Chapter - 6

The Last Tycoon - A Novel of the Standard Hollywood Definition of an Immediate, Dynamic, Unusual, Physical Love Affair
The Last Tycoon, even in its incomplete and imperfect state, in undoubtedly Fitzgerald's most mature piece of work. Evidently, at the time (1940) he was beginning this novel, Fitzgerald himself felt that it would be a masterpiece. In a letter of his daughter, he says of The Last Tycoon. "Look, I've begun to write something that is may be great, and I'm going to be absorbed in it for four or six months. It may not make us a cent but it will pay expenses and it is the first labor of love I've undertake since the first part of 'Infidelity'. Anyhow I'm alive again". But he may have been deluding himself about his spiritual state as much as he was about his physical one. It is possible to agree with William Troy when he says that The Last Tycoon "includes some of the most unfortunate writing Fitzgerald has left."

Fitzgerald was concerned about being forgotten as a novelist when he was in California and expressed his desire to write another novel, but he was unable to work on an extended fiction while on that M.G.M. Payroll. In March 1938 he wrote Perkins. "I am filling a note book with staff that will be of more immediate interest to you, but please don't mention me ever as having any plans. Tender is the Night hung over too long, and my next Venture will be presented to you without preparation or fanfare".(1)

In the fall Fitzgerald informed Beatrice Dance: "I have a grand novel up my sleeve and I'd love to go to France and write this summer. It would be short like The Great Gatsby but the same time in what it will have the transcendental approach, an attempt to show a man's life through some passionately regarded segment of it".(2)
Fitzgerald began writing his Hollywood novel in 1939 after the termination of his M.G.M. contract. Although he had earned some $90,000 in eighteen months, much of it had gone to pay debts and he had no savings. His wife required expensive treatment in North Carolina and his daughter was attending Vassar. Fitzgerald had written the seventeenth episode of the thirty episode plan for the novel when he died on 21 December 1940. The work published in 1941 as The Last Tycoon inevitably falls into the sentimental category of “unfinished masterpiece,” a designation that hampers proper appraisal of Fitzgerald’s achievement. One may grieve that he did not complete his novel, but it is not necessary to make excuses for what he wrote. Fitzgerald’s work in progress required judgment on its merits. That procedure has been impeded because the working drafts have therefore been published only in the cosmeticized text edited by Edmund Wilson more than fifty years ago. The Cambridge edition allows just reassessment of Fitzgerald’s developing novel, “pregnant with latent possibilities of excellence” (1).

In dealing with an unfinished work, we must, of course, distinguish between the intentions of the author and his actual achievement. We must further distinguish, in this particular case, among the author’s various intentions, for Fitzgerald was anything but unified in mind and heart when he undertook this work, and different facets of his personality emerged in plans.

At the time he was writing this novel, he was more deeply involved with Hollywood than he thought, and so once again he failed to be objective or to keep his proper distance from his subject. This was an old story with Fitzgerald and
the persistent cause of his artistic failures. In This Side of Paradise, he had been too deeply involved with the Princeton boys Weltanschauung to do more than make passing criticisms of it; in Tender is the Night he had succumbed to the attractions of the Mediterranean Coterie he had been describing; in this last novel, written after his own “crack-up”, he was less capable than ever of submitting a Phenomenon such as Hollywood to any permanent standards of judgment.

In an outline of his novel which he prepared for the benefit of a magazine publisher in September 1939, there seems to a clear indication of this incapacity; “We have a love affair between stahr and Thalia (later this name was changed to Kathleen], an immediate, dynamic, unusual, physical love affairs..... This love affair is the meant of the book”. The point of view of the passage as well as the diction are undeniably those of Hollywood. One might say, then, that Fitzgerald was adapting his language to the recipients of the letter, and that he was emphasizing those angels of his work best calculated to appeal to a large American magazine audience. Undoubtedly this motivation entered into the scheme but it is also clear that Fitzgerald was actually doing his best to deliver a story that would fit these specifications. He described the affair elsewhere as “Very Hollywood.”

Fitzgerald’s last, unfinished work The Last Tycoon (1940, published 1941), might well have developed into his finest novel. But any analysis of the work is unfortunately delimited by the fact that Fitzgerald had completed only six of the nine chapters projected in his outline when he died suddenly in 1940.
The version edited by Edmund Wilson (1941) includes the fragment, Fitzgerald’s outline for the entire novel, and copious notes and drafts that he was considering for its completion. In his foreword Wilson notes that the manuscript "represents that point in the artist’s work where he had assembled and organized his material and acquired a firm grasp of his theme, but has not yet brought it finally into focus"(4).

Although Fitzgerald’s notes indicate his intention of revising even the first six completed chapters, he was generally pleased with the work in progress:

There’s nothing that worries me in the novel, nothing that seems uncertain. Unlike Tender is the Night, it is not the story of deterioration – it is not depressing and not morbid in spite of the tragic ending. If one book could ever be ‘like’ another, I should say it is more ‘like’ The Great Gatsby than any other of my books. But I hope it will be entirely different – I hope it will be something new, arouse new emotions, perhaps even a new way of looking at certain phenomenon. I have set it safely in a period of fie years age to obtain detachment, but now that Europe is tumbling about our ears this also seems to be for the best. It is an escape into a lavish, romantic past that perhaps will not come again into our time(5).

The setting of The Last Tycoon is Hollywood. One of the major preoccupations of the novel is the decline of the power of the superstar Hollywood magnates. The little, The Last Tycoon, enunciates the principal themes of the novel. In proclaiming his protagonist, Monroe Stahr, a “tycoon”, Fitzgerald goes beyond the currently accepted interpretation of “tycoon” as a powerful industrialist to its root meaning in its language of origin. In Japanese, the tycoon is the shogun, the absolute leader of the army upon whose decisions depends victory of defeat.
The unrestricted power of the Monroe Stahrs controlled Hollywood through the first half of the 1930s. The Last Tycoon is set in the last halcyon period before Hollywood felt the impact of anarchic labor movements. When the novel begins, Monroe Stahr is still regarded by his men "like the Emperor and the Old Guard. There is no world so but it has its heroes, and Stahr was the hero."

But The Last Tycoon, despite its rich engrossing evocation of a glittering Hollywood era, was not intended by Fitzgerald to be a novel about the film industry. In fact, he insisted that it was "distinctly not about Hollywood (b). The manuscript and the outline indicate, however, that in a very large sense, the novel distinctly is about Hollywood. In the earlier stages of writing, Fitzgerald obviously planned to keep the Hollywood setting subsidiary to the presentation of his protagonist, Monroe Stahr, who would have been a "tycoon," a leader of men in any circumstances or environment.

The story occurs during four or five months in the year 1935. It is told by Cecilia, the daughter of a producer named Broadogue in Hollywood. Cecilia is a pretty, modern girl, neither good nor bad, tremendously human. Her father is also an important character. A shrewd man, a gentle, and a scoundrel of the lowest variety. A Selfmade man, he has brought up Cecilia to be a princes, sent her East to college, made of her rather a snob, through, in the course of the story, her character evolves away from this. That is, she was twenty when the events that the tells occurred, but she is twenty-five when she tells about the events, and of course many of them appear to her in a different light.
Cecilia is the narrator because. She is of the movies but not in them. She probably was born the day The Birth of a Nation was previewed and Rudolf Valentino came to her fifth birthday party. So she is, all at once, intelligent, cynical, but understanding and kindly toward the people, great or small, who are of Hollywood.

She focuses the attention upon two principal characters – Milton Stahr and Thalia, the girl he loves.

In the beginning of the book the author pours out his whole impression of this man Stahr as he is seen during an airplane trip from New York to the coast – of course, through Cecilia’s eyes. She has been hopelessly in love with him for a long time. She is never going to win anything more from him than an affectionate regard, even that tainted by his dislike of her father.

Stahr is overworked and deathly tired, ruling with a radiance that is almost moribund in its phosphorescence. He has been warned that his health is undermined, but being afraid of nothing, the warning is unheeded. He has had everything in life except the privilege of giving himself unselfishly to another human being. This he finds on the night of a semi-serious earthquake (like in 1935) a few days after the opening of the story.

It has been a very full day even for Sahr – the burst water mains, which cover the whole ground space of the lot to the depth of severa feet, seem to release something in him. Called over to the outer lot to supervise the salvation of the electrical plant (for he has a finger in every pie of the vast bakery), he finds two women stranded on the roof of a property farmhouse and goes to their rescue.
Thalia Taylor is a twenty-six-year-old widow and his conception of her should make her the most glamorous and sympathetic of his heroines. Glamorous in a new way, and her feminine arrogance that has been pushed into prominence in the case of, etc. People simply do not sympathize deeply with those who have had all the breaks, she is, like Rosalba in Thackeray's Rose and the Ring, with “a little misfortune.” She and the woman with her (to whom she is serving as companion) have come secretly on the lot through the other woman’s curiosity. They have been caught there when the catastrophe occurred.

Now we have a love affair between Stahr and Thalia, an immediate, dynamic, unusual, physical love affair and this love affair is the meat of the book. That is to say by making Cecilia, at the moment of her telling the story, an intelligent and observant woman. Thus, I hope to get the verisimilitude of a first person narrative, combined with a Godlike knowledge of all events that happen to my characters.

Two events beside the love affair bulk large in the intermediary chapters. There is a definite plot on the part of Bradogue, Cecilia's father, to get Stahr out of the company. He has even actually and factually considered having him murdered. Broadogue is the monopolist at his worst – Stahr, in spite of the inevitable conservatism of the self-made man, is a paternalistic employer. Success came to him young, at twenty-three, and left certain idealisms of his young unscarred. Moreover, he is a worker. Figuratively he takes off his coat and pitches in, while Bradogue is not interested in the making of pictures save as it will benefit his bank account.
The second incident is how young Cecilia herself, in her desperate love for Stahr, throws herself at his head. In her reaction at his indifference, she gives herself to a man whom she does not love. This episode is not absolutely necessary to the serial. It could be tempered, but it might be best to eliminate it altogether.

Back to the main theme: Stahr cannot bring himself to marry Thalia. It simply doesn’t seem part of his life. He doesn’t realize that she has become necessary to him. Previously his name has been associated with this or that well-known actress or society personality and Thalia is poor, unfortunate, and tagged with a middle-class exterior which doesn’t fit in with the grandeur Stahr demands of life. When she realizes this she leaves him temporarily, leaving him not because he has no legal intentions toward her but because of the hurt of it, the remainder of a vanity from which she had considered herself free.

Stahr is now plunged directly into the flight to keep control of the company. His health breaks down very suddenly while he is on a trip to New York to see the stockholders. He almost dies in New York and comes back to find that Bradogue has seized upon his absence to take steps which Stahr considers unthinkable. He plunges back into work again to straighten things out.

Now, realizing how much he needs Thalia, things are patched up between them. For a day or two they are ideally happy. They are going to marry, but he must make on more trip East to clinch the victory which he has conciliated in the affairs of the company.
Now occurs the final episode which should give the novel its quality—and its unusualness. The plane which is bearing Stahr from Hollywood Crashed in the middle. The angle is that of three children who, on a Sunday picnic are the first to discover the wreckage. Among those killed in the accident besides Stahr are two other characters we have met. Of the three children, two boys and a girl, who find the bodies, one boy rifles Stahr’s possessions; another, the body of a ruined ex-producer; and the girl, those of a moving picture actress. The possessions which the children find, symbolically determine their attitude toward their act of theft. The possessions of the moving picture actress tend the young girl to a selfish possessiveness; those of the unsuccessful producer sway one of the boys toward an irresolute attitude; while the boy who finds Stahr’s briefcase is the one who, after a week, saves and redeems all three by going to a local judge and making full confession.

The story swings once more back to Hollywood for its finale. During the story Thalia has never once been inside a studio. After Stahr’s death as she stands in front of the great plant which he created, she realized now that she never will. She knows only that he loved her and that he was a great man and that he died for what he believed in...

Fitzgerald wrote that “There’s nothing that worries me in the novel, nothing that seems uncertain. Unlike Tender is the Night, it is not the story of deterioration—it is not depressing and not morbid in spite of the tragic ending. If one book could ever be “like” another, I should say it is more “like”. The Great Gatsby than any other of my books. But I hope it will be entirely different— I
hope it will be something new, arouse new emotions, perhaps even a new way of looking at certain phenomena. I have set it safely in a period of five years ago to obtain detachment, but now that Europe is tumbling about our ears this also seems to be for the best. It is an escape into a lavish, romantic past that perhaps will not come again into our time”.

If Fitzgerald’s notion that Stahr’s love affair would eventually constitute “the meat” of his new book were true, the critical reader should probably have found it lean and tasteless fare indeed. But his instinct as a novelist to exploit and material that he could handle best led him in another direction which, had the work ever been completed, would have become increasingly dominant. More and more, his intention was to show the mechanism of the motion-picture business “from the inside.” This phrase is not meant primarily to suggest the scabrous, the scandalous, or the meant primarily to suggest the scabrous, the scandalous, or the “confidential” – through there is a swarm of all these elements in the book. (Two examples that readily come to mind in this connection are Wylie White’s description of his affair with the wife of a producer who said to him as soon as it was over” “Don’t you ever tell about this or I’ll have you thrown out of Hollywood. My husband’s a much more important man than you!”; and Cecilia’s description of how she surprised her father in the midst of a hectic business day and found his secretary, Birdie Peters, completely nude in an airless cupboard into which he had stuffed her when he heard somebody at the door!) What is meant, instead, is that Fitzgerald was fascinated by the technical process of making films and he intended to share this interest with other
Americans. He realized that very little interest existed in this area, even in those intellectual circles where for some unclear reason he apparently though he was most likely to find it. Americans were, in general, prepared to take their movies, as they took their cars and other machines, pragmatically, that is, to make use of them for enjoyment but rarely (if ever) to look under the hoods to find out what made their wheels go round. That was for the specialists, the mechanics, the technicians.

But somewhere along the line, Fitzgerald, like an old-car enthusiast who putters around with an old motor until he knows how to take it apart and put it together again, had picked up the details of the movie mechanism. Like all enthusiasts with esoteric interests, he became firmly convinced that his interest in the subject was not something peculiar to himself but was latent in a great many people and he was prepared to do what he could to awaken it. This is the task he sets for himself in The Last Tycoon and he goes about it with such energy, subtlety, and success that he merits the praise given to him by Edmund Wilson on this score: "The moving picture business in America has here been observed at a close range, studied with a careful attention and dramatized with a sharp wit such as are not found in combination in any of the other novels on the subject. The Last Tycoon is far and away the best novel we have and about Hollywood.

But this is faint praise indeed (the only serious competition for the distinction presumable might come from Nathaniel West). Fitzgerald's reliance upon the technical aspect of the making of moving pictures as an important element of his work is an indication of how empty of humanly significant content
he felt this book to be. Because he had nothing dramatically important to say about life as he had in some of his earlier books, the heart of The Last Tycoon is a moral vacuum, which must have been the counterpart of the vacuum in Fitzgerald's heart at the time he was writing the book.

For a long time he had the idea of making the hero of a novel a Hollywood cameraman. The five version of what was to become Tender is the Night was to be about "a man named Francis Melarky, a movie technician who visited the Riviera with his possessive mother." In the Last Tycoon, the author appoints himself a public guide for a tour of the moving-picture studios, and he includes glimpses of what goes on behind the scenes such as no guided tour ever gives. There is, first of all, the back lot was thirty acres of fairyland – not because the locations really looked like African jungles and French chateaux and steamers at anchor and Broadway by night, but because they looked like the torn picture – books of childhood, like fragments of stories dancing in an open fire. I never lived in a house with an attic, but a back lot must be something like that, and at night of course in an enchanted distorted way, it all comes true."

Then there is the description of the processes that actually makes the wheels go round:

"Mr. Stahr's Projection Room" was a miniature picture theater with four rows of overstuffed chairs. In front of the front row ran long tables with dim lamps, buzzers and telephones. Against the wall was an upright piano, left there since the early day's of sound. The room had been redecorated and reupholstered only a year before, but already it was ragged with work and hours.... the lights in the room went out...
This passage is an example of the kind of details which Fitzgerald intended to use to a greater extent as he completed the novel. He describes one of the characters he was going to develop, a man named Robinson, in his notes for the story: "I would like this episode to give a picture of the work of a cutter, camera man or sound unit director in the making of such a thing as Winter Carnival, accenting the speed with which Robinson works, his reactions, why he is what he is instead of being the very high-salaried man which his technical abilities entitle him to be." He considered including some characters in his cast for no better reason than that they were integral elements of the Hollywood scene though not necessarily part of his particular story. One of his other notes reads as follows: "There is a place for a hint somewhere of a big agent, to complete the picture."

The intention that such a statement plainly presupposes was bound to be one of the weaknesses of the finished book. The background of a story ought to be sketched in just enough to provide the events and characters with a local habitation and a name. Realism or naturalism pursued for its own sake beyond this point becomes fetishistic. In Fitzgerald's best work, the background is held in check and does not distract from the attention that should go to the foreground of the story. In the Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald had not forgotten for a moment that though the mechanics of Prohibition and gangsterism might be interesting subjects in themselves they were not his subjects as a novelist. Fitzgerald never knew the gangster world of Gatsby as intimately as he knew the Hollywood of Monroe Stahr. It is ironic, then, that in The Last Tycoon his specialized
knowledge, instead of being an asset, became a handicap which he could not wholly overcome. In a novel, it must never be forgotten by either writer or reader that the primary interest centers upon the human beings whom the novelist creates and the situations in which they are involved. It is perhaps because Fitzgerald no longer felt so sure of himself, even on his home ground that he allowed the purely expository elements of The Last Tycoon to predominate in its scheme.

But what of those ethical intentions discerned by Dos Passos in the book? It would be strange indeed if they were completely absent, for, as Fitzgerald had said, he was always aware of a tendency in himself "to preach to people in some acceptable form," and to look upon himself as something more than a mere entertainer (in which derogatory classification he included Cole Porter, Rodger, Hart, and "all that gang"). His intentions along this line in The Last Tycoon are most obvious in some of the unrealized plans Fitzgerald had for the ending of the novel. There was to be an airplane crash in which Monroe Stahr and a number of Hollywood celebrities were to be killed in an obscure region of the Rocky Mountains, disappearing in the fall and buried under the snows of winter. The following spring the wreckage was to be found by three youngsters (two boys and a girl) of very different characters. Each of them was to discover mementos of a victim who resembled himself or herself. The girl, for example, was to find some of the belongings to a famous actress; one of the boys was to find Monroe Stahr's briefcase. This scene evidently was to have several purposes: to show that the seeds of character, though maturing slowly, are already present in early
show that the lives of men have unforeseen effects on the imaginations and lives of the following generation ("What a man owes to society," says Irving Babbitt, "is not his philanthropy but a good example.") In his notes, Fitzgerald cautioned himself that "this must be subtly done and not look too much like a parable or moral lesson, still the impression must be conveyed, but be careful to convey it once and not rub it in. If the reader misses it, let it go – don’t repeat. Show Frances [the young girl who finds the dead actress’ belonging] as malleable and amoral in the situation, but show a definite doubt on Jim’s part, even from the first as to whether there is fair dealing even to the dead." (This refers to the other boy’s suggestion that they hide the fact that they have found the wreckage and then loot and strip the plant. The last phrase reminds us that in The Great Gatsby, too, the final touchstone for testing the moral value of the different characters was their capacity for the feeling of reverence that is expressed in “fair dealing even to the dead!” All Gatsby’s guests, except for the narrator nick and the nameless man identified as “Owl-eyes,” failed the test by not attending his funeral. Like the ancient Greeks, Fitzgerald feels that outrage or honour can still be done to a man after he is dead. This is significant, for according to them, anyone with any decent feelings will recognize the responsibility to a man does not end with his earthly life.

Fitzgerald was fearful of his own impulse to moralize. In his notes for the projected incident, he wrote: "I cannot be too careful not to rub things in or give it the substance or feeling of a moral tale." He decided finally to give "a bitter and acrid finish to the incident to take away any possible sentimental and moral stuff that may have crept into it." He need hardly have troubled himself on this
score however, for he was unable to sustain any genuinely moral preoccupation in the portions of the story that are finished (or almost finished). The Last Tycoon is reminiscent of Fitzgerald's own caustic observation (in a letter to his daughter) concerning the work of Thomas Wolfe: "His awful secret transpires at every crevice he did not have anything particular to say" The passage about the airplane crash and its effect on the lives of the three young people who discover it, even if he had managed to write it, could not have changed materially this negative impression. Fitzgerald's idea of showing the inevitable betrayal of each succeeding generation's promises and hopes is not original. It had been done before — notably by Dreiser at the close of An American Tragedy — where we are shown Clyde Griffiths' nephew in very much the same position (as part of a group of itinerant street preachers and singers) as that occupied years before by his ill-fated uncle. Life an American, these authors seem to say, is bound to follow the same pattern it has followed up to now, so long as the economic and social forces that mould the American character remain basically the same. This essentially is the message of both Dreiser and Fitzgerald.

In terms of character, Monreo Stahr is undoubtedly the most interesting creation in The Last Tycoon. Stahr was Fitzgerald's first attempt to draw "a great man" of our contemporary world, but the fact that he turns out to be a Hollywood version of a great man rather than one unconditionally great does not rather than one unconditionally great does not seem to have occurred to the author. Or perhaps he might have said that there was no such thing as a man unconditionally great. Each man perforce has to be measured by the relative yardstick of a definite time and place and as Fitzgerald would say, given the twentieth century, given America, given Hollywood — Monroe Stahr is our type off hero.
But Fitzgerald did not attempt a portrait of this “great contemporary man” all at once. He had been preparing for a long time to do a study of an autochthonous variety of the Superman. Like Nietzsche, he thought it unlikely that the Superman would appear in any traditional guise (Nietzsche had said that, though speculation was futile as to the exact shape this mythical character might take, his own idea was that the Superman, when he did appear on the historical stage, would resemble Cesare Borgia rather than Parsifal!). The superman was bound to be a sorry simulacrum if he turned up in anything but an unexpected guise – and what guise could be more surprising than that of a Hollywood movie magnate? Fitzgerald saw Stahr at the same time as completely up-to-date and as a throwback to an earlier stage of the American system of private enterprise. Here was the true inheritor of the mantle of the earlier tycoons: Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, Ford, Harriman, Gould, Frick the empire builders, the captains of industry and finance, the capitalists.

Fitzgerald’s study of Stahr (whose name never appeared on pictures and was almost unknown to the public, which did not recognize the very real though completely dark “star” who, as the true creative and controlling power behind the scenes, was infinitely more important than the tinsel-bright ones that he made or broke at will) should be connected with his lifelong interest in Napoleon. In one of the letters to his daughter at Vassar he tells her that he has accumulated a small library of a hundred and fifty books dealing with Napoleon (who was so important, also, to Nietzsche and to Dostoevski’s Raskolnikov – those other speculators on the nature of the Superman). From the beginning of his writing
career he had been concerned with a definition of “the big man” in school and in the world. Amory Blaine, in This Side of Paradise and said: “Oh, Lord, what a pleasure it used to be to dream I might be a really great dictator or writer or religious or political leader – and now even a Leonardo da Vinci or Lenenzo de Medici couldn’t be a real old fashioned bolt in the world. Life is too huge and complex.

Between Amory Blaine in This Side of Paradise, who has dreamed of becoming a “big man,” and Monroe Stahr in the Last Tycoon, who actually became one, Fitzgerald had created three other heroes: Anthony Patch, Jay Gatsby, and Dick Diver. How do they measure up to the requirements of the hero? Anthony Patch, making his way to the status of multimillionaire by the routes of inheritance and litigation, is hardly heroic in the authors’ eyes or in ours. Gatsby is, of course, like Stahr, a self-made man, but he has taken an illegitimate short cut to success, and even within his own little particular circle of the underworld, he is only the creature of the sinister Meyer Wolfsheim. Dick Diver has the makings of a first-rate hero but he is too troubled and burdened with his own neuroses to exploit his potentialities. So we are left finally with Monroe Stahr as the sole realization of the Napoleonic dream in the context of our contemporary world.

Monroe Stahr is also Fitzgerald’s one full-length study of a subject that apparently always interested him a great deal – the Jew in America. Meyer Wolfsheim (Who had been described by Edith Wharton, in a letter to Fitzgerald, as the “perfect Jew”) is a subordinate and rather shadowy figure in the Great
Upon Stahr, on the other hand, the pitiless light of publicity is always beating. The result, as might be expected, is that deficiencies of character are discovered under Stahr’s exterior side by side with points of position and admirable strength.

Like Napoleon, he has earned his triumph by his genuine abilities, financial and otherwise. When he had first been admitted to the circle of “the ruler,” – a boy wonder of twenty – two – he had been.

_A money man among money men... He had been able to figure costs in his head with a speed and accuracy that dazzled them – for they were not wizards or even experts in that regard, despite the popular conception of Jews in finance. They were content to look at Stahr for the sublimated auditing, and experiences a sort of glow as if they had done it themselves, like rooters at a football game._

But Stahr has defects which are inseparable from his virtues. Most important of his defects is a certain coldness and self-centeredness: “He has had everything in life except the privilege of giving himself unselfishly to another human being.” This shortcoming in Fitzgerald’s eyes, however, seems to be less a person characteristic than a racial one. In The Crack-Up, we find him commenting on his own changed aspect at the time of his breakdown: “You began by pretending to be kind (politeness). It pays so well that it becomes second nature.
Stahr is described as a conservative, paternalistic employer: "Success had come to him young, at twenty-three, and left certain idealisms of his youth unscarred." Though he had begun as a "moneyman," he is a worker, too. He is always ready, if need be, to take off his coat and go to work, whereas Cecilia's father and Stahr's partner in business (who eventually tries to have him murdered) "is not interested in the making of pictures save as it will benefit his bank account." Despite his faults (the most serious fault is the coldness of temperament which makes him the last in a long train of causes that drive the producer Manny Schwartz to suicide).

Stahr appears to be the comparatively hopeful figure in Hollywood. But Fitzgerald came to the pessimistic conclusion that he was something of a forlorn hope. The labor unions, the unscrupulous money—men who have no interest in making good pictures—the outright gangsters, seem to him to be taking over there as everywhere else in America. Fitzgerald's notes indicate that he would have attempted to show this had he lived to complete the novel. The crash of Stahr's plane was to be emblematic of another fall as well. He was to be "the last tycoon," the last wholly independent man. He had come out of nowhere in the beginning of his life, and he was destined to plunge into nothingness at the end. In other words, he was to illustrate the same philosophy of nihilistic existentialism which Fitzgerald had outlined more abstractly in The Crack Up—that life at best is merely a trajectory between zero and zero.
When Fitzgerald met Irving Thalberg in 1927 the novelist was in Hollywood for the first time and working for United Artists – not for Thalberg at M-G-M. His original screenplay, “Lipstick,” was rejected. During this visit Fitzgerald, inspired by alcohol, made himself conspicuous by performing a humorous song at a party given by the Thalbergs. Fitzgerald’s short story Crazy Sunday (American Mercury, October 1932) provides a version of this debacle, with Thalberg and director King Vidor amalgamated into the character Miles Calman. The last contract between Fitzgerald and Thalberg was a 1934 phone call in which the presumably intoxicated Fitzgerald tried to sell Thalberg movie rights to Tender is the Night (7). Five days after Thalberg died, Fitzgerald wrote: “Talbert’s final collapse is the death of an enemy for me, though I liked the guy enormously. He had an idea that his wife and I were playing around, which was absolute nonsense, but I think even so that he killed the idea of either Hopkins or Frederick Marsh doing Tender is the Night (8). A month after Thalberg’s death Fitzgerald reported to Perkins: “I have a novel planned, or rather I should say conceived, which fits much better into the circumstances, but neither by this inheritance [from his mother’s estate] nor in view of the general financial situation do I see clear to undertake it (9). This letter does not mention Thalberg, and Fitzgerald did not yet have enough Hollywood experience to write a novel about the move industry.

In 1937 Fitzgerald, deep in debt following his “crack up,” went on the M-G-M payroll at $1,000 per week. He expressed high hopes and ambitions for a new career in a letter to his daughter written en route to California:
“I feel a certain excitement. The third Hollywood venture. Two failures behind me though one on fault of mine. The first one was just ten years ago..... then fight the rest tooth and nail until, in fact or in effect, I’m alone on the picture. That’s the only way I can do my best work. Given a break I can make them double this contract in less than two years."

Although M-G-M raised his weekly salary to $1,250, Fitzgerald was let go after eighteen months with a single screen credit, an adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque’s *Three Comrades*, on which he was required to collaborate with E.E. Paramour, with whom he feuded. Fitzgerald was angry and dismayed when his work was rewritten by produced Joseph L.Mankiewicz. Although he was subsequently assigned to important M-G-M movies – including *Infidelity* (unproduced), *Marie Antoinette, The Women, and Madame Curie* – Fitzgerald’s scripts were not used. His free-lance studio assignments in 1939 and 1940 included a disastrous alcoholic trip with Budd Schonberg to Dartmouth College for location work on *Winter Carnival*; he also worked briefly on *Gone with the Wind*. 

While Fitzgerald was in California during 1937-40 his wife, Zelda, was being treated for schizophrenias in North Carolina. Shortly after his arrival in July 1937 he met Sheilah Graham; they maintained separate residences. But their relationship endured despite crises caused by his alcoholism. As a syndicated Hollywood columnist she was able to provide him with information about the studios. After Fitzgerald’s death Graham wrote books detailing their time together.
Fitzgerald was an unsuccessful screenwriter – partly because he was a difficult collaborator, but mainly because it is impossible to film literary style. Yet he recognized the force of the movies as an alternative to print, stating in 1936.

I was that the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion. It was an art in which words were subordinated to images, when personality was worn down to the inevitable gear of collaboration. A long past as 1930, I had a hunch that the talkies would make even the best selling novelist as archaic as silent pictures. There was a rankling indignity, that to me became almost an obsession, in seeing the power of the written word subordinated to another power, a more glittering, a grosses power (15) ....

Despite Fitzgerald’s resentment of the movie industry and his Hollywood failures, his decision to write a novel about a heroic Hollywood figure is not difficult to comprehend. His imagination was stimulated by the saga of Irving Thalberg, which embodies Fitzgerald’s defining theme of aspiration.

