at last" (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.275). Nicole's budding of feminist consciousness marks that she begins to appear on the proscenium of social stage as an awakened one and shares as equal rights as man. At last she chooses her life style, divorcing with Dick and living with her new lover based on her will. And the other heroine Rosemary is a professional woman, an independent new woman, who has been told since her childhood that "You were brought up to work—not especially to marry...whatever happens it can't spoil you because economically you're a boy, not a girl." (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.40). Rosemary holds the initiative in the whole relationship with Dick. Initially, Rosemary with little social experience falls in love with the handsome and charming Dick at first sight. She has the sense that Dick "represented externally the exact furthestmost evolution of a class" (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.21) and that "he would open up whole new worlds for her, unrolled an endless succession of magnificent possibilities" (Fitzgerald, 1933, p.16). As a result, she behaves actively to pursue his love. And several years later the situation reverses dramatically when Dick and Rosemary meet again. At that time Rosemary has four-year's acting experiences and grows up as a sophisticated professional woman.

In the end, traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream" story displays male's victory, while modern editions express male's anxiety. Women, in patriarchy society, are regarded as "incomplete beings, doomed to slavery; soft and lacking in muscle, they have no grasp on the world; so they work hard to annex a lover or, better, a husband" (Beauvoir, 1953, p.213). The "Poor Lad's Daydream" story in fairy tales and folklore reflects an extreme gender condition that the women with high social ranks, fortune or kingdom are always fragile and incapable of ruling the world, and everything they own and their whole world are doomed to be controlled by men. Only in this way and by owning a man can women get "defined", and it is always lower-class "poor lads" who "define" them and govern their world. Nevertheless, *Tender Is the Night* shows "a typical metaphor of the collapse of modern patriarchal culture and the rising of feminism" (Zhang, 2001, p.71). The female characters in the novel, just as William Guldahl Stewart thinks, belong to those who are "charming" and "have devastating effect on the men related to them" (Cooperman, 1996, p.117). Anxiety about male power is looming in the novel.

3. OTHER NOVELS IN THE EVOLUTION OF "POOR LAD'S DAYDREAM" STORY

Fitzgerald is not the only novelist who favors this kind of transformation of narrative mode. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by the British literary giant Lawrence in the same time also contains the similar plot. Although obscure, it is also modern "Poor Lad's Daydream" story about a lower-class man's striving for marrying an upper-class woman.

It is the same as Fitzgerald that Lawrence expresses a theme of "the fall of male". The hero Mellors is the only one who can offer Connie sexual gratification in comparison with other men who are sexually related to her. In other words, it is mainly through the "sexuality" of "the essence of the facilities of body" rather than other "natural power" as "extraordinary strength, form, prudence, arts, eloquence, liberality, nobility" that Mellors wins Connie's affection. Even so, sadly, "Mellors is just Connie's sexual tool, nothing different from his other male companions." (Yang, 2011, p.144) Furthermore, this sexually powerful man is emotionally incompetent. This kind of incompetence has no difference with other men's sexual incompetence. However, Connie is awakened by the sex with Mellors, and in return she helps Mellors out of the solitude and becomes his patron saint and emotional consoler and guide (Spilka, 1955, p.190). When Mellors gets worried that their relationship will be found out by folks, Connie says firmly that "Well, I can go away." "Anywhere! I've got money of my own..." (Lawrence, 1993, p.126) Females' spiritual powerfulness exactly sets off males' weakness, taking Mellors as the representative. Just like Pinion comments on the interrelationship in the novel, "they (males) are new-born, and only through females can they see eternally spiritual light" (Pinion, 1978, p.72). Lawrence himself once said in *Study on Thomas Hardy* that "in male-female relationship, males are superficially in ascendancy, which leaves people an illusion; while looking deeply we may find that males' dread for females due to their own weakness is visible, because once females leave them, they would feel lonely and deserted as dust" (Hou, 2009, p.23)². The novel ends with hero's yielding statement that the heroine is what he lives for. "So I believe in the little flame between us. For me now, it's the only thing in the world. I've got no friends, not inward friends. Only you. And now the little flame is all I care about in my life." (Lawrence, 1993, p.313).

Just as *Tender Is the Night*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* embodies an unsatisfactory ending for the hero. It is known from the last part that Mellors gives up his job of game-keeper, and gets work on a farm. It seems that

² See D. H. Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Ed. Edward D Macdonald, Phoenix[C]. New York: The Viking Press. Cited from Hou Chaofeng, "Feminism in Lawrence's Literary Creation—Reread *Lady Chatterley's Lover*", 1936.

Mellors could not receive as much benefits like increasing wealth and social status as poor lad in folklore does, even though he could manage to marry an upper-class lady. Regardless of the passionate honey words, Mellors' concern about the money and his worry about their future can also be seen in his letter to Lady Chatterley. In the letter money is mentioned five times. When introducing his present work and life, Mellors seems to mention unconsciously that he "get(s) thirty shillings a week as labourer" (Lawrence, 1993, p.311). Then he sighs at another place that "It means a man bringing up a family on twenty-five and thirty shillings" (Lawrence, 1993, p.312). When he denounces people's luxury consumption and social education causing this phenomenon, and evaluates the function of money—"bring up the masses to depend entirely on spending money, and then the money gives out...Money poisons you when you've got it, and starves you when you haven't" (Lawrence, 1993, pp.312-313), as well as clearly exposes his worry to Connie that he "feel(s) the devil in the air, and he'll try to get us. Or not the devil, Mammon" (Lawrence, 1993, p.313), readers can witness a lower-class man's entire anxiety about living together with an upper-class woman. This also indicates that Lawrence, a writer enormously concerned about the theme of "money and class, sexuality and gender" (Richetti, 2005, p.715), does not believe in cross-class marriage.

