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WRITERS LIKE ME: FITZGERALD, WEST, PARKER, SCHULBERG,
AND HOLLYWOOD

by

TOM CERASULO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The
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Abstract

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This dissertation reconsiders the myth of the film industry's corrosive effect on American writers by tracing the professional lives and works of an interrelated group of "highbrow" authors who wrote for -- and often about -- the movies during the Studio Era. Looking through the lenses of both literature and film, and taking into account both text and context, the project argues against the critical commonplace that Hollywood screenwriting ruined the careers of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nathanael West, Dorothy Parker, and Budd Schulberg. The movie industry greatly benefited these four authors and certainly did not drain them of their talent. Hollywood provided the financial, social, and creative resources they each needed during a complex moment in American cultural life. Furthermore, an examination of the production histories of selected films reveals the contributions these writers, who had all established themselves in other genres, were able to make to the art of the motion picture. Ultimately, Hollywood was good for these

artists, and these artists were good for Hollywood.

But this reciprocal relationship was far from painless. Screenwriters and their bosses not only battled over creative control of individual texts, but over notions of authorship and authority in general. Working in Hollywood made writers question their professional roles and deepened their anxiety about their cultural roles. However, despite their fears that Hollywood was a wasteland, working for the movies was fruitful for each of the four authors this dissertation considers. And by lending their time and names to the long battle for recognition of the Screen Writer's Guild, they helped to buoy a movement fighting for changes that would benefit writers throughout the industry. In the end, Fitzgerald, West, Parker, and Schulberg all realized that understanding Hollywood was far more important than vilifying Hollywood. Rather than being destroyed by the studio system, their careers were invigorated by it.

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INTRODUCTION

In "Mightier Than the Sword," one of the last short stories F. Scott Fitzgerald ever wrote, the veteran screenwriter Pat Hobby comforts an Eastern novelist who has been unkindly treated by a ruthless Hollywood producer. "Authors get a tough break out here," Hobby says, consoling his new friend. "They don't want authors. They want writers -- like me" (149).

Fitzgerald is the tragic hero of the ubiquitous "Hollywood as vampire" legend. According to dozens of critics -- most notably Edmund Wilson, Arthur Mizener, Aaron Latham, and sometimes even Fitzgerald himself -- the movie industry broke his spirit and dried him up creatively. But an examination of Fitzgerald's career as a whole shows no great chasm between his pre-Hollywood career and his last years in Los Angeles. In both "halves" we find an eagerness to be popular and reach a wide audience. In both we find a desire to be, in Fitzgerald's words, "endorsed by the intellectually elite," an artist whose place in history is assured. In both we can see his willingness to use his cultural capital to champion writers he liked and respected -- from Dorothy Parker, Ring Lardner and Ernest Hemingway in the 1920s to Nathanael West and Budd Schulberg in the 1930s. In both we find Fitzgerald experiencing vocational anxiety, yet continuing to practice his craft and producing good work nonetheless. In short, Hollywood wasn't the setting for F. Scott Fitzgerald's failed second act; it was part of the same successful performance.

Accordingly, this dissertation reconsiders the "Hollywood as vampire" myth by tracing the careers of an interrelated group of "highbrow" writers who wrote for -- and in

many cases about -- the movies during the studio era. I argue that rather than destroying their talent, time spent in Hollywood actually benefited artists such as Fitzgerald, Nathanael West, Dorothy Parker and Budd Schulberg. Hollywood provided the financial, creative, and social resources these authors each needed during a complex moment in American cultural life. Furthermore, my discussion of the production histories of films such as A Star is Born (1937), Three Comrades (1938), and On the Waterfront (1954) demonstrates the contributions these writers, who had all established themselves in other genres, were able to make to the art of the motion picture. In the end, Hollywood was good for these artists, and these artists were good for Hollywood.

Looking at the careers of these writers as they unfold over time reveals a shift in the vocation of authorship as it moves from a pose of the artist who stands outside of society to a later role as a laborer in industrial America. Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines literature and film, and takes into account both text and context, I examine how these authors contributed to the motion picture industry, and how the motion picture industry contributed to these authors. But, as I go on to point out, this reciprocal relationship was far from painless. As Pat Hobby's words in "Mightier Than the Sword" make plain, writers and those they worked under, movie producers and directors, not only battled over creative control of individual texts, but over notions of authorship and authority in general.

Tom Dardis' Some Time in the Sun (1976) went a long way towards dispelling the persistent myth, fueled by Edmund Wilson's 1941 essay "The Boys in the Back Room," that moving to Los Angeles ruined Nathanael West and Scott Fitzgerald. Although both novelists complained that screenwriting led them astray from their "real" work, their

contracts were often for short periods of time. Neither was an especially prolific novelist before settling in Hollywood, and both made a good deal of money writing for the movies at a time when their fiction wasn't selling. As Dardis points out, The Day of the Locust (1939) and The Last Tycoon (1941), written during their time in Los Angeles, are now widely regarded as among their better books.

But in his effort to paint bright portraits of individual authors through carefully selected anecdotes highlighting their California years, Dardis elides the larger picture of a moment of cultural crisis in the writing vocation. A self-proclaimed movie fan, he focuses on the product and ignores much of the process. While Dardis is correct in stating that Hollywood didn't destroy writers, it did make them face head-on their status as workers toiling in an ungentle marketplace. Concerns about holding on to an identity as a "serious" artist in an age of mass culture, worries that began even before they signed screenwriting contracts, only intensified once inside the studio gates.

The generation of authors that forms the body of my study grew up alongside the American film industry -- Dorothy Parker and Edison's Kinetoscope were both introduced to the world in 1893. As these artists came of age, many wore their distaste for the movies like a badge of honor. But as they bemoaned the waning cultural importance of literature in a market flooded with commodities, many secretly envied film's power to reach the masses. In the 1920s, shortly before writing his editor that only lowbrows go to the movies, Fitzgerald told friends that Hollywood was the future. He and his contemporaries began to recognize that motion pictures would allow them to reach larger audiences than the theatre or the book ever could. For many, the screenwriting was already on the wall.

Soon, hundreds of Eastern authors would also have an economic motive for boarding the Super Chief to Los Angeles. When the Depression hobbled Broadway and the New York publishing industry in the 1930s, Hollywood, with its need for spoken dialogue, allowed starving playwrights, literary journalists, and novelists to transform themselves into screenwriters with a paycheck. But, as Richard Fine points out in West of Eden (1993), a history of writers in Hollywood during the Depression, this new role came with a price.

Accepting a studio contract put authors into a structure and hierarchy where time, function, and productivity were measured and used to gauge success. Fine explains: "Writers were not destroyed by Hollywood in the 1930s. But the profession of authorship as they knew it was certainly under attack" (159). Movie producers divided up labor in such a way that the guiding vision behind individual films remained their own, as did legal ownership of the scripts. Screen credits were sometimes withheld out of spite or granted to friends and lovers on a whim. Multiple writers were often assigned to the same script, a policy that infuriated many "name" authors. As Dorothy Parker once remarked of a screenwriter she considered her literary inferior, "If he's a writer, I'm Marie of Romania." But movie producers believed that the product was too expensive to be left in the hands of effete, dilly-dallying artists, and writers who smelled of the highbrow were often paired with industry insiders or junior apprentices. For instance, as a young man, Budd Schulberg, the son of a movie mogul -- and therefore both neophyte and old hand -- was called upon to baby-sit for Fitzgerald during a 1939 screenwriting trip to the Dartmouth campus, a journey fictionalized in Schulberg's novel The Disenchanted (1950).

I contend that working in Hollywood not only made writers further question their

professional roles; it also deepened their anxiety about their cultural roles. For example, the producer Walter Wanger had brought Fitzgerald to Dartmouth in order to show him off and borrow some of his cultural capital. Among many Hollywood executives, a dismissal of high culture was often paired with a reverence for the cultural prestige it carried. In the absence of possessing artistic credibility, many film executives settled for possessing the possessors of this quality. We are reminded of Jack Warner's claim to visitors that he had bought William Faulkner, "for peanuts" (quoted in Hamilton 200). Symbolic goods (poems, movies, Betty Grable's legs, and Coca-Cola) have both an economic value and a cultural value, and these exchanges are rarely equal. "Name" authors such as Fitzgerald and Parker at times were worried that they had cashed out their status as artists at too low a price.

And yet, despite their fears that Hollywood was a wasteland, working for the movies was fruitful for the four writers whose careers and relations to Hollywood form the main body of my dissertation. West and Fitzgerald, by their own admission, were not successful screenwriters. Yet the job provided them with financial support and allowed them to study the theme of American dreaming and its discontents -- which runs throughout their fiction -- at its epicenter. Furthermore, as their letters show, even before their Hollywood novels, even before their first trips to the studios, Fitzgerald and West were questioning the role of the artist in 20th century America: Why do I write? Who is listening? What does it mean to call myself a writer?

My project examines how these issues play out in their early fiction -- from West's sculptor who doesn't sculpt in "The Impostor" (circa 1926) to Fitzgerald's writer who doesn't write in The Beautiful and Damned (1922), from authors in search of

audiences in West's Balso Snell (1931) and Fitzgerald's "Crazy Sunday" (1932) to an audience in search of an author in Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) -- culminating in discussions of West's The Day of the Locust (1939) and Fitzgerald's "Pat Hobby" (1939-1940) stories and The Last Tycoon (1941). Instead of viewing their fiction written in Los Angeles as revenge tracts, as many critics have done, I view them as sites of negotiation. These texts, as well as Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? (1941) and The Disenchanted, don't condemn Hollywood; they try to come to terms with it. They satirize the film industry, sometimes even savagely. But they also carefully examine studio society and American society at large, trying to figure out the writer's place within both.

For example, despite popular belief, Fitzgerald's Pat Hobby stories are neither jeremiads nor mere potboilers. Not only are they more objective about the film industry than they've been given credit for, but Fitzgerald also revised them many times and had definite ideas on the order in which they should be published. It's true that Fitzgerald, like Pat and his colleagues, had his share of troubles as a screenwriter, but many of these difficulties were of his own devising. Of the four authors I look at in my project, Fitzgerald was the one most invested in the Romantic belief of the artist as solitary man of genius. His collaborators often resented his tendency to claim superior taste and judgment, especially since his scripts often contained facial expressions, long passages of narrative, and flowery dialogue. Still, Fitzgerald always worked hard on his scripts, and was paid well for them, even if they weren't produced. For him, the movies filled the financial gap left when the short story market weakened. And although he never got the hang of screenwriting, the unfinished The Last Tycoon and the underrated "Pat Hobby"

stories, written while under Hollywood contract, show his powers as a fiction writer hadn't been lost in the Crash of 1929.

Unlike Fitzgerald and Parker, who had tasted commercial success in the literary marketplace of the 1920s before losing it to the Depression, and Schulberg, who had a surprise best seller with 1941's What Makes Sammy Run?, Nathanael West, whose career was confined to the 1930's, was unable to support himself as a writer outside of Hollywood. Because his name meant nothing outside of a small circle of artists and intellectuals, he had difficulty breaking into the studios. When he finally did, it came as a relief. "Thank God for the movies," he told friends (Jay Martin 341). In addition to a paycheck, the movies provided him with a golden opportunity to further study his career-long examination of the role of the artist in a market flooded with commodities. In college, West began affiliating himself with the avant-garde, cultivating a pose of "art for art's sake" and adopting an air of disinterestedness. Yet The Dream Life of Balso Snell, his first novel, concerns writers in search of an audience. Behind the flippancy of this self-described "book written against writing books," lurks West's anxiety about the position of the artist in society and a fear of mass culture, a theme which culminates in his last novel, The Day of the Locust.

As West's Hollywood years exemplify, screenwriting provided these authors not only with subject matter and financial support, but also with a network of social support. An important segment of the audience for writing is other writers, and during their years in California these four artists championed each other's work and offered peer approval, encouraging each other to keep writing during a time when all questioned their literary vocations. In the back room of a Los Angeles book shop, artists such as Parker, William

Faulkner, Schulberg, John O'Hara, Dashiell Hammett, West, and Fitzgerald often gathered after a day put in at the studios. West was never commercially or critically successful, but within this group that met to drink and talk, he was accorded the highest respect. As a "writer's writer," known by those in the know, Nathanael West was an inside celebrity. Other literary artists, as well as other movie writers, formed his most appreciative audience. In the Los Angeles literary community, West found the approbation and support of his peers, if not the commercial and critical success he desired. Typifying what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would call a "loser wins" situation, West was considered a big man at Stanley Rose's book shop in part because he was so unappreciated by the larger culture. So, instead of destroying him, Hollywood can be said to have financially and emotionally subsidized Nathanael West's fiction. And by lending his time and his name to the long battle for recognition of the Screen Writer's Guild (SWG) -- as did Parker and Schulberg -- West returned the favor by helping to buoy a movement fighting for writer solidarity.

A vocal leader in the SWG and well connected in publishing circles, Dorothy Parker was a valuable ally to other Hollywood authors and screenwriters. Like Fitzgerald, who had recommended her to Maxwell Perkins when she was considering writing a book of fiction, she was extremely supportive of younger and less established colleagues. She provided jacket blurbs for The Day of the Locust and What Makes Sammy Run? and reviewed both books favorably. Despite the fact that Parker was well treated and highly paid by the studios, she supported the SWG and fought for rights that would have their greatest affect on the least fortunate members of her profession. In 1941, nine years after the struggle had begun and one year after West and Fitzgerald's deaths, a minimum fee

scale was instituted and the Guild was given jurisdiction over screen credits. In this respect, not only was the film industry good for writers like West, Parker, and Schulberg, but these writers were also good for the film industry.

Where Fitzgerald and West's talents were best suited to writing about Hollywood, I argue that Parker and Schulberg did some of their best work writing for Hollywood. Both received Academy Award nominations -- Parker for A Star is Born and Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman (1947) and Schulberg for On the Waterfront -- and both successfully navigated the rough waters of the studio system to bring their words to the screen. Dorothy Parker's urbane wit and ability to think on her feet, honed at The Algonquin Round Table in the 1920's, led to her reputation as the best "pitcher" on the MGM lot in the 1930s. Since reading is time consuming, many movie executives preferred scripts and story ideas to be talked out to them, and Parker was adept at getting her ideas across in meetings and making sure her contributions made it into the final product. Her legendary genius for bon mots proved to be ideally suited for the stylized, rapid-fire patter of 1930s sound film, and her sharp voice can clearly be heard in film classics like A Star is Born and Suzy (1936). Often teamed with her husband Alan Campbell, who worked on structure as she worked on dialogue, the duo manufactured scripts quickly and effectively. Like Parker and Campbell, many screenwriters found that by forming partnerships -- with other writers or with directors -- they would increase their chances of getting their scripts produced and receiving screen credits. Frances Goodrich/Albert Hackett and Howard Hawks/William Faulkner are notable examples. Another is the collaboration between Elia Kazan and Budd Schulberg.

As the title to his autobiography, Moving Pictures: Memoirs of a Hollywood

Prince (1981), attests, Schulberg, the son of one of the founders of the American film industry, grew up as California royalty. The summer before he left for college, his mother, a Hollywood agent, helped him sell a screen treatment. Therefore, unlike the other three authors featured in my project, Schulberg's life as a professional writer began in the movies. After graduating and publishing a few short stories, he returned to Hollywood to work in the family business, gathering up material for his fiction and building friendships with Fitzgerald, West and Parker before going into Eastern exile again in the 1940s.

When the prodigal son returned, in the mid 1950s, the studio system was dissolving and independent production was taking over. Kazan and Schulberg partnered up, and they created On the Waterfront and A Face in the Crowd (1957) to great acclaim. Both films were adapted solely by Schulberg from his own original stories -- something that wouldn't have been allowed under the studio system at its height. Therefore, while he may not be the "auteur" of these movies, I argue that his mark on them can clearly be seen. In a manner that wasn't possible under the factory-like conditions of the studio system, a Taylorized filmmaking process where the screenwriter stopped working when the project began shooting, Kazan and Schulberg collaborated every step of the way -- from pre-production, to production, to post-production -- to create these movies.

Budd Schulberg's writing career has spanned over sixty-five years. Because he has lived so much longer than West, Fitzgerald, and Parker, and as a "Hollywood Prince" had an insider's view of the rise and fall of the studio system, biographers and film historians have been eager to hear him reminisce. He's an often quoted source in examinations of his canonized friends. Yet Schulberg's fiction itself has received little critical attention, perhaps with good reason. In the final analysis, he was more successful writing stories for

Hollywood than about Hollywood. The books What Makes Sammy Run? and The Disenchanted are interesting attempts to document the rewards and punishments of screenwriting, but both suffer from one-dimensional characters and a plodding style.

As Fitzgerald learned, scriptwriting and novel writing are different skills, and what plays on the page doesn't always play in front of the camera. Obviously, the reverse also holds true, as can be demonstrated by Schulberg's misguided novelization of Waterfront. Schulberg's strength was for screenwriting, not for prose fiction. He excelled at giving structure to scripts, something his friends Fitzgerald and West struggled with. More importantly, as a Hollywood insider, he knew the complicated process of how movies actually get made -- what would work and what wouldn't, what was possible and what wasn't. He was able to write directly to the screen instead of blindly for the screen.

Like Budd Schulberg, many writers eventually realized that trying to understand the movie business was more important than vilifying it. All four of the authors featured in my project used their observations as subject matter, and all four did some of their best work while under contract to the studios. Along the way, these authors donated their support to others working in Hollywood -- writers like them. Financially and creatively, time spent in Los Angeles benefited Fitzgerald, West, Parker and Schulberg. Rather than being destroyed by the movie industry, their careers were invigorated by it.

Chapter One: The 1920s

What a writer professes about himself and about his vocation is part of who he is, and inherent in the word "author" is a claim to authority. To promote his upcoming book This Side of Paradise, the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, a former ad man and supervisor of a railroad gang, sat down for an interview with himself in March of 1920. He submitted a transcript of this phony conversation to his publisher's marketing department, but Scribner's ultimately decided not to use it.¹ The reasons why can be deduced. At the time, Fitzgerald was simply one more young man with an ambitious debut novel. With a catalog that included titles by august names like Henry James and Edith Wharton, Scribner's might have believed that no one would want to listen to a beginner talk about the state of American literature and the profession of authorship. Furthermore, Scribner's was a conservative imprint. It sold books, not authors. Overconfident Fitzgerald pronouncements like: "The wise writer, I think, writes for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward" (56) might even have put some potential readers off.

When This Side of Paradise was released, some critics found it pedantic, and others noted that it was full of typographical errors, but Scribner's quickly found the public certainly did care what Fitzgerald had to say. The 1920s saw an increased interest in American writers (Brooks 5), especially photogenic ones, and much of the positive buzz over Fitzgerald's novel was about him, not the book itself. A reporter who had

¹Forty years later, The Saturday Review published the piece as "A Conversation with Mr. Fitzgerald."

interviewed Scott called him: "an actor...vivacious, imaginative, forceful, slightly unbalanced. The latter is his chief charm" (In His Own Time 416). The media ate up Fitzgerald's showmanship and his sense of style. Like his new friend Dorothy Parker, whom he had met through Robert Sherwood,² Fitzgerald was now a New York celebrity. One afternoon Parker saw a taxi driving down Fifth Avenue with Fitzgerald sitting on the roof waving to pedestrians. "Everyone wanted to meet him," she told Zelda's biographer Nancy Milford (67). A little later, Parker wrote an article poking fun at his shameless self-promotion: "He didn't invent youth, but he was well up in the van when it came to cashing in on the idea" ("Professional Youth" 14).

This Side of Paradise made Fitzgerald famous, but it's a myth that it also made him rich. His royalties for the novel, which took about thirty-six months to write, amounted to less than \$10,000 ("Introduction" to As Ever xvii). The book didn't pay for Scott and Zelda's wedding, but it represented to them, and to the public at large, that Fitzgerald had a promising literary career ahead of him. In this way, the capital gained from the novel was more cultural than financial, more symbolic than concrete. On a deeper level than the monetary, writing and selling TSOP solidified Fitzgerald's self-identity. He writes of the months before it was published: "While I waited for the novel to appear, the metamorphosis of amateur into professional began to take place...the stitching together of your life in such a way that the end of one job automatically becomes the beginning of the next" ("The Crack Up" 86).

²Fitzgerald and Parker had a brief romance in the early 1920s (Mellow 120).

According to William Charvat, until the early 19th Century writing in the United States was seen as a hobby, a pastime for a gentleman amateur -- especially since lax copyright laws made it pretty much impossible for an author to make a living (292-293). But Fitzgerald was no gentleman amateur. With his talk of consecration by "the schoolmasters of ever afterward," he certainly felt the pull, described by Raymond Williams in Culture and Society, between the artist as genius and the author as professional. Yet the instrumental value of authorship was as important to him as its expressive value. Scott was largely in the writing business to make money and win people over. From the inception of his career he promoted himself and his work, studied the different segments of the market for this work, and developed strategies to exploit these markets. Fitzgerald may have lived as a famous novelist during the 1920's, but he never made his living that way.

Scott and Zelda, a writer in her own right, courted celebrity. The scrapbooks they kept, portions of which were later published by Matthew Bruccoli and Scottie Fitzgerald under the title The Romantic Egoists, demonstrate just how much press attention the Fitzgeralds received in the 1920s, and just how much they enjoyed receiving it. Years later, Zelda wrote to her daughter: "Daddy loved glamour & I also had a great respect for popular acclaim" (quoted in Mellow 491). Shortly after their wedding, the couple began serving up autobiographical slices³ of their lives to mass market magazines like The Ladies' Home Journal, Cosmopolitan, and The Saturday Evening Post. Like the "puff" profiles of movie stars that had begun appearing in fan magazines in the 1920s, these

³For more on Fitzgerald's autobiographical magazine writing see Dolan's Modern Lives.

pieces by the Fitzgeralds were more likely to focus on how swell it was to be famous rather than on the rigors and intellectual rewards of being a creative artist. And although they often carried both of their names, they were also likely to have been written solely by Zelda (Brucoli, Some Sort 260-262).

Scott's letters make it apparent that he saw himself primarily as a novelist, working in the genre that the great Henry James had argued could give authors the artistic status of painters and sculptors, but just as textbooks subsidized Scribner's literature list, it was articles, short stories and film money -- not novels -- which paid most of Fitzgerald's enormous bills in the 1920s. Scott always kept his eyes on the cashbox, but never wanted to appear to be doing so. In this way, Fitzgerald resembled Scribner's itself. Mark McGurl writes "the book publishing industry has been perhaps unique in American capitalism in the degree to which it has touted itself as a 'bad business' with relatively tiny profit margins, a labor not of capitalist greed but of cultural responsibility and love" (14). Accordingly, Fitzgerald relied on his tenacious agent Harold Ober to make the money deals with the magazines and the studios, but he insisted on working with the people at Scribner's directly.

Biographical accounts like Aaron Latham's and Arthur Mizener's contrast the gentlemen Fitzgerald dealt with at the publishing house with the philistines who constantly undercut him in Hollywood, and in West of Eden: Writers in Hollywood, Richard Fine does a good job of establishing that author/publisher relations in the 1920s were generally cordial (20-41). But even a marriage as seemingly perfect as the Fitzgerald/Scribner's union had its rough patches. Maxwell Perkins,⁴ Fitzgerald's

legendary editor, may have believed in his author from the jump, but his bosses upstairs weren't so sure. James West's The Making of "This Side of Paradise" shows that Scribner's thought interest in Fitzgerald was a passing fad, and they originally issued the book in eleven small reprints -- waiting for each to sell out completely before going back to press -- rather than in two or three larger ones, a strategy which cost the novelist sales, sleep and money (111-115).

That Fitzgerald wrangled a large income and gained exposure from the popular magazine market throughout the 1920s is a fact universally acknowledged -- and usually forgiven -- by observers of his career. But to see the author as 1930's Hollywood sell-out is to ignore the fact that he had been "selling out" to the movies since the beginning of his career. He viewed Hollywood as a rich source of income and, later, a medium with artistic promise, and he wasn't alone in this among respected writers. William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, Sigmund Freud and even Count Leo Tolstoy were early believers in cinema's potential. And, reciprocally, the film industry was beginning to see the potential rewards of beckoning literary artists into the fold. In 1919, Sam Goldwyn had a studio, but no stars. To distinguish his films in the crowded marketplace and to raise the cultural status of the film medium itself, he started the "Eminent Authors" project and recruited star writers like Gertrude Atherton, Rupert Hughes, Elmer Rice, Edward Justice Mayer, and Rex Beach.⁵

⁴Perkins wasn't much for spelling or fact checking, but he excelled at making his authors feel important (Berg 57).

⁵Many film historians have labeled Goldwyn's "experiment" a failure. In the end, some of the Eminent Authors couldn't adapt themselves to the medium (or chose not to). But others, most notably Beach and Hughes, became successful writer/producers.

That same year, in the months before This Side of Paradise was published, Scott Fitzgerald had submitted several scripts to D.W. Griffith, whose studio had just given Dorothy Parker her first film credit for Remodeling Her Husband (1919). Henry Dan Piper writes that Fitzgerald "had tried unsuccessfully to persuade D.W. Griffith that the craft of movie making itself was a wonderful subject for a picture. According to Fitzgerald, Griffith had laughed at him" (137). Of course, history, as well as the hit film Merton of the Movies (1922), soon proved Fitzgerald correct. Whereas the audience for books has little interest in reading about printing presses and the heroic efforts of those brave souls working in Permissions, moviegoers are fascinated with the filmmaking process and relish a glimpse of a movie camera filming a movie camera filming a movie.

Fitzgerald also tried pitching his "movie about movies" idea to Metro Pictures, but they weren't interested in it either. Although the industry was still young, it already possessed the lure of money and glamour, and it was tough for a writer to break-in. But that didn't stop aspiring wordsmiths from trying. In the late teens and early twenties, the studios began being deluged with movie ideas and original stories from amateurs and professionals alike. Budd Schulberg writes: "They came pouring in, mostly illegible scrawls, written on everything from postcards to butcher paper. Everybody who paid his nickel to see a show thought it was easy money to dash off a movie. Most of them were illiterate. Nearly all of them were godawful" (Moving Pictures 16-17).

Richard Koszarski has investigated how 1920s newspaper ads for sham correspondence courses and thin pamphlets for "scenarists"⁶ gave the false impression

that those with no writing skills, no knowledge of the film medium, and no connections within the industry could make a fortune selling scenarios to the movie people (98).

These ads, like motion pictures themselves, were aimed primarily at housewives. Unlike would-be starlets, who had to get a baby-sitter (and often a trans-continental train ticket) before pounding the pavement in make-up and heels, aspiring filmploy writers were assured by these ads that they could work at home at the kitchen table and churn out their screen stories in their spare moments before making dinner or after the kids were asleep.

Boosted by a recent Supreme Court decision which had ruled that authors owned the movie rights to their novels and plays, professional writers like Fitzgerald quickly realized that a lucrative market had just opened up for them. If they couldn't sell originals, they could surely make money off the work they'd already done. The year This Side of Paradise was published the Fitzgerald story "Head and Shoulders" became Metro's The Chorus Girl's Romance (1920), and "Myra Meets His Family" was transformed into Fox's The Husband Hunter. Shortly after, two more of his early stories, "The Off-Shore Pirate" and "The Camel's Back" were also snapped up by the studios (Margolies 66-71). Fitzgerald thought he saw a gold mine. In a March 1920 telegram to fiancée Zelda, he boasts of his new found ability to support her: I HAVE SOLD THE MOVIE RIGHTS OF HEAD AND SHOULDERS TO METRO COMPANY FOR TWENTY FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS. I LOVE YOU DEAREST GIRL (Mizener, "Introduction,"

⁶ Here "scenarist" is being used to denote the writer during the silent era who provided the original screen story. Before sound forced the industry to adhere to a more corporate model, job titles and division of labor were often arbitrary. Pat McGilligan writes: "Before 1926, at least to judge by the official credits, there were no screenwriters. The expression per se scarcely existed...There were subspecies of gag writers, continuity writers, treatment writers, scenarists, adapters, titlists, what-have-you" (Backstory 1).

Flappers and Philosophers 13). Despite the legend, Fitzgerald didn't turn to Hollywood as a humiliating last resort; he had been courting it the whole way along.

The month Scott Fitzgerald became a published novelist -- and sold his first screen property -- Dorothy Parker became an unemployed magazine writer. The twenty-seven year old was fired from Vanity Fair in March 1920 for angering powerful advertisers with her scathing drama reviews. In a show of solidarity, colleagues Robert Sherwood and Robert Benchley resigned and walked out the doors of Conde Nast right behind her. These three formed the core of the Algonquin Round Table, a circle that grew to include -- in various permutations -- Alexander Woolcott, Harold Ross, Harpo Marx, Franklin Pierce Adams, Edna Ferber, Heywood Broun, Donald Ogden Stewart, and Marc Connelly. Lots of anecdotal history has been written about the group, but whether or not they consciously stood for anything is up for debate. Parker biographer John Keats claims: "They were not in revolt against society. They merely felt superior to it" (73). Critic Arthur Kinney calls these writers: "a mutually supportive society for high standards of language in an increasingly popularized world of journalism" (11), but they all -- even Harpo -- did far more talking than writing. In the final tally, the group's reason for gathering together seems to have been to provide a permanent excuse not to be behind a typewriter.

Robert Benchley once said: "It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous"

(Frewin 46). More sophisticated than intellectual, Benchley and company were known for their quick mouths rather than their deep thoughts. Franklin Pierce Adams, known as FPA, kept his friends in the news by reporting their exploits in his popular "Conning Tower" column.⁷ Looking for a quip or a quote, other journalists would show up at the Algonquin Hotel around lunchtime to see what the group was saying. Like Benchley and Woollcott, and like Fitzgerald, Parker was attracted to fame and footlights. The Algonquin Round Table appeared to be dismissive of middlebrow taste and language, but they were acutely aware that the reading public was listening to every word they said.

"Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses," "One more drink and I'll be under the host," and "You can lead a horticulture but you can't make her think" are among Dorothy Parker's most famous zingers, but her literary ambitions were broader than just being known for talking wise. During her long career she wrote poems, humor pieces, reviews, articles, and stories. But Marion Meade, who wrote the best researched and most penetrating biography of the author, reports that Parker's ultimate goal was to write a novel⁸ since "real writers, in her eyes, seldom limited themselves to short fiction" and she "needed to prove she was a real writer" (195). Parker's career as "a real writer" was her first priority. In the poem "Fighting Words" she warns potential suitors they can criticize her personality "But say my verses do not scan/And I get me another man!"

⁷ FPA's "Conning Tower" column also led the attack on the copy errors contained in This Side of Paradise. In an effort to enforce "high standards of language," FPA printed lists of the novel's misspellings, making Fitzgerald angry and ashamed (Correspondence of FSF 63).

(Portable 114). A "New Woman" not bound to the ethic of care, a woman writer who was one of the boys, Parker used magazines, the theatre, and the newspapers to reach a huge audience. In 1922, for instance, she published short articles in popular magazines like Ainslee's, Life and Ladies Home Journal, sung on stage with her friends in the revue "No Siree," and even published her first book, an extended humor piece written in collaboration with FPA entitled Men I'm Not Married To, Women I'm Not Married To.

But literary fiction was where Parker's real interest lay. "Such a Pretty Little Picture," which appeared in the December 1922 edition of H.R. Mencken and George Jean Nathan's The Smart Set, is a representative example of her early stories. Kinney believes that Parker's fiction owes something "to her friend Scott Fitzgerald's use of setting and to his ability to choose details that at once will reveal and satirize his characters" (118), but she had been doing it longer than Fitzgerald had, and it was one of the things she did best. Through free indirect discourse, Parker's stories usually crumble the facade between how things appear and how they really are. In "Such a Pretty Little Picture," she focuses on a loveless suburban marriage that everyone mistakenly believes is perfect: "Adelaide Wheelock's friends -- and she had many of them -- said of her that there was no nonsense about her. They and she regarded it as a compliment" ; "The lovely light was kind to the cheap, hurriedly built stucco house, to the clean gravel path, and the bits of closely cut lawn" (Complete Stories 4, 11). Mencken, no friend of the folks he called the "muddlebrows" and the "booboisie," was likely attracted to the story's attack

⁸In 1925, Parker would contribute Chapter 7 to a collaborative work called Bobbed Hair that was serialized in Collier's magazine. This is the closest she would ever come to writing a novel.

on the hypocrisy of the average American. Although The Smart Set didn't pay very well, appearing in it was a prestigious feather in Parker's hat.⁹

Like Parker, Fitzgerald felt pressure in the early 1920s to publish big, ponderous books in order to prove to himself that he was an author rather than a media personality. He had enjoyed the fame and the whirlwind of parties that had followed This Side of Paradise, but, writes Arthur Mizener: "Fitzgerald's writer's conscience, his serious ambition, began to assert itself; what that conscience thought of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald was to come out in his next novel" (147). From the very beginnings of his career, not just in Hollywood in the 1930s, Fitzgerald was questioning what it meant to be a "serious" writer. 1922's The Beautiful and Damned was his attempt to mimic the type of Literary Naturalism favored by Mencken, Nathan, and other influential critics young novelists wanted to impress. According to the contributors to Civilization in the United States, a popular -- but pessimistic -- essay collection published the same year as Fitzgerald's second novel, America was going to hell because of aesthetic starvation and moral decline. The Beautiful and Damned reflects this worldview. Playing off of Wharton's title The House of Mirth, Fitzgerald considered calling the book The House of Pain, an appellation some readers may think fitting. Not much happens in the novel. Its theme is the meaninglessness of life. Anthony Patch, the unsympathetic protagonist, grows increasingly bitter over the course of 450 pages as he waits around to inherit money. The fullest character in the book is the celebrity author Richard Caramel. As Pat

⁹With the departure of Mencken and co-editor Nathan in the mid 1920s, The Smart Set lost its literary cache and became a popular fiction magazine, filled with the sort of formulaic "success stories" that it had been created to oppose.

Hobby would be later, Caramel is the type of mediocre writer Fitzgerald was afraid he had settled for being.

Fitzgerald's anxiety about "selling out," was beginning to nag at him. In 1922 he had some gag stationary printed up with letterhead that read:

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD
HACK WRITER AND PLAGIARIST
ST. PAUL MINNESOTA
(Correspondence of FSF 107)

As if poking fun at himself wasn't enough, Fitzgerald has his characters doing it too. At one point, Caramel dismisses This Side of Paradise as trite (421). Like most jokes, Fitzgerald's had some truth to them. Caramel, like Fitzgerald, is the author of a novel that has caught on with America's youth. But his talent has shrunk in inverse proportion to his prosperity. The Demon Lover -- another working title for the novel we're reading -- is his only good book. Through Caramel, who has devolved into writing prose as sweet and un-nourishing as his name, Fitzgerald exorcises his own demons. James Mellow writes: "Caramel is the crass commercial writer, eager for praise and adulation, thin skinned about critical comment, that Fitzgerald obviously imagined he himself might become" (132).

Caramel's friends believe he's popular because he has more talent than he does smarts. His golden prose gilds the flimsy content lying beneath it. Speaking in passive-aggressive hypotheticals, Anthony tells him: "Suppose, for instance, I have more wisdom than you, and less talent. It would tend to make me inarticulate. You, on the contrary, have enough water for your pail and a big enough pail to hold the water...the more narrowly you can look at a thing the more entertaining you can be about it" (36). Later,

Caramel justifies his movie-friendly short stories -- full of "kissing, shooting, and sacrificing" -- by arguing "Wasn't it true that men who had attained real permanence from Shakespeare to Mark Twain had appealed to the many as well to the elect?" (222). It sounds like a rationalization, but it nonetheless makes the point that just because something is popular doesn't necessarily mean it's no good.

During a discussion about the function of the artist in society, Anthony Patch, the author of several unwritten books, hypocritically declares: "every writer writes because it's his mode of living" (37). Richard Caramel may not be living up to his early potential, but at least he supports himself with his craft. He's a professional writer who actually writes. Anthony Patch, on the other hand, is a poseur. Being a writer isn't his mode of living, it's a title he hides behind. Because there's no system of credentials for becoming a writer, as there are for becoming a medical doctor or Catholic priest let's say, it's easy for Patch to dust off his typewriter, fill his pail with water, and declare himself open for business. But that's as far as it goes. Nothing ever pours out. He lacks the discipline to do any actual writing. His wife Gloria has a similar get-artistic-quick scheme. She wants to act in the movies,¹⁰ and tells her husband she's trying to get famous for his own good: "I hate to see you go to pieces by just lying around and saying you ought to work. Perhaps if I did go into this for a while it would stir you up so you'd do something" (215). What Patch does mainly is sit at his desk in a smoking jacket. He sharpens pencils, drinks tea and stares at the wall (211-212). Patch has vague literary pretensions, and flips through

¹⁰Gloria's artistic dreams are thwarted as well. Testing for the ingénue, she gets the part of the middle-aged dowager, a situation echoed in the 1952 Bette Davis film The Star.

books like "Success As A Writer Made Easy (302)," but he's more interested in looking in the bathroom mirror than in looking inside himself for material.

