THE CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF THE WORKS OF
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD
Fitzgerald in 1940 (photo by Belle O’Hara).
The Love of

THE LAST TYCOON

A Western

* * *

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Edited by

MATTHEW J. BRUCCOLI

University of South Carolina
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

F. Scott Fitzgerald Selected Chronology: 1927–1941

The Geography of The Love of the Last Tycoon

Introduction


2. Preparation for the Novel and Writing

3. The Outlines and the Drafts

4. The Unwritten Episodes: 18–30

5. Publication and Reception

6. Editorial Principles and Procedures

Notes

The Love of THE LAST TYCOON: A Western

Selected Fitzgerald Working Notes: Facsimiles

Inventory of Drafts

Textual Apparatus

Editorial Emendations in the Base-Texts; Textual Notes

Fitzgerald’s Revisions, Corrections, and Annotations in the Latest Typescripts

Wilson’s Alterations in the Latest Typescripts

Variants in the Scribners Setting Copy and the First Printing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word Division</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory Notes</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1  The Sanitarium Frame</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2  Specimen Working Drafts</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My chief debt is to Mary Jo Tate for extraordinary editorial support. When Mrs. Tate was compelled to migrate, Judith S. Baughman heroically took over. I am fortunate to be at the University of South Carolina, where I can do my work: Bert Dillon, Chairman of the Department of English, and Carol McGinnis Kay, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, have provided encouragement. Joel Myerson, former chairman of the department and the textual consultant for this volume, has been my friend and disputant for twenty years.

Since the manuscripts for The Love of the Last Tycoon and related documents from which this volume was edited are at the Princeton University Library, the editor is deeply obligated to the library and its admirable staff. I owe great debts to William L. Joyce (Associate University Librarian for Rare Books and Special Collections), Don C. Skemer (Curator of Manuscripts), and John Delaney (Leader of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Cataloguing Team). Material relating to Edmund Wilson’s work on The Last Tycoon was provided by William Cagle, Director of the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

Large debts have accrued to Jeanne Bennett and R. L. Samsell, Los Angeles conscripts. Frances Kroll Ring and Budd Schulberg patiently searched their memories, as did the late Sheila Graham. Charles Scribner III of Charles Scribner’s Sons facilitated the Cambridge Edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald; I am fortunate in his friendship. Additional obligations have been incurred to members of my English 841B seminar on F. Scott Fitzgerald and to Professor William Leary (University of Georgia), Professor Ahmed Nimeiri (University of Khartoum), Professor Douglas Porch (The Citadel), Professor Kiyohiko Tsuboi (Okayama University), Professor John Winberry (University of South Carolina), David G. Chandler (Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst), Kristine Krueger (Academy of Motion Picture Arts
Acknowledgments

and Sciences, National Film Information Service), Samuel Marx, M. E. Olsen (American Airlines), Stephen J. Perrault (Merriam-Webster, Inc.), Dr. John Swan (Bennington College Library), Fred Zentner (Cinema Bookshop, London), and the late Vernon Sternberg (Southern Illinois University Press), who edited and published my 1977 volume “The Last of the Novelist”: F. Scott Fitzgerald and The Last Tycoon. Dr. Andrew Brown of Cambridge University Press has endeavored to improve my work. Julie Greenblatt of the New York office of Cambridge University Press bestowed her friendship on me while overseeing the editing of this volume. Katharita Lamoza ably supervised the later stages of production.

Fredson Bowers did not yet this volume. At the time of his death in April 1991 we had agreed on an editorial plan and had identified the base-text.

I rely on Arlyn Bruccoli’s literary judgment.

My editorial work on this volume is dedicated to Scottie, but it was no fun without her.

M.J.B.
21 August 1992
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD SELECTED CHRONOLOGY: 1927–1941*

January 1927  Fitzgerald works on “Lipstick” in Hollywood for United Artists; screenplay rejected; meets Irving Thalberg.


October 1932  Publishes “Crazy Sunday.”

14 September 1936  Thalberg dies.

July 1937  Goes to Hollywood with six-month M-G-M contract at $1,000 per week; lives at The Garden of Allah on Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood.

14 July 1937  Meets Sheilah Graham.

July–August 1937  Polishes screenplay of A Yank at Oxford.

August 1937–February 1938  Works with E. E. Paramore on Three Comrades for producer Joseph Mankiewicz; Fitzgerald’s only screen credit.