During the evolution of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story there exists a story mode between traditional and modern edition, by which *The Red and the Black* (1830) by French writer Stendhal of the 19th century is a good example.

Like "poor lad" in folklore, the hero Julien in *The Red and the Black* is born humbly, but full of wit and courage. He longs to step into the upper class and becomes the master of the world depending on his own talent and wisdom like Napoleon did from his childhood. He knows that people, who are born into a very poor family with no money, no power and no noble relatives, "can impossibly achieve success without artifice" (Fan, 2010, p.11). So after Father Pirard recommends him to be the secretary of Marquis de La Mole, Julien enters "the center of Parisian power" "the center of intrigue and hypocrisy" (Stendhal, 1958, p.244) with joy, and soon finds out a shortcut to success, which is to win the affection of marquis' daughter Mathilde. In the initial period, Julien detests Mathilde for her peculiarity and arrogance. Being aware that he can get promoted and obtain the honor of aristocracy by marrying her, Julien begins to chase after her ardently. For this reason, after receiving a love letter from Mathilde, Julien reacts initially that he eventually defeats his aristocratic rivals and stands on the same starting line with them. When Mathilde becomes pregnant, Julien is conferred by the marquis with a knighthood, a possession and the rank of Lieutenant of Hussars, meanwhile he dreams of being "commander-in-chief of an army by the age of thirty". Were his fancy dream achieved, Julien would

become one of the heroes like those in traditional "Poor Lad's Daydream" story. However, Stendhal sets the plot in another way: the hero does not make success after unremitting efforts. In the end, the feudal aristocracy and the reactionary church collude with each other in cajoling and coercing Madame de Renal (Julien's previous relationship with her is a prelude of that with Mathilde, regarded as a typical disillusioned "Poor Lad's Daydream") into writing to disclose Julien as "poor and self-seeking, it was with the aid of the most consummate hypocrisy, and by seducing a weak and unhappy woman, that the man in question sought to make a career for himself and win a respected position in society" (Stendhal, 1958, p.450) (this letter can be seen as a retelling of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story in derogatory tone)—so that the marquis cancels his engagement to Mademoiselle Mathilde. Grabbed by rage, Julien shoots Madame de Renal to wound and is sentenced to death. Up to this point, Julien's daydream becomes thoroughly shattered. The story shows that sometimes a powerful social force usually pushes man's fancy dream further and further away from being realized every time when it seems very close to be realized.

Nevertheless, Stendhal displays the triumph of male power as in folklore. Even though the tactics Julien adopts in love affair is humble and the ending of the story is diverse from the traditional mode of "Poor Lad's Daydream" story, the author makes the hero the winner in love affairs. Madame de Renal gets suffered from the affection and shot to wound, but she loves Julien deeply all the way; Mademoiselle Mathilde, after Julien is sent into prison, walks around for saving him and even wills to commit suicide for love, "to astonish the world with the depth of her love and the sublimity of her actions" (Stendhal, 1958, p.470). When Julien is executed, she takes the carriage, with his head on her knees, to the tomb he has chosen for himself and buries him in person, showing tremendous courage and loyalty. Although the hero fails to acquire women's social position and fortune, he wins their affection.

CONCLUSION

The reason why ancient "Poor Lad's Daydream" story has various editions in modern narration is that female's social status has been improved, social gender has been reconstructed, marriage concepts have developed because of the social change, and male writers become confused and anxious because of the change of male-female relationship and the change of gender roles.

It is known that "modern feminism begins with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)" (Gamble, 2006, p.15). Wollstonecraft claims in this book the right to work, the right to education, political right and voting right for women. What she

is most concerned about is women's "independence" (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.5).³ In her viewpoint, men since ancient times believe that they can benefit from subjugating their lifetime mate with their own power, and in deed they take various means to prove that women should be willing to get oppression. It seems that the whole universe is created for their convenience and enjoyment. Her thoughts undoubtedly aroused startling reaction in the depressing gender order (in this gender order men rules women, which is called "natural order") at that time. The first feminist movement started in the late 1830s. And that *The Red and the Black* was published in 1830 is not accidental, for the subtitle of which is "A Chronicle of 1830". The novel not sorely discloses some realities in political and economic spheres but also reflects the truth of the changing relationship between the two sexes. Although the triumph of male power is expressed in the ending of the novel, the story about how to achieve "Poor Lad's Daydream" has turned into one about an unrealizable "Poor Lad's Daydream" under Stendhal's pen. 1920s saw the upsurge of feminist thoughts, and western women's liberation movement reached its climax marked by women's suffrage between 1920 and 1928. Western women's position in this period changed dramatically in employment and marriage (Jiang, 2008, p.125). Women, as a new power to destroy male power, gradually become courageous to challenge men's domination, resulting in the fact that "many men are aware that they have gradually withdrawn from the center to the edge, and their status as master has been weakened again." (Lin, 2004, p.18). Women's increasing social status, the reconstruction of gender roles and the changes of marriage values owing to social change have a dramatic impact on Fitzgerald and Lawrence who grew up in the 20s. In their fictional worlds "Poor Lad's Daydream" is always unachievable, which reflects their anxiety about masculine power. The heroes in their works become further and further away from their ancient brother Ulysses (the hero in Homeric Epics *The Odyssey*), who even ignores the proposal from the goddess Calypso to enjoy eternity with her on her island because he has to return back home to clean up the suitors who keep "harassing" his wife.

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³ Wollstonecraft says that "Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue; and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath."