

# **The Last Tycoon Study Guide**

## **The Last Tycoon by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

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# Plot Summary

*The Last Tycoon* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a novel about a Hollywood producer who finds himself not only struggling to find love and success in a world of cut-throats, but who is in the ultimate struggle for his own life. *The Last Tycoon* is Fitzgerald's final work, a novel he was working on at the time of his death. The novel was published after editing by fellow writer and friend, Edmund Wilson, with the aid of Fitzgerald's notes and outlines. The novel was intended to be as compact and tightly constructed as *The Great Gatsby*, with a subject matter deeper and more complex than *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald was well on the way of accomplishing this goal. *The Last Tycoon* remains a testament to Fitzgerald's literary genius.

The novel opens with Cecilia, daughter of a Hollywood producer, flying home from her college in New York. Across the aisle from Cecilia are two Hollywood people, one of whom she recognizes as a visitor to her home. When a stewardess sits with Cecilia and addresses her by name, the gentleman she recognized immediately introduces himself and his companion. Wylie White is a screenwriter and his friend is a failed producer, though this is not explained to Cecilia immediately. When the plane is grounded in Nashville, the three companions decide to ride out to Andrew Jackson's historic home, Hermitage. The ride is long and quiet. Mr. Schwartz falls asleep for the first restful sleep in weeks, while Wylie flirts with Cecilia.

They arrive at Hermitage at dawn, however, they are unable to go inside because it is not open yet. Instead, Wylie and Cecilia talk on the front steps while Mr. Schwartz sleeps. When it is time to go, the newly awakened Schwartz says they should go on without him that he no longer wishes to return to Las Angeles. Wylie agrees to take a note to a fellow traveler and he and Cecilia leave. It is the next day before they learn that Mr. Schwartz committed suicide soon after their departure.

Back on the plane, Cecilia discovers that the mystery passenger that Mr. Schwartz was concerned with earlier is Monroe Stahr, her father's partner. Cecilia has had a crush on Stahr since childhood and hopes that this summer break from school will lend them an opportunity to explore those feelings.

A few days after returning to California, Cecilia goes to the studio in order to bring her father home for his birthday. While trying to convince him to leave his work, an earthquake strikes. Cecilia, her father, and his business companions go into Stahr's office. Here they learn that the earthquake has caused a water main to burst and the back lot is flooded. Stahr calls a fix-it man and they all rush out to see the damage for themselves. After a few moments, two women come floating down the flood on the head of a prop statue. Stahr is instantly infatuated with one of the women because of her resemblance to his deceased wife.

The next day, Stahr spends a busy, though typical, day at work. Throughout the day, Stahr encourages his secretary to track down the girls, finally getting one of them on the phone. Stahr asks to meet her in a public place and she reluctantly agrees to meet him



at a local drugstore. The moment Stahr sees her he knows he has made a mistake. This girl looks nothing like his wife. Stahr drives her home. The girl insists that he meet a girlfriend of hers. The moment the second girl opens her front door, Stahr knows she is the woman he remembers from the night before.

The second girl refuses to agree to meet Stahr anywhere and refuses to tell him her name. Stahr goes away dejected. However, Stahr runs into the girl at a party and convinces her to meet him the next day for coffee. Stahr and Kathleen drive to Santa Monica and find their way to a house Stahr is building out there. Kathleen seems reluctant to be with Stahr, though when he takes her home she insists he take her back to the house and there they become intimate. It is not until later that Stahr learns from a letter Kathleen wrote at the beginning of the date that she is engaged to marry another man.

Kathleen calls Stahr and asks to see him. Kathleen explains about a difficult relationship she recently left thanks to the help of her fiancy. Kathleen gives Stahr a chance to tell her not to marry her fiancy, but he does not take it. The next day Stahr receives a telegram to let him know Kathleen has been married.

A week later, Stahr asks Cecilia to arrange a meeting between him and a Communist who Stahr blames for organizing a union at the studio. Stahr takes Cecilia and this man to dinner and drinks too much, getting into a physical altercation with the Communist afterward. It is after this that Cecilia finally gets her wish and she and Stahr begin seeing each other.

Mr. Brady, Cecilia's father, has become unhappy with his partnership with Stahr. Brady begins plotting against Stahr in order to force him out of the company, going as far as blackmailing Stahr over his affair with Kathleen, which has continued despite her marriage, and hiring a man to kill Stahr. In retaliation, Stahr hires a man to kill Brady. However, Stahr has second thoughts, though he cannot cancel the order because the plane he is flying on the New York crashes. Brady dies soon after Stahr leaving Cecilia without both the most important men in her life.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

*The Last Tycoon* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a novel about a Hollywood producer who finds himself not only struggling to find love and success in a world of cut-throats, but who is in the ultimate struggle for his own life. *The Last Tycoon* is Fitzgerald's final work, a novel he was working on at the time of his death. The novel was published after editing by fellow writer and friend, Edmund Wilson, with the aid of Fitzgerald's notes and outlines. The novel was intended to be as compact and tightly constructed as *The Great Gatsby* with a subject matter deeper and more complex than *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald was well on the way of accomplishing this goal. *The Last Tycoon* remains a testament to Fitzgerald's literary genius.

Cecilia is the daughter of a Hollywood producer, a child who is used to flying all over the world in order to attend school or visit her father. Right now, she is on a plane, thinking about all the other people on board. There are sure to be other Hollywood people on board, though she does not recognize anyone except for a man sitting across the aisle from her.

The stewardess stops by to check on her and they begin to discuss a famous actress that Cecilia knows, an actress who flew this route before and discussed her fears about the current political climate with the stewardess. While they talk, the stewardess says Cecilia's name. The man across the aisle from her realizes who she is, and introduces himself and his companion. They are Wylie White and Mr. Schwartz.

The stewardess announces a few minutes later that the plane will have to make an unscheduled landing in Nashville because of a thunderstorm. Wylie White is upset at this prospect because he was born and raised in Nashville. Mr. Schwartz, however, does not seem bothered by anything except for a mysterious passenger called Mr. Smith by the stewardess. Once on the ground, Wylie suggest they drive out to Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's historic home, rather than spend an hour or two in a hotel room. Cecilia and Mr. Schwartz agree.

The ride is a long one and Wylie takes every advantage of the time to flirt with Cecilia while Mr. Schwartz sleeps. Once there, they cannot go inside because it is only dawn and the home is closed. Cecilia and Wylie decide to head back to the airport, but Mr. Schwartz elects to say, no longer wishing to return to Los Angeles. Mr. Schwartz gives Wylie a note for the mystery passenger and sends them on their way. It is not until the next day that Cecilia finds out that Mr. Schwartz committed suicide at Hermitage.

Once back at the airport, Cecilia notices a drunken passenger being denied boarding before she herself gets back on the plane. Once there, Cecilia discovers that the mystery passenger is her father's partner, Monroe Stahr. Stahr sits beside Cecilia for a few minutes, giving her a monogrammed ring off his finger, before he takes Wylie back



to his private compartment for a discussion regarding Mr. Schwartz. Later Stahr goes into the cockpit to regale the pilots with stories while he soaks in the atmosphere with the desire of learning to fly himself one day.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The introduction of Cecilia as the daughter of a producer sets the scene for the novel from the first words. Already the reader has found foreshadowing of a world of fame and riches, of a world that Cecilia herself finds hard to describe and to feel truly comfortable within, again foreshadowing the feel of the novel. The death of Mr. Schwartz warns the reader that this is not going to be a light-hearted novel, foreshadowing tragic events in the following pages.

The passages of flirtation between Cecilia and Wylie are entertaining and symbolic of the yearning for something outside your grip, as Cecilia clearly is not interested in Wylie. It is Stahr that Cecilia wants, a clear fact she states herself toward the end of the chapter. This touches on the theme of love and loss as well as setting the stage for an endless pursuit that may or may not be similar to Wylie's pursuit of her. The ring Stahr gives to Cecilia is symbolic of her desire to be married to him and his wistful feelings toward marriage, as might be inferred from his words when he hands the ring to her, "I give you this ring, Cecilia." pg. 23



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Cecilia goes to the studio lot in order to collect her father for his own birthday party. Cecilia finds him in his office with a few business associates, discussing heatedly a recent decision Stahr has made. While they are talking, an earthquake hits. There is little damage to the office itself, but when they go into Stahr's office, they learn that a water main has burst at the back of the lot. Stahr calls Robbie, a cutter who was once a telephone line repairman and who is very talented with mechanical things.

Stahr and Robbie go to the sight of the water main break and find the whole back lot under a flood. While they are discussing what to do, two girls come floating down the lot on the head of a prop statue. Stahr immediately attempts to rescue them, though he is unable to do so until several other men pitch in. The girls are beautiful and the men are most willing to help. Stahr, however, is struck dumb by the sight of one of the girls. The girl looks exactly like Stahr's deceased wife, a starlet named Minna Davis.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Cecilia is star struck over Stahr, stumbling over herself to say something intelligent while they wait for Robbie to appear so they can go inspect the water main damage. Stahr is struck dumb himself when he catches sight of the woman who looks like his deceased wife. These two scenes play off each other like a metaphor. Stahr is oblivious to Cecilia's desire just as the poor, stranded girl on the prop head is more than likely oblivious to his. This touches on the theme of love and loss, though it is not clear which will be the end result. It also foreshadows later events in the novel.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Cecilia, with her new mature outlook, has discovered since returning to Los Angeles that her father is not the man she thought he was, though Stahr is more of a man than she ever realized. In this realization, Cecilia has decided to give the reader an overview of Stahr's day in order to illustrate this revelation.

Stahr begins his day in the office where he spent the night with his secretary, Miss Doolan, going over the day's appointments while he shaves. Apparently, a cameraman that Stahr is acquainted with somehow managed to get onto the lot without security noticing him and tried to commit suicide by jumping from a balcony. The man has only managed to break his arm. Stahr is concerned about this and asks Miss Doolan to find out more about it.

Miss Doolan then begins to read off his messages. An actor is sick, the governor of California is bringing a group out, and a supervisor has beaten his wife and must be dropped down to a writer. Then, a call comes in about a censor's complaint that an actor's fly is down through half the scenes of a new movie. Then Miss Doolan tells him the Prince from Denmark is there for his tour of the set and a writer, Boxley, has demanded to see him.

Stahr asks Miss Doolan to track down the women from the night before and then turns his attention to the writer. Boxley is a novelist who is having trouble adjusting to the format of screen writing. Boxley wants to go home and give it all up, but Stahr is convinced he can write something really sensational and convinces him to stay. Then Stahr escorts the man out and introduces him to a gag man in the waiting area. Next, a movie star comes to talk to him, concerned about a personal problem that Stahr has no time to deal with. However, when Stahr learns the nature of the problem and the man's desperation, he takes time to talk to him.

Stahr has set aside exactly an hour for a conference regarding a movie that is supposed to begin filming the next week. Stahr begins the meeting by telling the writers, the supervisor, and the director that he has decided to scrap the entire film. Then Stahr explains that he is not happy with the script as it is written, that the characters are not real enough, are not sympathetic. After everyone realizes he does not really want to scrap the film, Stahr dictates the exact changes he would like to see.

After the conference, Stahr asks his secretary if she has any news on the woman from the night before and is disappointed at her lack of success. All Miss Doolan has come up with is a possible last name for one of the woman. Stahr then meets with the Prince from Denmark, Prince Agge, and takes him to the commissary for lunch. Once at the commissary, the two men find a table with fellow producers, including Mr. Marcus and Mr. Brady. The gentlemen begin to talk about the most recent films in production. One





man asks Stahr about a film their production company is about to release. Stahr rattles off the numbers he expects to see as a result of the film's release. Everyone thinks that Stahr has miscalculated his figures because the film will lose money with the figures he has quoted. However, Stahr has not miscalculated. Stahr knows the film will lose money and is of the opinion that it is okay for that to happen once in a while for the sake of artistic integrity.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Cecilia's purpose with this chapter, as she announces at the beginning, is to show how Stahr is a harder worker than her own father. Stahr is definitely a hard worker and a compassionate man, as illustrated by his concern for the actor with the problem and the time he takes to help the crew of a new film fix the problems he sees with their script. The attempted suicide outside the office building where Stahr spent the night is symbolic not only of the do or die attitude that held Hollywood in its grips even then, but it is also symbolic of the death that appears to surround Stahr, between his wife and this poor man. It also touches on the theme of death.

Stahr's decision to release a movie he knows will not sell well is a shock to his peers. However, this decision is symbolic of Stahr's belief in a good story and a well-filmed movie, a metaphor for his passion for the artistry of filmmaking. This too shows the contrast between Stahr and Brady because Brady is one of the voices loudly objecting to the idea of purposely losing money. Brady and his equals are in this business to make money. They do not understand Stahr's basic love of the art itself.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

After lunch, Stahr visits the set of *Red Ridingwood*, a director who once had his own studio. Stahr is not happy with the way *Ridingwood* is handling the film or the actress who is starring in it and artfully pulls *Ridingwood* out the back door while a new director enters through the front door.

Next Stahr goes to the projection room to watch the dailies of his current films. Stahr has comments on every scene he watches, requesting that several scenes be redone in order to repair fatal flaws, completely disgusted with one film whose scene was written Wylie White. Stahr orders that four new writers be put on the movie to repair Wylie's mistakes.

Back at his office after watching the processes in another room, Stahr talks with the poor camera man who attempted to take his own life that morning. Stahr learns that a rumor has circulated all the major studios in town that the man, Pete Zavras, is going blind. Stahr sent him to an eye doctor and found that his eyes are nearly perfect. While waiting for Zavras to obtain a letter from the eye doctor, Stahr soothes the ruffled feathers of two writers who found out they are not the only ones working on their particular movie. Then Miss Doolan that she has one of the girls from the night before on the phone.

Stahr is nervous when he picks up the phone. The girl is less than friendly and refuses to meet Stahr anywhere when he first asks. However, she finally relents and agrees to meet him at a drugstore down the street later that evening. In the meantime, Stahr has a meeting with two more writers and watches the dailies from the afternoon shoots. When Stahr returns to his office he finds Pete Zavras waiting for him. Zavras thanks Stahr for his help and tells him if he ever needs anything, just call.

Stahr has an episode of unknown cause after Zavras leaves that requires some sort of medication. Stahr appears unfazed by this episode and continues on with his day by going to dinner at the commissary. Stahr goes to meet the girl from the night before and realizes instantly that he has made a mistake. This girl looks nothing like his Minna. Stahr immediately offers to drive her home, refusing to answer any of the questions she asks.

The girl realizes why Stahr wanted to see her due to the fact that he was married to Minna Davis. The girl tells him that it was the other girl she was with that night that looks like Minna and offers to take him to her. Stahr refuses, but the girl insists. When Stahr sees this other girl through the screen door of her home, he falls under her spell once again. However, Stahr cannot get this second girl to so much as tell him her name, let alone promise to see him again.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

Stahr appears to be a tough man when necessary as illustrated by his firing of a director for not controlling his actress. However, despite the knowledge that Wylie is a drunk, Stahr does not fire him for inept work on another movie. These two episodes contradict each other and present some foreshadowing as regards to Stahr's personality later in the novel.

Stahr's attack, though not explained or really shown to be much of a concern, is foreshadowing into the health of Stahr. Zavras' promise to help Stahr should he ever need it is also foreshadowing into future events of the novel, though perhaps more violent if not more sinister than Stahr's possible illness.

Stahr finally finds the girl who has held his attention since the night before because of her resemblance to his deceased wife only to realize she looks nothing like his wife, a moment of revelation that appears to bode well for Cecilia's desires. However, this girl realizes Stahr's mistake before he himself does and takes him to the real girl who is reluctant to even speak to him. This, too, foreshadows future events in the novel, most importantly Stahr's obsession with this girl and her reluctance to speak to him. It also touches on the theme of love and loss in that the knowledge of who this girl is forces Stahr to reflect more on his deceased wife, showing the reader in more detail how lost Stahr still feels due to her death.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Cecilia hitches a ride with Wylie White to the studio with the purpose of seeing Stahr and telling him how she feels about him. Wylie encourages Cecilia even as he makes it clear that he is interested in her, though he admits his interest is mainly her money. When Cecilia arrives at the studio, she flirts with Stahr, a fact that he misses because he is out of practice. Finally Cecilia comes right out and tells Stahr how she feels. Stahr is surprised but congenial, telling her he is too old and tired to get married again. Stahr encourages her to get involved with Wylie White. Miss Doolan appears a moment later, clearly summoned by Stahr.

Cecilia is at a party later and she sees a girl across the room that she has never seen before. Cecilia takes no particular interest in the girl until Stahr comes into the party and makes a bee line for the girl. They dance, talk, and Stahr finally learns her name, Kathleen Moore. Stahr allows her to return to her friends while he joins his own at Cecilia's table. However, when Kathleen stands to leave a moment later, Stahr follows her out.

Kathleen attempts to get away although she swears she does not have a husband, no reason to avoid him. Kathleen swears she simply is not interested and he should get over her. Stahr follows her to the parking lot anyway, determined to get her to go out with him. Finally Kathleen agrees to meet him in this same parking lot the next morning. Stahr then returns to the party long enough to dance with Cecilia.

The next morning, Stahr and Kathleen meet. Kathleen is reluctant to go anywhere local, so Stahr talks her into going to a restaurant in Santa Monica he knows. At the restaurant, Stahr tells Kathleen he is building a house in the area. Kathleen asks to see it, so Stahr drives them out there. Kathleen is amused by the single finished room that already contains furniture and a small strip of yard that has grass already, although the house does not have a roof. Stahr explains that he wanted to test it out so he had a few props brought out.

When they go outside a phone begins to ring. Stahr and Kathleen search the entire yard for the phone and finally discover one in a shed. Stahr answers and believes he is about to talk to the President of the United States. Stahr acts self important as he waits, only when the phone is picked up on the other end it is an orangutan that one of his supervisors has procured for a movie. Kathleen finds the whole situation amusing.

Stahr starts to drive Kathleen home. They stop at a drugstore on the way for a quick meal. On her doorstep, Stahr wants to kiss her, but Kathleen is reluctant. Suddenly she begs him to take her back to the house in Santa Monica. Once there, Kathleen and Stahr make love. Later they talk about Minna and her resemblance to her and about Kathleen's lover in England. After a while they go out to the beach and watch some fish



come in close to the beach. There they meet a black man who tells them how he will not allow his children to watch movies because they lack anything meaningful.

On the way back to Kathleen's house, she begins searching through the car for a lost letter. Stahr asks if it was important and she says not to worry about it. At her door, Kathleen calls him Mr. Stahr and refuses a good night kiss. Stahr goes home thinking about the changes he will have to make in his selection of movie in order to find one the black man on the beach might like. At home Stahr settles in his study to begin sifting through a stack of screenplays waiting for his attention. Stahr's butler brings him a letter he found in the car. Stahr ignores it as long as he can, finally breaking down and reading it.

The letter is addressed to him from Kathleen. In it she explains that she has a fiancy and that she will no longer be able to see him. Stahr is disappointed by this news, feeling rejected and used. Stahr goes up to bed with his thoughts full of Minna. Perhaps it is better, Stahr thinks, since the only reason he was interested in her in the first place was because of her resemblance to Minna.

Cecilia, in the meantime, has attempted to find out who the girl from the party was. Cecilia has no success with the people at the party, so she goes to an old friend, a writer named Jane Meloney to see if she knows anything. When it is clear she does not, Cecilia suggests she arrange a lunch between Cecilia, herself, and an out of work actress from the party, Martha Dodd.

At lunch, Cecilia chickens out and is unable to ask Martha about the girl. Instead, Cecilia takes Martha to talk to her father about him finding her some work. Cecilia barges into her father's office without waiting for the secretary to buzz her in. Mr. Brady is acting funny, sweating profusely, and struggling with a window. Cecilia opens the window for him, telling him about the actress and what she would like for him to do. When he agrees, Cecilia sends her father into the washroom to clean himself up while she gets Martha. Except on her way to the door, Cecilia hears moaning from a closet. Cecilia opens it and out falls an overheated secretary, who is completely naked.

Cecilia rushes out of her father's office with Martha in tow. Martha offers without prompting to take Cecilia to meet the girl who danced with Stahr at the party the other night, but Kathleen is not home when they visit.

Stahr is in another conference with the writer, Boxley, tricking him by playing a game to get him into his work again. Then Stahr goes to his office for a quick meeting with his personal physician. The doctor is concerned about Stahr. Stahr has a heart ailment. He'll be dead in less than six months, if he does not stop working so hard. However, Stahr is not interested in slowing down his work load.

Kathleen calls later and requests to see Stahr. Stahr goes to her in his limo and they drive around while Kathleen tells him her story. Kathleen was poor, living on the streets when a man took her in. This man, a minor king that Stahr is vaguely aware of, was a drunk who abused Kathleen. Another man, an American, stole her away from her king,



brought her to America and promised her he would marry her. Kathleen tells Stahr all this, all the while waiting for him to tell her he loved her and ask her not to marry this other man. Stahr believes he has time since Kathleen's fiancy is not due back for another week. However, the fiancy returns early and Kathleen telegraphs Stahr the next morning to inform him that she has married.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Cecilia bravely announces to Stahr that she loves him and is quickly swept away. Cecilia is heartbroken, much like Stahr was in the last chapter when the girl refused to agree to see him again. These two situations again mirror each other. This is foreshadowing into the future of these two relationships.

When Stahr finds Kathleen at the party, he is surprised and more curious about this girl than ever before. Stahr does not understand how Kathleen has come to be at the party, however, his biggest concern at the time is attempting to get her to agree to see him again. Finally she does, foreshadowing events later in the same chapter. Kathleen's reluctance, however, is also foreshadowing in later events as well.

Stahr and Kathleen's date goes very well, especially as it ends with them making love in Stahr's half built house. However, it does not end well when Kathleen insists on calling him Mr. Stahr, not only allowing yet more foreshadowing into preceding events, but touching on the theme of love and loss. Stahr becomes focused on Kathleen and Minna, missing Minna more than before as a result of Kathleen's apparent callousness. The reader and Stahr finally find out what Kathleen's reluctance was when Stahr reads the letter and all the foreshadowing from Kathleen's reluctance is resolved, creating more as the reader and Stahr wonder how her night with Stahr might change her current situation.

Cecilia is curious of the strange girl because she is jealous, touching on the theme of jealousy. In her attempts to find out more about the girl, Cecilia catches her father having an affair with one of his secretaries, effectively damaging their relationship, though it is not clear how bad the damage may be. This episode with her father, however, takes Cecilia's mind off of Stahr and his new girl, a curious turn in this symbolic love triangle.

Kathleen calls Stahr and it appears that they may find a way to be together. Stahr is reluctant to tell Kathleen how he feels about her, however, due to his devotion to his wife and his fear of being hurt again. This is part of the theme of love and loss. Stahr loves Kathleen just as he loves his wife, however Stahr is deathly afraid of going through the misery of losing his love a second time. However, by this point the reader knows that Stahr is dying, so his fear of loss is ironic. If anyone will suffer a loss here, it is Kathleen.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Stahr calls Cecilia a week later and asks her to set up a meeting between him and a Communist Part organizer. Cecilia once had this type of connection. However, she lost contact with many of these people last fall, when her boyfriend died in a car accident. Stahr wants the meeting in order to gain insight into contract negotiations that are failing between him and Writer's Guild.

Cecilia manages to get a guy, Brimmer, to come meet with Stahr. They meet at Cecilia's home and discuss politics politely if a little angrily. Stahr wants Brimmer's people to stop inciting his writers and Brimmer wants the freedom to do whatever he likes. Stahr suggests lunch, where the conversation continues, including Brimmer's insistence that Stahr and his colleagues should back the anti-Nazi league. Brimmer also argues that the studios do not pay writers nearly enough although Stahr pays his writers more than most studios. Brimmer and Stahr pick at each other all through lunch. Stahr begins to drink heavily, something Cecilia has never seen him do before.

Back at Cecilia's house, the two men attempt to play ping-pong, however the game quickly becomes violent. Stahr threatens to beat Brimmer up and charges at him accusing him of stealing Kathleen from him, confusing the Communist with Kathleen's new husband. Brimmer knocks Stahr out with one punch. Cecilia gets Brimmer to leave and helps Stahr into the house when he wakes.

Stahr is apologetic when he sobers up. Cecilia tells him that he hit Brimmer and Stahr assumes Brimmer hit him in self defense. Stahr then asks Cecilia to go to Doug Fairbanks' ranch with him that night, beginning a two week relationship between the two.

The rest of the novel is summarized here by Fitzgerald's friend and fellow writer, Edmund Wilson from Fitzgerald's own notes: After the meeting with Brimmer, Stahr goes back East. A pay cut has been threatened at the studio and Stahr goes to try to talk the shareholders out of it. While there, Stahr becomes very ill and nearly dies.

While Stahr is ill, Brady uses the opportunity to cut the pay of the writers and all the low pay employees while the executives do not suffer a pay cut although Brady had promised they would. Stahr is unhappy with this because he has always worked hard for the lower paid employees. When Stahr returns, although he has considered quitting, he takes up the fight against Brady because he cannot stand the idea of giving in to him. At the same time, Cecilia has let it slip to Brady that Stahr is in love with another woman.

Kathleen's husband is a technician who works at the studio and is a leader with the union. Brady uses this information against Stahr, threatening to let the husband know





the truth so he could use the information to sue Stahr for alienation of his wife's affections. This case could potentially ruin Stahr, especially if it goes to court. However, Stahr has information on Brady regarding the death of the husband of a woman Brady was involved with, which creates some sort of stale mate. At the same time, Brady has hired Robbie to kill Stahr. At some point, Pete Zavras, who Stahr helped in Chapter three and four, comes to his aid and gets him out of trouble somehow, though the writer was not clear on this point.

During all this, Stahr has continued to get sicker. Stahr and Kathleen are having an active affair. Stahr wants to run away with her and get married, however Kathleen is reluctant because of the damage her husband can potentially do to Stahr. Finally Stahr learns about Brady's threats of murder and hires someone to murder him. However, Stahr has second thoughts on a flight to New York and decides to call it off. Unfortunately, the plane crashes before Stahr can do that. Stahr's funeral is a star studded affair, the climax of the novel, while Brady's death is a quiet affair. The novel was intended to end with Cecilia in a tuberculosis sanitarium and the image of Kathleen outside the studio, never once to step foot into that world.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter introduces a new story line, one that deals with a union battle between the studio and its workers. Stahr arranges to meet with a Communist Party organizer because he wants to understand the union and what the people involved in it are thinking, in order to help him better deal with their demands. This foreshadows events that were meant to appear later in the novel. Also in this chapter, Stahr and Cecilia begin to date, an idea foreshadowed with her hopes in previous chapters but ignored by Stahr until Kathleen's marriage.

The rest of the novel was to consist of Stahr in a battle for his work and his very life with Brady, Cecilia's father. This is foreshadowed in chapter six in regards to the union and the fact that Stahr had begun to date Cecilia. Cecilia eventually turns on Stahr, though it does not appear to be intentional, by giving her father ammunition to use against him. The two men battle in an ironic war of wills, ironic because Brady is the one who created Stahr by partnering with him in the first place, and neither one wins. The ending is another twist of irony with both men ending up dead and leaving the women to suffer the fallout of their war. Cecilia ends up alone and ruined in a tuberculosis sanitarium and Kathleen remains outside of the world she so desperately wanted to be a part of. This is symbolic of all the loss in this novel, hence the theme love and loss, and of the setting of the novel which includes a class separation often referred to in passing by Cecilia.





# Characters

## Cecilia Brady

Cecilia Brady is the daughter of a Hollywood producer, an insider in Hollywood, but distant enough that she can see the games those in power play. Cecilia is in love with Monroe Stahr and hopeful that he will eventually fall in love with her. Through the course of the novel, Cecilia throws herself at Stahr repeatedly hoping he will get the message and see her as something more than the daughter of his business partner. However, Stahr never does.

When Mr. Brady decides he needs to get rid of Stahr through any means necessary, it is his daughter Cecilia who gives him the ammunition he needs to blackmail Stahr. Cecilia tells her father that Stahr is in love with a married woman while he is dating Cecilia herself. Stahr finds this woman and her husband and then threatens to give the husband leverage to sue Stahr.

Cecilia writes this story of Stahr, a man she not only loved but greatly admired, while in a tuberculosis sanitarium. By this time, Cecilia's father has died and Stahr is also dead, therefore Cecilia is alone. It is also possible she had an affair with a man she did not love, perhaps Robinson or Wylie White, although the writer never made his intentions clear on this point. Either way, Cecilia is left with nothing at the end of the novel, ruined as an unedited scene shows her explaining it.

## Monroe Stahr

Monroe is a Hollywood producer who began a partnership with Mr. Brady when he was only twenty-two, lending him the nickname of boy-wonder. Stahr is a unique creature in Hollywood because he actually joins in and helps create the movies, from reading the scripts to watching the dailies to assisting in the editing, something other studio heads of the time are unwilling to do. Not only this, but Stahr has a mind for figures and is not afraid to produce a movie that will not make money. Stahr has also refused to have his name listed on the credits of any of his movies.

Stahr lost his wife three years before the opening of the novel. During a flood at the studio caused by a broken water main brought on by an earthquake, Stahr meets a woman who could be a dead ringer for his deceased wife. Stahr tracks this young woman out and asks her out on a date. The woman is reluctant, however eventually agrees. Stahr and this woman, Kathleen, go to Santa Monica where Stahr has been building a home. Kathleen and Stahr spend a wonderful day together. That night, however, Stahr finds a letter Kathleen wrote and accidentally left in his car that tells him she cannot see him any longer because she is to be married. Stahr goes to her and tries to tell her how he feels about her. However, he mistakenly believes that he has



more time. The next morning, Stahr receives a telegram from Kathleen that announces she has been married that day.

Stahr is suffering from a heart disease and is not expected to live more than six months. Work is Stahr's only solace in life. However, Stahr's partner, Brady, wants him out of the studio. When a struggle begins between the studio and the unions, Brady pulls some nasty punches in order to force Stahr out. At the same time, Stahr and Kathleen meet again and begin an affair. Brady learns of this affair and threatens to use it to hurt Stahr. Stahr becomes involved with some mobsters in New York and arranges for Brady's murder in order to protect himself, since he has come to believe Brady may want to kill him, and Kathleen. However, on a flight to New York, Stahr decides to call off the murder. Before Stahr can do this, however, the flight he is on crashes.

## **Kathleen Moore**

Kathleen Moore is a poor Irish girl who has just come to Los Angeles from England. Kathleen's mother died soon after the two moved to England and left Kathleen, then fifteen, destitute. Kathleen met a man who took her in and cared for her in exchange for her affections. However this man was a violent alcoholic who abused Kathleen. When Kathleen meets a kind American who promises to help her if she will promise to marry him, Kathleen quickly agrees on the condition that they live in America.

While setting up their home in Los Angeles and waiting for her betrothed to come back to her, Kathleen and a friend get caught on the grounds of Stahr's studio after an earthquake. Stahr is immediately taken with her because she reminds him of his deceased wife. After going to great pains to search her out, Stahr asks Kathleen for a date many times before she finally agrees. Stahr takes Kathleen to Santa Monica and shows her the house he is building there. When Stahr attempts to take Kathleen home, she asks him to take her back to his house where they share an intimate evening. It is not until that night that Stahr learns of her engagement through a letter she wrote before the date began and accidentally left in his car.

Kathleen becomes married a short time later. Kathleen gave Stahr the chance to ask her to call off the engagement; however he could not bring himself to do it though he felt sure he was in love with her. After the marriage, Stahr and Kathleen try to forget each other, however it proves impossible when it turns out that Kathleen's husband is a technician at the studio. Kathleen and Stahr have an affair, one that Brady uses against Stahr in his attempt to push Stahr out of their partnership. In the end, after Stahr's death, Kathleen is left standing outside the studio, a metaphor for the fact that she will always be an outsider to the world of Hollywood.

## **Mr. Brady**

Mr. Brady is Stahr's business partner and Cecilia's father. Early in the novel, Mr. Brady is described as the type of man who does not like to roll up his shirt sleeves and participate in the actual mechanics of making a movie. Mr. Brady does not even



understand how to make a movie. Mr. Brady only knows that it makes him money, and how to parcel out the work. Mr. Brady also makes it clear in the early chapters how much he dislikes Stahr's management style by complaining about a few of the decisions Stahr has made.

Mr. Brady is a busy man, much too busy to have the type of relationship with his daughter that he likes to think they have. Cecilia often remarks how he comes into the house whistling the tune, *Little Girl, You've Had a Busy Day*, as though they have a relationship in which he cares what kind of day she has had. This relationship is further strained, when Cecilia walks into her father's office in order to ask him to help a down and out actress. Instead, she finds him in the throes of passion with one of his three secretaries.

Mr. Brady wants Stahr out of their partnership. While Stahr is in New York and becomes sick, Brady makes several decisions regarding the partnership and the union battle that cause Stahr many problems, not to mention the contract on Stahr's life Brady takes out with Robbie. Stahr tries to repair the damage, becoming deeply concerned for his own life. When Brady finds out about Kathleen and brings her and her husband into their dispute, Stahr knows he must do something. Stahr orders a hit on Brady and then changes his mind. However, Stahr dies in a plane crash before he can call off the order, resulting in both of their deaths.

## Minna Davis

Minna Davis was a starlet who was married to Stahr. Stahr is still deeply in love with Minna even three years after her death and it is Kathleen's resemblance to Minna that causes Stahr to seek her out. Minna is often on Stahr's mind, a woman even he admits he did not always get along with but whom he greatly admired and desired. Stahr compares Minna and Kathleen to each other often in the early days of his relationship with Kathleen, and it is Minna's memory that causes Stahr to hesitate the night Kathleen tells him about her fiancy and hints to him how deeply she wants him to ask her not to marry him. Stahr is afraid it is his lasting love for Minna that has caused him to feel such deep devotion to Kathleen. This hesitation causes Kathleen to go ahead and marry her fiancy the very next day.

## W. Bronson Smith

W. Bronson Smith is an American Kathleen met while living with her English lover. W. Bronson Smith saves Kathleen from this lover who had been abusive toward Kathleen and promises to take her to America for a new start. Kathleen is engaged to marry Smith when she meets Stahr. Kathleen feels as though she must marry this man despite her feelings for Stahr because she made a promise to him and because Stahr has refused to admit his true feelings for her. However, after her wedding, Kathleen and Stahr meet up again and begin an affair. About the same time, a struggle between the studios and the unions begins. W. Bronson Smith is a technician working for the studios



and he is active in his union. When word gets out that Stahr and Kathleen are having an affair, Brady uses this affair against Stahr, threatening to give Smith enough evidence to sue Stahr for alienation of his wife's affections.

## Wylie White

Wylie White is a screenwriter who often works for Stahr. White is a drunk and he is washed up as a writer, a fact that Stahr is aware of from the beginning of the novel but chooses to ignore. White also claims to be in love with Cecilia after meeting her on a flight from New York to Los Angeles, interested only in gaining some of her money and reputation. White also plays a part in the union negotiations later in the plot where Brady promises not to slash salaries of the writers and the stenographers and then does exactly that.

## Mr. Marcus

Mr. Marcus is another producer on the lot that Stahr and Brady work on. Mr. Marcus is very old and in a wheelchair, a man who does everything so slowly that Cecilia avoids running into him while on the lot so that she will not be delayed in her business too long. However, Mr. Marcus still has a steel trap of a mind and is still very well respected on the lot. Stahr, particularly, looks up to Mr. Marcus and goes out of his way not to upset his sensibilities.

## Jack 'Robbie' Robinson

Robbie is an expert cutter who often works for Stahr. Robbie also used to be a telephone line repairman. Therefore, Stahr often calls him when he needs emergency repairs around the lot. It is Robbie that Stahr calls the night of the earthquake when the calls start coming in about the broken water main and the flood on the back lot. It is also Robbie who helps Stahr rescue the two girls as they float through the flood on the head of a massive prop statue.

In Fitzgerald's original notes, Robbie was to have an affair with either Kathleen or Cecilia or both. It is believed that Fitzgerald backed off of this idea, especially the idea of Robbie and Kathleen, however it is believed that Robbie is the man that Mr. Brady hires to kill Stahr. Robbie's character was to be developed in much more detail later in the novel according to Fitzgerald's notes, however, in the published chapters Robbie only appears twice.

## Miss Doolan

Miss Doolan is Stahr's secretary. Like any good secretary, Miss Doolan attempts to protect her boss from overwork and unnecessary interruptions. However, she is not always successful. Miss Doolan is highly professional and organized; making it easier

for Stahr to do what must be done everyday. It is Miss Doolan who tracks down Kathleen for Stahr, or rather Kathleen's neighbor who she was with on the lot the night of the earthquake, though Miss Doolan does not know who Kathleen is or why Stahr wants her found.



# Objects/Places

## Hollywood

Hollywood is the heart of the movie industry during the time period of this novel and is where the studio Stahr and Brady work at is located.

## New York

New York is where Cecilia goes to school and where Stahr is headed in order to call off a hit on Mr. Brady when his plane crashes.

## Santa Monica

Santa Monica is a beach community in California where Stahr is having a house built. It is the shell of this house where Stahr takes Kathleen the first night they are together.

## The Studio

The studio is the production company and the huge production lot where Stahr and Brady not only have their offices, but where they film the majority of their movies.

## Stahr's Office

Stahr's office is where Monroe Stahr not only conducts business but where he is living periodically in the time before he meets Kathleen because he has no reason to go home to the house he has been renting.

## Brady's Office

Brady's office is where many of the scenes between Cecilia and her father take place and where Cecilia catches her father in the middle of sexual relations with one of his secretaries.

## The Processed Leather Room

The processed leather room is a room in the Brady home that is decorated in soft grays with leather covered furniture. Cecilia thinks of the room as too fragile to enter.



## **The Letter and the Telegram**

Kathleen writes Stahr a letter that informs him that she is engaged to be married and sends him a telegram after she has become married in a spur of the moment civil ceremony.

## **The Plane**

It is on a plane that Cecilia opens her narrative and where she meets Wylie White, Mr. Schwartz, and spends a few minutes talking to Stahr. It is also on a plane that Stahr makes his decision to call off the hit on Brady and where he dies before he can do just that.

## **Scripts**

Stahr reads most of the scripts for the movies he wishes to do and movies that are actively being filmed himself, a fact that most producers would not have bothered themselves with.

## **Dailies**

Stahr insists on seeing the daily films of all the movies currently in production on his lot so that he can make changes or suggestions as he deems necessary, another thing most of the other producers would not think of doing.

## Social Concerns And Themes

Fitzgerald's experiences as a screenwriter from 1937 until his death, and his previous work on the screenplays of *Tender Is the Night*, *Red-Headed Woman*, and other works during the 1920s and 1930s gave him the basis for his last work. He patterned his central character, the producer *Monro Stahr*, after the famous boy-genius *Irving Thalberg*, but *Stahr* is an embodiment of the heroic aspects of the *Thalberg* legend, not an actual portrait of *Thalberg*. Fitzgerald envisioned *Stahr* as the rare Hollywood mogul with taste and courage who could elevate the typical studio product into an artistic statement while still making money. *Stahr* shares Fitzgerald's commitment to traditional values and the fundamental ideals of American culture, and Fitzgerald may have been trying to record his vision of what was best in America before the turmoil of the coming war permanently altered the landscape. As Fitzgerald admitted, he was growing nostalgic for a "lavish romantic past."

Fitzgerald's choice of a Jewish man was certainly influenced by *Thalberg's* background, but he may also have been trying to compensate for some of the idle, unknowing, and off-hand comments he had made about Jewish people in some of his previous books. He called it a "fortuitous circumstance" that American Jews were "somewhat uncertain in their morale" in the 1930s, but his lifelong dedication to progressive political positions must have had something to do with his emphasis at a time when the Nazis were triumphant in Europe. His ability to identify with the underdog is one of the most appealing traits of his maturity, validating his innate instinct for decency.

*Stahr* is a kind of actualization of the American Dream, but his life is set in a world based on the creation of illusion.

At the end of the continent, where the last frontier has been pressed against the barrier of the Pacific, Fitzgerald tried to work through the consequences of a nation facing the fact that it no longer had an infinity of possible futures. At the end of his life, Fitzgerald had transferred his focus from the old island that flowered before the eyes of Dutch sailors (in *The Great Gatsby*) to a kind of lotus-land where the flowers were all bizarre hybrids and mutants, their significance baffling and inexplicable.





# Themes

## Jealousy

Jealousy is a theme of *The Last Tycoon*. Jealousy is a facet of all three of the main plot lines, beginning with Cecilia's love of Stahr. Cecilia never expresses her jealousy, however she makes it very clear from the beginning of the novel that she is in love with Stahr and it is only human for her to feel jealousy when she learns that Stahr is in love with another woman. After Kathleen marries her American lover, Stahr begins spending time with Cecilia, giving her hope that perhaps now their relationship will finally move to the higher level she has been wishing for since she was a child. However, it becomes clear to Cecilia that this will not happen through rumors around the studio and from Stahr himself. As a result, Cecilia tells her father of Stahr's other lover, supposedly by mistake.

Jealousy threads its tendrils through the second plot line, that of Stahr and Kathleen's relationship, as well. Stahr is deeply in love with Kathleen, although he does question his own emotions when faced with the possibility of Kathleen's marriage to another man because of her close resemblance to his deceased wife. When Kathleen tells Stahr of her engagement, he becomes depressed by the idea, his thoughts immediately drawn to his wife, Minna. However, when he learns of her marriage to her American fiancy, Stahr becomes erratic, attempting to beat an innocent man when he confuses him with Kathleen's husband in a drunken rage.

Jealousy also crops up in the final story line as well. Brady decides that he must rid himself of Stahr, because he's such a star on the lot. Other reasons, presumably, are because of his youth, his attentions to Brady's young daughter, and the respect Stahr garners from all the people who work for him, from the most lowly person on the ladder of success to the most respected man on the lot, Mr. Marcus. It is the jealousy of Stahr's many successes disguised as professional ambition that leads Mr. Brady to go so far as to order the murder of Stahr. Jealousy is a natural human emotion and it often colors the events in many people's lives, represented here in this novel not in one form but three.

## Love and Loss

Love is another theme of this novel that touches two out of the three main plot lines, and with love there is always loss or the fear of loss. Stahr is a man who loved his wife deeply and still feels her loss three years after her death. Stahr spends all of his time working in order to keep from remembering the emptiness in his home without his wife. It is in this act of avoidance that leads Stahr to the moment where he meets a woman who could possibly ignite a spark of love inside of him again. The fact that this woman looks exactly like his deceased wife does not bother him until he is faced with a moment of decision. Stahr chooses the easy way out, refusing to profess his love to Kathleen, and by so doing he losses her to marriage with another man.



Love and loss also surrounds Cecilia, the narrator of the novel. Cecilia is deeply in love with Stahr only to realize that he cannot return her devotion because he has already committed his heart to another woman. In this way, Cecilia has already lost the possibly of love with the only man she truly believes herself to want. However, this is only the beginning of the loss Cecilia will experience in her short life. Cecilia's relationship with her father is also very complicated. Cecilia openly admits that her father is much too busy with his own life to spend much time with her, though his guilt does cause him to attempt a relationship that she has neither encouraged nor discouraged. That is until the day she catches her father in the midst of an intimate tryst with one of his secretaries. With this new knowledge, Cecilia has lost what little of a relationship she has enjoyed with her father. Love and loss is a theme that crisscrosses the lives of both the main characters, enriching the depth of the plot and making all the characters more sympathetic.

## Death

Death enters the novel in the very first chapter when the reader meets Mr. Schwartz. It is rather casual the way the writer simply leaves Mr. Schwartz at the historic home of Andrew Jackson, hinting to the reader that something might be wrong but not really explaining this act until Cecilia crassly announces that Mr. Schwartz committed suicide. Then death again makes an appearance in the second chapter when Cecilia describes the outer office of her father and Stahr's offices and announces that Stahr's wife is dead.

The death of Stahr's wife clearly is still affecting him as witnessed by his preference to sleep at the office rather than drive home to an empty house. It is also Stahr's attachment to his wife that leads him to fall in love with Kathleen and become wrapped up in an affair with her. However, a bigger element of this theme follows Stahr every day. Stahr has a heart ailment and is expected to die within the next six months. Stahr's impending death does not color his outlook on life. On the contrary, Stahr himself spends very little time thinking about this prospect. However, his disease does come into play later in the novel when he becomes ill while on a trip to New York, allowing Mr. Brady to create chaos at the studio.

As Brady's scheme to rid himself of Stahr, Stahr does become frightened for his own life, not due to his heart ailment but threats from Brady who may or may not have hired someone to murder Stahr. To protect himself, Stahr hires someone to kill Brady. However, Stahr changes his mind, though he himself dies in a plane crash before he can call off the murder. Now Cecilia is left with not only the death of the man she loves, but the death of the father with whom she never had the chance to build a satisfactory relationship.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *The Last Tycoon* is first person through the narrative of Cecilia Brady. Fitzgerald creates an observant woman with Cecilia so that he can allow her to imagine scenes that she is not privy to in order to give certain parts of the novel a sense of the omniscient third person point of view while still being a first person narrative.

The novel is written in such a way that it seems that Cecilia is writing this to friends or perhaps sympathetic strangers in order to preserve the life of a man she greatly admires, Monroe Stahr. This gives the writer's trick of allowing Cecilia to imagine certain scenes more credibility. It is not necessary for Cecilia to say, that this is the way she imagined it happened. However, she does in certain places throughout the novel. The idea of her preserving a friend's memory makes it feel as though everything she is telling the reader is something Stahr might have told or inferred to her in a moment of friendly intimacy. The character of Cecilia is drawn in such a way as to give the reader a sense that all of this is being told in confidence, secrets about a great man and his many desires, through the eyes of a woman who longed to be one of his many desires.

By using the first person account to encompass his narrative, the writer lends intimacy to the secrets of Stahr's life that might not have been felt by the reader if it had been told in another point of view. Had the novel been completed with the intended funeral scene after Stahr's death, the impact of the funeral would have been highly emotional thanks in part to Cecilia's rose colored narrative due to her own feelings for Stahr.

## Setting

The novel is set in Hollywood in the late thirties toward the end of the Great Depression. Hollywood has recently gone through some major changes, including the transition from silent films to 'talkies'. Many actors, producers, and directors who were at the top of their game before the transition now find themselves struggling to make a living, writers are considered replaceable commodities and cameramen can find themselves out of work in less than a day should a negative rumor be started. It is the turmoil in Hollywood that is the true setting for *The Last Tycoon*. Stahr is such an oddity in this mayhem that his own partner wants him out. Stahr believes in hard work, in actually understand every facet in the act of making a movie and insists on being an active part at each stage. Most producers of his time did not agree with his philosophy and it is this same philosophy that causes Stahr's own partner to turn against him.

It is also the class differences during this time that act as a setting and an influence in the attitudes of the characters of this novel. Cecilia comments several times how the rich and successful tend to stick together at parties and social events, shunning others around them who are less fortunate. There is a party in the beginning of the novel in



which a once successful actress is having a hard time finding work. This actress attempts to ingratiate herself to the more successful party guests and finds herself repeatedly shunned. This scene is a metaphor for the attitude inherent in the plot regarding such people as Mr. Brady and Cecilia herself. In this situation, once more Stahr sticks out, insisting on dancing with a young, unknown girl who is not a part of the richer sect. However, there is a later scene where Stahr embarrasses himself by attempting to demean certain employees of the studio and his words fall on deaf ears due to the fact that he is dining not with the elite crowd but with one of the disenfranchised.

## Language and Meaning

*The Last Tycoon* is written in precise English using many of the slang words of the time period. The sentence structure and grammar is very easy to follow, many of the passages written in such a way that the reader might believe the novel were written in recent times while other passages contain such formal phrases that it is clearly marked by its own time period.

Fitzgerald uses British slang in some of the passages that include Kathleen, a character from England, in such a way as to remind the reader of Kathleen's former home. The writer also throws in many Hollywood slang phrases, such as cutter or dubbing room, to lend authenticity to the main characters as being Hollywood related. Fitzgerald himself worked as a writer in Hollywood about the time period in which he was working on this novel and the reality of that shines through in his descriptions of not only the lot and associated buildings, but in the relationships between the various characters, writers and producers and directors.

## Structure

The writer, from the notes found with his manuscript, originally intended for this novel to be many chapters long. However, due to his premature death, the novel was published with only the original six chapters printed in whole and the rest of the story synopsis at the end of Chapter 6. No one can be completely sure of how Fitzgerald planned for his novel to continue past the first, polished chapters, therefore it was decided to not attempt to edit and publish the remaining chapters that Fitzgerald had finished in a previous draft of the novel. This novel, then, beyond the previously mentioned six chapters and synopsis, was published with a section of notes to give the reader a feel for the uncompleted novel as Fitzgerald himself had originally proposed it.

The novel has three main story lines. The first revolves around Cecilia, the narrator of the story. This story line tells of a young girl with a child's crush on her father's partner. Cecilia is a college student who finds herself head over heels for a man who has never seen her in such a role. Stahr does spend time with Cecilia after learning of her love, however by the time he learns of it, he is already in love with someone else. The second story line revolves around Stahr's new love. Stahr falls for a girl who reminds him of his



deceased wife, a beautiful starlet. However, this love is complicated when Stahr learns that his new lover has married someone else. The final story line revolves around Stahr's partnership in a movie production company. Stahr's partner is threatened by Stahr's gifts to turn out truly successful pictures as well as Stahr's insistence on taking an active role in the making of the movies. It is this final story line that brings all the plot points into one, explosive conclusion.

The pace of the novel begins slow and then picks up with the surprising suicide and an earthquake on the studio lot that brings Stahr to his first meeting with the new love of his life. Though the novel transitions between the first person narrative with Cecilia as the main voice and the third person with Stahr as the main character, there is no confusion with each transition. In fact, many of the transitions begin with Cecilia telling the reader who the narrator will be.