December 1937–January 1939  M-G-M contract renewed for one year at $1,250 per week; works on “Infidelity,” Marie Antoinette, The Women, and Madame Curie.

April 1938  Moves to bungalow at Malibu Beach.

1 September 1938  First mention of “plan for a novel.”

October 1938  Moves to cottage on “Belly Acres” estate in Encino.

* This chronology is restricted to Fitzgerald’s movie work and the composition of The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western.
x

Selected Chronology

JANUARY 1939  Termination of M-G-M contract after eighteen months.

JANUARY 1939  Works on Gone With the Wind for David O. Selznick.

FEBRUARY 1939  Trip to Dartmouth College with Budd Schulberg to work on Winter Carnival for United Artists; fired.

MARCH 1939  Works on “Air Raid” for Paramount.

APRIL 1939  Discusses novel with Maxwell Perkins and Harold Ober; hires Frances Kroll as secretary.

SPRING–SUMMER? 1939  Writes “Last Kiss” and “Director’s Special” (“Discard”); both declined by Collier’s.

MAY 1939  Begins blocking out novel.

JULY 1939  Breaks with Ober.

18 JULY 1939  Offers Kenneth Littauer of Collier’s serial rights to unwritten novel.

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1939  Short jobs for Universal (“Open That Door”), Twentieth Century-Fox (Everything Happens at Night), and Goldwyn (Raffles).

29 SEPTEMBER 1939  Sends synopsis of novel to Littauer.

NOVEMBER 1939  Sends 6,000 words to Littauer and Perkins; Littauer declines to make advance.

28 NOVEMBER 1939  Breaks off negotiations with Collier’s; offers serial rights to the Saturday Evening Post, which declines.

JANUARY 1940  Publication of “Pat Hobby’s Christmas Wish,” first of seventeen Hobby stories in Esquire.

FEBRUARY 1940  Submits “Dearly Beloved” to Esquire; declined.

Selected Chronology

May 1940  Moves to 1403 North Laurel Avenue, Hollywood.

October 1940  Works on Life Begins at Eight-Thirty screenplay for Twentieth Century-Fox.

November 1940  Suffers heart attack.

21 December 1940  Death of F. Scott Fitzgerald at Sheila Graham’s apartment, 1443 North Hayward Avenue, Hollywood.

March 1941  Edmund Wilson agrees to edit Fitzgerald’s work in progress.

27 October 1941  Publication of THE LAST TYCOON / AN UNFINISHED NOVEL / BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD / TOGETHER WITH / THE GREAT GATSBY / AND SELECTED STORIES.
The geography of *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (map by Eleanor Lanahan).
INTRODUCTION

F. Scott Fitzgerald had written the seventeenth episode of the thirtyepisode plan for his Hollywood 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 Fitzgerald did not complete his novel, but it is not necessary to make excuses for what he wrote. Fitzgerald’s work in progress requires judgment on its merits. That procedure has been impeded because the working drafts have heretofore been published only in the cosmeticized text edited by Edmund Wilson more than fifty years ago. This Cambridge edition allows just reassessment of Fitzgerald’s developing novel, “pregnant with latent possibilities of excellence.”

The first edition of The Last Tycoon, posthumously published by Charles Scribner’s Sons, was subtitled An Unfinished Novel. Wilson’s foreword explains: “The text which is given here is a draft made by the author after considerable rewriting; but it is by no means a finished version. In the margins of almost every one of the episodes, Fitzgerald had written comments—a few of them are included in the notes—which expressed his dissatisfaction with them.” And: “This draft of The Last Tycoon, then, represents that 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.”

Wilson’s use of “draft” may be inadvertently misleading, indicating a more advanced document than actually exists. There is nothing that can be accurately described as “this draft”: there are layers of working drafts for seventeen episodes or sections that Fitzgerald did not assemble into a single draft—or into chapters after Chapter I. Moreover, there are breaks in the continuity of these episodes. Fitzgerald wrote new episodes without attempting to put the exist-
Introduction

...ing ones into finished condition. The whole work was still developing through a process of composition by accretion. Indeed, it would have been impossible for him to give final form to some of the first seventeen episodes because he had not resolved the plot details in the thirteen unwritten ones. There is no evidence that he had decided on the ending.

The 1941 Wilson edition silently emends—not always correctly—Fitzgerald’s words, styles the punctuation, combines episodes into chapters, and moves two scenes. Wilson’s text conveys the impression of a more finished work than is represented by the working drafts. It is characteristic of Wilson’s editorial policy that no source is provided for the title—allowing the reader to assume that The Last Tycoon was Fitzgerald’s final choice. Yet Fitzgerald never referred to his novel by title in his correspondence. The only title page that survives with the draft material names the work “STAH R / A Romance.”

When Fitzgerald’s lover, Sheilah Graham, sent his work in progress to Scribner’s editor Maxwell Perkins in January 1941 (see p. lxvii), she reported that the working title was “Stahr,” and she added that three weeks before he died Fitzgerald had asked her what she thought of “The Love of the Last Tycoon,” saying that he would submit it for Perkins’s reaction. Graham explained that “he wanted it to sound like a movie title and completely disguise the tragi-heroic content of the book.” In her June 1941 response to Wilson’s summary of the novel, Fitzgerald’s secretary, Frances Kroll, referred to it as “Stahr” three times and mentioned that “Scott satirically considered the alternative title for the book ‘The Last of the Tycoons’ ” (see pp. lv–lvi). In these 1941 letters neither Graham nor Kroll used “The Last Tycoon.” There are no extant letters from Wilson to Graham or Kroll bearing on the title; and there is no discussion of the title in the correspondence between Perkins and Wilson. Perkins first referred to the novel as “The Last Tycoon” in an 18 June 1941 letter to Wilson.

The only appearance of “The Last Tycoon” in Fitzgerald’s hand is on a page of holograph notes headed Title in crayon. All the notes are crossed out except for “The Love of the Last Tycoon / A Western,” which has what appears to be a check mark and the designa-
The title page; the note in Frances Kroll’s handwriting refers to “The Homes of the Stars,” a Pat Hobby story Fitzgerald published in August 1940. There is also a carbon copy of this title page. Princeton University Library.
Introduction
Introduction xvii

ution “U.”, indicating that it was to be recopied for the unclassified section of his notebooks.* This is the only title on the list that Fitzgerald wrote in title-page format, providing the subtitle and the author’s name. The deleted comment next to the title reads: “This is the familiar Fitzgerald formula but the boy grows tired.” “The Love of the Last Tycoon / A Western” also appears on a page of miscellaneous typed notes headed “UNCLASSIFIED” (see “Selected Fitzgerald Working Notes,” p. 197).

No good case for the title “The Last Tycoon” can be made on the basis of the surviving Fitzgerald documents. The choice is between “Stahr: A Romance” and “The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western.” The latter is preferable because it is close to the title by which the novel has been known and because it has the Fitzgerald bouquet. Fitzgerald was in fact writing a western—a novel about the last American frontier, where immigrants and sons of immigrants pursued and defined the American dream. It is appropriate that these tycoons made movie westerns: they too were pioneers.

The following account of the gestation and composition of the novel performce repeats many of the details in “The Last of the Novelists”: F. Scott Fitzgerald and The Last Tycoon.⁴


The seed for The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western is preserved in Fitzgerald’s undated note on his January 1927 meeting with Irving Thalberg, the “boy wonder” of the movie industry (see “Selected Fitzgerald Working Notes,” p. 140):

We sat in the old commissary at Metro and he said, “Scottie, supposing there’s got to be a road through a mountain—a railroad and two or three surveyors and people come to you and you believe some of them and some

xviii

Introduction

of them you don’t believe, but all in all, there seem to be half a dozen possible roads through those mountains, each one of which so far as you can determine, is as good as the other. Now suppose you happen to be the top man, there’s a point where you don’t exercise the faculty of judgment in the ordinary way, but simply the faculty of arbitrary decision. You say, ‘Well, I think we will put the road there’ and you trace it with your finger and you know in your secret heart and no one else knows, that you have no reason for putting the road there rather than in several other different courses, but you’re the only person that knows that you don’t know why you’re doing it and you’ve got to stick to that and you’ve got to pretend that you know and that you did it for specific reasons, even though you’re utterly assailed by doubts at times as to the wisdom of your decision because all these other possible decisions keep echoing in your ear. But when you’re planning a new enterprise on a grand scale, the people under you mustn’t ever know or guess that you’re in any doubt because they’ve all got to have something to look up to and they mustn’t ever dream that you’re in doubt about any decision. Those things keep occurring.”

At that point, some other people came into the commissary and sat down and the first thing I knew there was a group of four and the intimacy of the conversation was broken, but I was very much impressed by the shrewdness of what he said—something more than shrewdness—by the largeness of what he thought and how he reached it at the age of 26, which he was then.

This encounter was written into the novel as Monroe Stahr’s lecture on responsibility to the pilot in the first chapter.

Irving Grant Thalberg was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1899. His parents were of German-Alsatian Jewish stock. He was not a poor boy; his father was a lace importer, and the family was solidly middle class. Thalberg was a “blue baby,” born with cyanosis (a congenital heart defect in which the flow of venous blood to the lungs is impeded) and was not expected to have a long life. Rheumatic fever terminated his high-school education in 1916. After a night-school commercial course he was employed by Carl Laemmle in 1918 as a secretary-stenographer in the New York office of Universal Pictures. At twenty he was managing the California studio.

Thalberg was 5 feet 6 inches tall and slim. He was handsome, spoke quietly, and had pleasant manners; but he was a forceful figure who commanded intense loyalty. His success and reputation
Introduction

resulted from his capacity for work, attention to detail, story sense, taste, and perfectionism. He worked closely with writers and respected good writing; nevertheless, he was regarded as insensitive to writers’ feelings, and he was responsible for the system of assigning different writers to work simultaneously on the same screenplay.

In 1923 Thalberg joined Louis B. Mayer as Vice-President of the Mayer Company; when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was formed by Loew’s, Inc., in 1924, Thalberg became Second Vice-President and Supervisor of Production. He was largely responsible for M-G-M’s reputation for expensively produced movies, and he insisted on retakes to improve movies that were regarded as completed. The movies he personally produced included The Merry Widow (1925), The Big Parade (1925), Ben-Hur (1926), Flesh and the Devil (1927), The Broadway Melody (1929), The Big House (1930), Anna Christie (1930), Trader Horn (1931), The Sin of Madelon Claudet (1931), Strange Interlude (1932), and Grand Hotel (1932).

Bad feelings developed between Thalberg and Mayer over the division of the M-G-M profits, as Thalberg insisted that his share be commensurate with his responsibilities. Mayer, who had a powerful ego, felt that he was being disparaged and overshadowed by his protégé. In 1933, while Thalberg was in Europe recuperating from a collapse caused by overwork, Mayer removed him as M-G-M production head, although Thalberg retained his own production unit. Mayer also instituted a pay cut for M-G-M employees, which Thalberg had opposed. The Thalberg unit produced The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1934), China Seas (1935), Mutiny on the Bounty (1935), A Night at the Opera (1935), Romeo and Juliet (1936), The Good Earth (1937), and Camille (1937)—the last two released after his death.

Thalberg’s stand on the Screen Writers Guild provided a plot element in Fitzgerald’s novel. According to his biographer Bob Thomas, Thalberg opposed the leftist Guild and supported the studio-backed Screen Playwrights. Thomas states that Thalberg defeated a Guild strike vote by declaring: “For if you proceed with this strike, I shall close down the entire plant, without a single exception.”3 Budd Schulberg, who was a Hollywood insider as the son of Paramount executive B. P. Schulberg and a member of the
(Top) Irving Thalberg at Universal Pictures, age 20.

(Center) Director King Vidor, Thalberg, and Lillian Gish on the set of *La Bohème* (1926).

(Left) Thalberg accepts the Oscar for *Mutiny on the Bounty*, with Clark Gable and Frank Capra.
(Top) Buster Keaton, producer Harry Rapf, Irving Thalberg, Nicholas M. Schenck (president of Loew’s, Inc.), Mrs. Schenck, Louis B. Mayer, producer Eddie Mannix, producer Hunt Stromberg.

(Right) Sheilah Graham and F. Scott Fitzgerald in Tijuana.

(Bottom) M-G-M Studio, Culver City, 1932.
xxii

Introduction

Screen Writers Guild Board, endorses Thomas’s report: “Not only was Irving strongly opposed to the organization of a Writers Guild, he was in the forefront of the fight to break the Guild.”

Thalberg married actress Norma Shearer in 1927; they had two children, and the marriage was regarded as solid. His health remained precarious, but he continued to work to exhaustion. Irving Thalberg died of pneumonia in September 1936.

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. Fitzgerald’s second Hollywood trip in 1931 had him working for M-G-M but not directly with Thalberg; again his screenplay—based on Katharine Brush’s novel Red-Headed Woman—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 contact 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. Five days after Thalberg died, Fitzgerald wrote: “Thalberg’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.’” 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.” This letter does not mention Thalberg, and Fitzgerald did not yet have enough Hollywood experience to write a novel about the movie 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:
Introduction

I feel a certain excitement. The third Hollywood venture. Two failures behind me though one no fault of mine. The first one was just ten years ago. At that time I had been generally acknowledged for several years as the top American writer both seriously and, as far as prices went, popularly. I had been loafing for six months for the first time in my life and was confidant to the point of conciet. Hollywood made a big fuss over us and the ladies all looked very beautiful to a man of thirty. I honestly believed that with no effort on my part I was a sort of magician with words—an odd delusion on my part when I had worked so desperately hard to develop a hard, colorful prose style.

Total result—a great time + no work. I was to be paid only a small amount unless they made my picture—they didn't.

The second time I went was five years ago. Life had gotten in some hard socks and while all was serene on top, with your mother apparently recovered in Montgomeroy, I was jittery underneath and beginning to drink more than I ought to. Far from approaching it too confidently I was far too humble. I ran afoul of a bastard named de Sano, since a suicide, and let myself be gyped out of command. I wrote the picture + he changed as I wrote. I tried to get at Thalberg but was erroneously warned against it as "bad taste." Result—a bad script. I left with the money, for this was a contract for weekly payments, but disillusioned and disgusted, vowing never to go back, tho they said it wasn't my fault + asked me to stay. I wanted to get east when the contract expired to see how your mother was. This was later interpreted as "running out on them" + held against me.

(The train has left El Paso since I began this letter—hence the writing—Rocky Mountain writing.)

I want to profit by these two experiences—I must be very tactful but keep my hand on the wheel from the start—find out the key man among the bosses + the most malleable among the collaborators—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.11

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. Paramore, with whom he feuded. Fitzgerald was angry and dismayed when his work was rewritten by producer Joseph L. Mankiewicz.12 Although he was
Introduction

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 Schulberg 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 schizophrenia 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 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 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. As 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 grosser power. . . .

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 embodied Fitzgerald’s defining theme of aspiration.

Fitzgerald’s Hollywood novel is usually described as a roman à 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 à clef depends upon the key, that is, the extent to which the effect of the work requires reader recognition and whether the writer provides the key to his sources. The roman à clef can 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 à 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 Kathleen Moore derives from Sheila Graham. (Kathleen resembles Minna in the novel; Fitzgerald’s friends saw a close resemblance between Sheila Graham and Zelda Fitzgerald.)

That Fitzgerald had Thalberg in mind as he wrote is indicated in the manuscript where Stahr is addressed as “Irving” (Episode 11). When Fitzgerald was endeavoring to obtain an advance from Collier’s in 1939 he explained to the magazine’s fiction editor, Kenneth Littau: “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” (see p. xxxi). 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
xxvi

Introduction

To Miss in Copy of Sheares

Dear Nora:

You told me you read little because of your eyes but I think this book will interest you perhaps you could see it as an attempt to preserve something of Shaw's and of this story

Flary imaginary soul my own impression of him

shortly recorded

but very affecting in its effect on me, inspired the

broadly amusing in its effect on me, inspired the

brief part of the character of Stater — though I have

put in much of other men and, inevitably, myself.

A star is born was a pathetic story and doomed and hence things happen here.

With old affection and gratitude,

Fitzgerald’s draft letter to Norma Shearer Thalberg. A Star Is Born (Selznick, 1937) was a movie about Hollywood written by Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell, and Robert Carson. Princeton University Library.
Introduction

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.”18 (Scottie was nineteen in 1940, and Schulberg was twenty-six.) Other characters are loosely based on actual figures. Cecelia’s father, Pat Brady—who’s rivalry with Stahr reflects the relationship between Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer—combines aspects of Mayer and M-G-M vice-president Eddie Mannix, an 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 notes reads: “La Borwitz. Joe Mank—pictures smell of rotten bananas” (see p. 159). Rienmund may be Fitzgerald’s version of producer Hunt 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 Lovering, the second-unit head who went to Dartmouth for Winter Carnival.19 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 Scott about the ping-pong scene involving his father Harry Rapf, one of the established producers at MGM in the Thalberg era.”20 Other minor characters can be identified: Boxley is based on British novelist Aldous Huxley; Mike Van Dyke on gag writer Robert Hopkins; Johnny Swanson on actor Harry Carey (see p. liv); Popolous 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 biographical, autobiographical, and fictional elements.
Introduction

2. PREPARATION FOR THE NOVEL AND WRITING

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 extended fiction while on the M-G-M payroll. In March 1938 he wrote Perkins: “I am filling a notebook with stuff 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.”21 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 it this summer. It would be short like ‘Gatsby’ but the same in that it will have the transcendental approach, an attempt to show a man’s life through some passionately regarded segment of it.”22 If Fitzgerald was referring to a Hollywood novel, he must have been aware that there was no important novel dealing with the movie industry and that he had untouched material. Nathanael West’s The Day of the Locust was published in May 1939 while Fitzgerald was working on his novel, and he read it in proof; but their techniques and material were so different that there was no overlap.23

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. He informed Perkins in January that he expected to combine free-lance screenwriting jobs with his own writing:

... if periods of three or four months are going to be possible in the next year or so I would much rather do a modern novel. One of those novels that can only be written at the moment and when one is full of the idea—as “Tender” should have been written in its original conception, all laid on the Riviera.24

In March he wrote to Scottie:
Introduction

xxix

Sorry you got the impression that I'm quitting the movies—they are always there—I'm doing a two weeks rewrite for Paramount at the moment after finishing a short story. But I'm convinced that maybe they're not going to make me Czar of the Industry right away, as I thought 10 months ago: It's all right, Baby—life has humbled me—Czar or not, we'll survive. I am even willing to compromise for Assistant Czar!

Seriously, I expect to dip in and out of the pictures for the rest of my natural life, but it is not very soul-satisfying: because it is a business of telling stories fit for children and this is only interesting up to a point. It is a pity that the censorship had to come along + do this, but there we are. Only—I will never again sign a contract which binds me to tell none other than children's stories for a year and a half!25

In February and again in April 1939 Fitzgerald was hospitalized in New York after binges. During the April trip he discussed his writing plans with Maxwell Perkins and his agent, Harold Ober. Charles Scribner, head of the publishing house, wrote Fitzgerald an encouraging letter:

Max and I have always thought that, apart from squaring you with the world, living where you have should give you a vast source of material that someday you should be able to use. There has been plenty about Hollywood but no one to my knowledge has told anything about it that made the people live, and while their surroundings and the form of life they lead may make them absurdly glamorous or dissolute they must have originally been born like other men and women and fundamentally have the same insides.26

Fitzgerald responded untruthfully to Perkins:

[Scribner] seemed under the full conviction that the novel was about Hollywood and I am in terror that this mis-information may have been disseminated to the literary columns. If I ever gave any such impression it is entirely false: I said that the novel was about some things that had happened to me in the last two years. It is distinctly not about Hollywood (and if it were it is the last impression that I would want to get about).27

The novel was, of course, about Hollywood; but, as his parenthetical words indicate, Fitzgerald was protecting his material and his studio employment.
xxx

Introduction

In April 1939 Fitzgerald hired Frances Kroll as his secretary to work with him at home, being careful to find someone with no studio connections.28 At the end of May Fitzgerald sent Ober an optimistic status report:

First, I have blocked out my novel completely with a rough sketch of every episode and event and character so that under proper circumstances I could begin writing it tomorrow. It is a short novel about fifty thousand words long and should take me three to four months.

However, for reasons of income tax I feel I should be more secure before I launch into such a venture—but it will divide easily into five thousand word lengths and Collier’s might take a chance on it where the Post would not. They might at least be promised a first look at it when its finished—possibly some time late in the Fall.29

In July 1939 Fitzgerald broke with Ober over the agent’s refusal to resume the practice of advancing him money against unsold stories; thereafter Fitzgerald tried to act as his own agent in obtaining an advance for serial rights to the unwritten novel. On 18 July Fitzgerald informed Kenneth Littauer that he had blocked out a short novel “on a basis of 2500 word units. The block-out is to be sure that I can take it up or put it down in as much time as is allowed between picture work and short stories.” He asked for an advance of $750 from Collier’s for “first look at the novel and at a specified number of short stories in a certain time.”30 Littauer declined the proposition.

Fitzgerald sent a synopsis to Littauer, and a copy to Perkins, on 29 September 1939:

This will be difficult for two reasons. First that there is one fact about my novel, which, if it were known, would be immediately and unscrupulously plagiarized by the George Kaufmans,* etc., of this world. Second, that I live always in deadly fear that I will take the edge off an idea for myself by summarizing or talking about it in advance. But, with these limitations, here goes:

* Fitzgerald was convinced that his play The Vegetable had provided playwright George S. Kaufman with the idea for Of Thee I Sing (1931). Editor.