Fitzgerald’s Hollywood novel is usually described as a roman a clef (a novel with a key): a work of fiction in which recognizable persons and events are more or less disguised as fictional. The term is imprecise and subject to interpretation because realistic fiction draws upon life. Some writers work
closer to life than others; some conceal their sources; some expect their material to be identified by readers. The distinction between lifelike fiction and the roman a clef depends upon the key, that is, the extent to which the effect of the work required reader recognition and whether the writer provides the key to his sources. The roman a clef be read by the uninitiated, but the insider will read it more meaningfully.

Although The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western has elements in common with the roman a clef, it does not strictly belong in that category. Fitzgerald’s best fiction is transmuted autobiography: Stahr is Fitzgerald’s imaginative projection of himself into Thalberg Stahr, like Fitzgerald, is ill and tired; the dead Minna davis represents the hopelessly disturbed Zelda Fitzgerald; and Katheen Moore derives from Sheilah Graham. (Kathleen resembles Minna in the novel; Fitzgerald’s friends saw a close resemblance between Sheilah Graham and Zelda Fitzgerald).

That Fitzgerald had Thalberg in mind as he wrote is indicated in the manuscript where Stahr is addressed at “Irving” (Episode II). When Fitzgerald was endeavoring to obtain an advance from Collior’s in 1939 he explained to the magazine’s fiction editor, Kenneth Littaurer” “Milton Stahr (who is Irving Thalberg — and this is my great secret.... So much so that he may be recognized — but it will also be recognized that no single fact is actually true”. He also wired perkins at the time of the Collier’s negotiations: “..... I THINK I CAN WRITE THIS BOOK AS IF IT WAS A BIOGRAPHY BECAUSE I KNOW THE CHARACTER OF THIS MAN”. Nevertheless, Stahr is not a direct
portrait of Thalberg; the events in the novel do not duplicate his life. The love plot is invented, as is Stahr’s relationship with Cecelia Brady, his partner’s daughter. The inscription Fitzgerald drafted for the copy of the novel that was to be presented to Thalberg’s widow explains that he “inspired the best part of the character of Stahr” but that the character is an amalgam.

Since Fitzgerald was not a Hollywood insider, his novel drew upon other people’s memories. He talked at length with Budd Schulberg about B.P. Schulberg and about Thalberg’s working routine. When Budd Schulberg read the work in progress Fitzgerald told him: - I sort of combined you with my daughter Scottie for Cecilia (17). Scottie was nineteen in 1940, and Schulberg was twenty-six.) Other characters are loosely based on actual figures. Cecelia’s father, Pat Brady – whose rivalry with stahr reflects the relationship between Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer – combines aspects of Mayer and M-G-M vice-president Eddie Mannix, and Irishman. Certain of Stahr’s associates resemble M-G-M personnel Fitzgerald knew. Jaques La Borwits is Fitzgerald’s portrayal of Joseph L. Mankiewicz. One of Fitzgerald’s note reads: “La Borwitz. Joe Mank – pictures smell of rotten bananas” (see p.159). Rienmund may be Fitzgerald’s version of producer Hund Stromberg. These characterizations are obviously satirical, for Fitzgerald resented his hired hand status at the studio. Schulberg has identified the source for Robinson as Otto Levering, the second – unit head who went to Dartmouth of Winter Carnival (18). Schulberg also notes that “The Brimmer character is based on an actual communist organizer that Maurice Rapf and I knew in Hollywood... he remembers telling scoot about the
ping-pong scene involving his father Harry Rapf, one of the established producers at MGM in the Thalberg era.” Other minor characters can be identified: Boxley is based on British novelist Aldous Huxley, Mixe Van Dyke on gap writer Robert Hopkins; Johnny Swanson on actor Harry Carey; Popolus on executive Spyros Skouras of Twentieth Century Fox. Broaca may be based on Frank Borzage, Who directed Three Comrades.

The Love of the Last Tycoon was not intended to provide data for a guessing game. The possible character sources are interesting to students of movie history but are not necessary for a proper understanding of the novel. Even the Irving Thalberg identification is not essential. Fitzgerald was writing a novel; the Monroe Stahr story combines biography, autobiographical, and fictional elements.

While Fitzgerald’s experiences in Hollywood during the last years of the 1930s contributed heavily to the planning and writing of The Last Tycoon, a glimpse at the novelist’s earlier life and work suggests that this novel was almost foreordained. Fitzgerald had been interested in, may be fascinated by, movie-making from a very early period in his life. He wrote film treatments and scripts and in addition used what he knew about Hollywood in several of his short stories as well as in The Beautiful and Damned and later in Tender is the Night. He had mixed feelings about film as an art form during these years and yet was convinced of its power over its audience. With the advent of talking pictures, he mulled over the possibility – and felt sorrow – that someday it might replace the novel. In 1936, he wrote: “I saw that the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one
human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion” (19).