## Quotes

"Even before that, when I was in a convent, a sweet little nun asked me to get her a script of a screen play so she could 'teach her class about movie writing' as she had taught them about the essay and the short story. I got the script for her, and I suppose she puzzled over it and puzzled over it, but it was never mentioned in class, and she gave it back to me with an air of offended surprise and not a single comment. That's what I half expect to happen to this story."

Chapter 1, pg. 9

"At both ends of life man needed nourishment: a breast--a shrine. Something to lay himself beside when no one wanted him further, and shoot a bullet into his head."

Chapter 1, pg. 21

"Obviously Stahr had put the pilots right up on the throne with him and let them rule with him for awhile." Chapter 1, pg. 27

"There is no world so but it has its heroes, and Stahr was the hero." Chapter 2, pg. 37

"I loved Father--in a sort of irregular graph with many low swoops--but I began to see that his strong will didn't fill him out as a passable man." Chapter 3, pg. 38

"All eyes followed his down the table, but, as if forewarned, Mr. Marcus had already signaled his private waiter behind him that he wished to rise, and was even now in a basket-like position in the waiter's arms. He looked at them with such helplessness that it was hard to realize that in the evenings he sometimes went dancing with his young Canadian girl." Chapter 3, pg. 59

"As the whole vision of last night came back to him--the very skin with that peculiar radiance as if phosphorus had touched it--he thought whether it might not be a trick to reach him from somewhere. Not Minna and yet Minna. The curtains blew suddenly into the room, the papers whispered on his desk, and his hear cringed faintly at the intense reality of the day outside his window. If he could go out now this way, what would happen if he saw her again--the starry veiled expression, the mouth strongly formed for poor brave human laughter." Chapter 4, pg. 73

"The room was almost black, but he made his feet move, following a pattern, into his office and waited till the door clicked shut before he felt for the pills. The water decanter clattered against the table; the glass clacked. He sat down in a big chair, waiting for the Benezdrine to take effect before he went to dinner." Chapter 4, pg. 76

"And Wylie White told me a lot, which I believed because he felt Stahr intensely with a mixture of jealousy and admiration. As for me, I was head over heels in love with him then, and you can take what I say for what it's worth." Chapter 4, pg. 82



"Hollywood is a perfectly zoned city, so you know exactly what kind of people economically live in each section, from executives and directors, through technicians in their bungalows, right down to extras." Chapter 5, pg. 85

"Not a pretty girl, for there are none of those in Los Angeles--one girl can be pretty, but a dozen are only a chorus." Chapter 5, pg. 87

"She was alert and calm--qualities that were currently at a premium. There was lassitude in plenty--California was filling up with weary desperadoes. And there were tense young men and women who lived back East in spirit while they carried on a losing battle against the climate."

Chapter 5, pg. 96

"That's how the two weeks started that he and I went around together. It only took one of them for Louella to have us married." Chapter 6, pg. 151

# Adaptations

Elia Kazan directed the 1976 film interpretation of the novel. It starred Robert DeNiro as Stahr, and featured numerous Hollywood leading men, such as Robert Mitchum and Tony Curtis. The screenplay was by Harold Pinter and is judged by many critics as the best rendering for the screen of any of Fitzgerald's works. American viewers tended to like the film, while British critics often found it tedious and long-winded. Almost everyone agreed, though, that DeNiro did a splendid job of portraying Fitzgerald's troubled hero.





## Key Questions

Given that this novel was left unfinished at Fitzgerald's death, being concluded by the notable author and critic (and friend of the writer) Edmund Wilson, based on Fitzgerald's notes, discussion might center on the "shape" of the plot. Fitzgerald had the reputation of being a careful and thorough editor and reviser of his work; thus, current readers cannot be certain that the book ends as the author would finally have wished. The plot of the work surely was intended to close with Stahr's death; but, it is not certain that the demise was to be achieved in the way provided by the published text. Therefore, readers could well develop theories as to the most plausible and realistic closing of the story.

Since Wilson's effort represents about half of the finished text, a great deal of the characterization develops in that portion. Does this editor do justice to the early representations of the personalities of such personages as Pat Brady (especially in view of the important role that he plays later in the plot), Kathleen Moore (whose affair with Stahr is surely a key element of the book), and Cecilia Brady (who narrates the story)?

1. Given the reputation of Hollywood current in the minds of many people today, does Fitzgerald's image of Irving Thalberg as Monro Stahr seem credible? Is the character too idealized?
2. Does the narrative point of view succeed in this novel? Would any other approach be more effective (such as a first person point of view)?
3. If you were writing the ending for the text, how would you conclude the story?
4. Does Stahr's commitment to a work ethic seem to prefigure the contemporary emphasis on people who feel overworked and excessively dedicated to their careers?
5. Does the time frame of the setting appear to be realistic, in view of the vision currently held of the 1930s? For example, do the attitudes and behavior of the characters accurately reflect the historical mood of the era?
6. Does Fitzgerald's habit of modeling characters on real persons become distracting, once it is recognized?

Would a reader enjoy the book more if he or she knew nothing of the practice?

7. Does the old theme of reality versus illusion come across strongly in this novel, more, say, than in *The Great Gatsby* 8. Is Stahr's series of romances in any way a cause for a lower estimate of his character than would be the case for a more "steady" personage?



## Topics for Discussion

This is an unfinished novel presented to the reader with only the first quarter of the novel actually written in a narrative form with the final parts of the novel synopsis. Do you think the publishers and editors of this novel should have published it this way or should they have finished it first? Is it possible for anyone to know for sure how Fitzgerald intended to finish the novel? Do you believe the synopsis to be accurate to Fitzgerald's wishes after reading the notes at the end of the novel?

Consider the point of view of this novel. Do you think the habit of Cecilia to imagine what really happened between Stahr and Kathleen to be accurate or tinged by Cecilia's own romantic feelings toward Stahr? Could the novel have been written as effectively if done in another point of view? Would Cecilia's character have been drawn the same if the novel were written in another point of view?

Consider the language of the novel. Does some of the more archaic phrases make it difficult for a modern reader to understand the intent of the novel? How would the novel be different if rewritten by a modern, best selling novelist?

Consider the character of Stahr. Why do you suppose his business associates grow so unhappy with him that they plot to kill him? Is Stahr too good to be true or do you think that Fitzgerald intended to introduce some fatal flaw to Stahr's character?

Consider the intended death of Stahr. It is suggested in Fitzgerald's notes that Stahr's plane was to be found by a group of children and his belongings plundered, creating a connection between the children and Stahr and his enemies. It is also suggested that Fitzgerald had intended to have Stahr's funeral be the final epilogue to his story. Which ending do you think would have been a fitting end for the novel? Would the big Hollywood funeral have been more dramatic or the drawn out saga with the children?

Discuss Stahr's relationship with Kathleen. Do you believe Stahr was truly in love with Kathleen or that he was attracted to her only because of her resemblance to his deceased wife, Minna Davis? Why did Kathleen not tell Stahr from the beginning that she was engaged to someone else? Was Kathleen using Stahr to become a rich Hollywood wife or was Stahr using Kathleen to regain something he lost with Minna?

Discuss Cecilia. Is Cecilia a sympathetic character? Do you think the writer intended for the reader to feel sorry for Cecilia like one might feel sorry for a poor little rich girl, with some scorn? Or do you believe Fitzgerald intended Cecilia to be more like Kathleen, an abandoned child with no one to care for her? Should Stahr and Cecilia gotten together?



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994