Fitzgerald’s writing during his last years in Hollywood suggests, however, that his pessimism about the future of film may have been wavering. Even though he planned to kill off movie man Monroe Stahr at the end of the Last Tycoon, he portrayed Stahr as a man who did not totally believe in “the tritest thought” and “the most obvious emotion”. Fitzgerald was writing a love story, about a great leader, and about Hollywood. He researched his subject. The notes to The Last Tycoon, include references to Terry Ramsaye’s two-volume history of the silent screen, A Million and One Nights, director William Demille’s autobiography Hollywood Saga, and articles in Fortune about M-G-M and Thalberg Cecilia Brady was based partly upon Fitzgerald’s daughter. His relationship with Sheilah Graham was translated partly into the relationship between Kathleen Moore and Stahr. The notes to the novel as well as Fitzgerald’s correspondence also give us clues to the sources of a few of the other characters. To Kenneth Littaner, of Collier’s magazine, Fitzgerald wrote. “Stahr... is Irving Thalberg and this is my great secret...” Others mentioned include actor Harry Carey as a model for Johnny Swanson, Studio boss Marcus Loew as model for Mr. Marcus, producer Harry Rapf as a model for Leanbaum, Joseph M. Mankiewicz for Jacques La Borwitz, novelist Aldous Huxley as a model for the writer Boxley, and soon. Fitzgerald wrote: “Through the story is purely imaginary perhaps you could see it as an attempt to preserve something of Irving” (20).
Of course, some events are based partly on actual occurrences, such as the famous earthquake in the studios in 1936 and while the rivalry between stahr and Brady is based on the rivalry between Thalberg and head of MGM Lour's B. Mayer, Mayer and Thalberg, so far as we know, never attempted to murder each other as was planned for the novel. Part of the greatness of this final novel is how well it reflects Fitzgerald's ambiguous feelings about Hollywood. And the description of what happens in the film studios has yet to be equaled. But above all there is the exceptional rhythmic prose style.

Regarding Fitzgerald's intention was to produce a novel of concentrated and as carefully constructed as The Great Gatsby had been and he would unquestionable have sharpened the effect of most of the scenes as we have them by cutting and by heightening of color. He had originally planned that the novel should be about 60,000 words long, but he had written at the time of his death about 70,000 words without, as will be seen from his outline, having told much more than half his story. He had calculated, when he began, in leaving himself a margin of 10,000 words for cutting; but it seems certain that the novel would have run longer than the proposed 60,000 words. The subject was were more complex than it had been in The Great Gatsby the picture of the Hollywood studios required more space for its presentation than the background of the drinking life of Long Island; and the characters needed more room for their development.
The draft of The Last Tycoon represents the point in the artist's work where he has assembled and organized his material and acquired a firm grasp of his theme, but has not yet brought it finally into focus. It is remarkable that, under these circumstances, the story should have already so much power and the character of Stahr emerge with so much intensity and reality. This Hollywood producer, in his misery and grandeur, is certainly the one of Fitzgerald's central figures which he had thought out most completely and which he had most deeply come to understand. His notes on the character show how he had lived with it over a period of three years of more filling in Stahr's idiosyncrasies and tracing the web of his relationships with the various departments of the business. Amory Blaine and Anthony Patch were romantic projections of the author; Gatsby and Dick Diver were conceived more or less objectively, but not very profoundly explored. Monroe Stahr is really created from within at the same time that he is criticized by an intelligence that has now become sure of itself and knows how to assign him to his proper place in a larger scheme of things.

The Last Tycoon, though incomplete, is considered to be another best work from his pen. It is marked off also from his other novels by the fact that it is the first to deal seriously with any profession or business.

The earlier books of Fitzgerald had been preoccupied with debutantes and college boys, with the fast lives of the wild spenders of the twenties. The main activities of the people in these stories, the occasions for which they live, are big parties at which they go off like fireworks and which are likely to leave them in pieces. But the parties in The Last Tycoon are incidental and unimportant. Monroe Stahr, unlike any other of Scott Fitzgerald's heroes, is inextricably involved with an industry of which he has been one of the creators, and its fate will be implied by his tragedy.
It is worthwhile read The Great Gatsby in correction with The Last Tycoon because it shows the kind of thing that Fitzgerald was aiming to do in the latter. If his conception of his subject in Tender is the Night had shifted in the course of his writing it so that the parts of that fascinating novel do not always quite hand together, he had recorded here the singleness of purpose, the sureness of craftsmanship, which appear in the earlier story. In going through the immense pile of drafts and notes that the author had made for this novel, one is confirmed and reinforced in one's impression that Fitzgerald will be found to stand out as one of the first rate figures in the American writing of his period. The last pages of The Great Gatsby are certainly, both from the dramatic point of view and from the point of view of prose, among the very best things in the fiction of our generation. T.S. Eliot said of the book that Fitzgerald had been taken the first important step that had been made in the American novel since Henry James, and certainly The Last Tycoon, even in its unfulfilled intention, takes its place among the books that set a standard.

In conclusion we can compare Fitzgerald with Charles Lamb. Lamb was a 18\textsuperscript{th} century writer while Fitzgerald is a modern and 20\textsuperscript{th} century writer. But still there are similarities between them. The very first thing is that both are autobiographical authors and enjoy in revealing their own self in their books. The unfinished novel captured a unique portrayal of the film industry. He left us with a wonderful work in progress. Undoubtedly the final version would have been greater.
Edmund Winson's words may aptly suit to bring a suitable conclusion. "The moving – picture business in America has been observed at close range, studied with a careful attention and dramatized with a sharp with such as are not to be found in combination in any of the other novels on the subject. The Last Tycoon is far and away the best novel we have had about Hollywood; and it is the only one which takes us inside".

2. Letter P.126-127


17. Budd Schulberg, The Four Seasons of Success (Garden city, New York, Double day, 1972) P.134


212