This portrait resembles college student and Providence dandy Nathanael West circa 1922. A transfer student from Tufts -- where he enrolled by doctoring his lackluster high school record and flunked out by refusing to attend classes -- West, then known as Nathan Weinstein, had gotten into Brown University by stealing the credits of another man with the same name. Luckily, this other Weinstein was a good science student, leaving his namesake free to concentrate on the humanities. In describing this period, Jay Martin, West's definitive biographer, paints a portrait of the artist as a young aesthete. West's generous allowance from his parents, who were then enjoying the flush of prosperity in the building trade, allowed him to buy good clothes and purchase all the books he wanted. He wore beautiful clothes, dabbled in Catholic mysticism, and founded a society of the intellectually elite, a group that often went to the movies to laugh at the sad parts and cry during the funny parts. West couldn't decide whether he'd rather be a painter or a writer, but he knew he didn't want to work for a living. Joining his father's construction business held no appeal to him.

Similarly, Anthony Patch gravitates towards the arts because he finds the idea of a straight job distasteful, and writing looks like it's easy. Running out of money, Anthony is suddenly forced to start producing pages. But writing, like tennis playing, requires practice. The prose that comes out of Anthony consists of "wretched and pitiable efforts to 'write down' by a man who had never before made a consistent effort to write at all." Caramel tries to help him out by telling him to concentrate on short stories if he wants to make some quick money, and advises him to make them plot-driven, "cheerful and on the

side of the heaviest artillery" (303, 301). That way, the movies, represented in the novel by Bloeckman, like Wharton's Rosedale a Jewish arriviste who ends up the most admirable character in the book, might buy the rights to them.

Scott Fitzgerald had some experience with this market strategy himself. The working title for Tales of the Jazz Age, a collection of Fitzgerald's stories published the same year as The Beautiful and Damned, was In One Reel (Letters of FSF 155). In part, Fitzgerald promoted his early short story collections as catalogs of properties available for filming, just in case the movie people had missed them the first time. The narrator of the story "Dice, Brassknuckles, and Guitar" offers his opinion on how his protagonist should be filmed: "Now if this were a moving picture (as, of course, I hope it will be some day) I would take as many thousand feet of her as I was allowed -- then I would move the camera up close and show the yellow down on the back of her neck where her hair stopped and the warm color of her cheeks and arms" (The Price Was High 48). In 1922 The Beautiful and Damned itself was bought by Warner Bros.¹¹ Fitzgerald had no input on the movie made from his novel, and he wasn't quiet about his dislike for how it had turned out. As he wrote a friend: "If you want a good laugh see the screen version of the B+D" (Correspondence 120).

In 1923, Fitzgerald was approached to write an adaptation of This Side of Paradise for a motion picture in which he and Zelda would star. He received \$3,000, and was excited by the possibility, but the project fell through,¹² as did plans for a screen

¹¹ Fitzgerald's ledger, which lists all his work and all income generated from it, records that Warner Bros. paid \$2500 for The Beautiful and Damned (The Ledger of FSF).

story for David O. Selznick entitled -- intriguingly -- "Transcontinental Kitty." Later that same year, from New York, he wrote the intertitles for a Paramount/Famous Players/Lasky film based on Edith Wharton's The Glimpses of the Moon and the story for a production of Grit starring Clara Bow. Neither project was a critical or commercial success. Alan Margolies, who has done valuable work on Fitzgerald's pre-Hollywood film career, quotes from a review of Grit which singles out Fitzgerald's contribution as a "a rather weak and poorly developed crook theme" (71).

In the mid 1920's, the rising star at Paramount,¹³ and the man who had dubbed Grit's Clara Bow the "It girl," was B.P. Schulberg, father of aspiring writer and grade-school student Budd Schulberg. A New York transplant who had moved to Hollywood earlier in the decade, after most of the industry had already done so in the teens (partially for the weather and the available land and partially to keep avoiding the long-arm of Edison's camera patents), the senior Schulberg was arguably the most intelligent producer in town. Writer Herman Mankiewicz, a member of Parker's Manhattan circle, grumbled about him: "He's read too goddamn many books" (quoted in Gabler 203). B.P. had also written one, adding to the growing shelf of screenwriting/get-rich-quick textbooks Richard Koszarski describes in his standard history of the silent feature. An aggressive businessman, a philanderer,¹⁴ and a compulsive gambler, the elder Schulberg was

¹²After Overlook gave up their option, Lasky/Paramount paid Fitzgerald \$10,000 for the screen rights (Robert Martin 134).

¹³By the mid-1920s, seven of the eight major studios had been established. This group includes Universal, United Artists, Fox, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Columbia, and MGM. The eighth, RKO, was founded by Joseph Kennedy in 1928.

nonetheless the highly literate and cultured man that MGM's Irving Thalberg, who had others do his reading for him, often got credit for being.

Literature was held in the highest regard in the Schulberg home. Sunday afternoons at their Hollywood mansion would find B.P. reading Twain, Poe, and Melville to his children ("The Art of Fiction" 96, Beck 3). His wife, Ad, who would later become a literary agent, paid her kids a quarter for every book they read. Budd told an interviewer from The Paris Review: "Sonya, my youngest sister, said in our house the typewriter stood where a piano might be in other homes. We'd just sit down at the typewriter and run off a couple of scales -- stories" ("The Art of Fiction" 97). Budd Schulberg was encouraged to be writer in the way that other parents -- like West's -- pushed their offspring towards professions in finance, medicine, or law. While still a child, he began honing his gift for plot structure by sitting in on his father's script sessions and story conferences.

Born in 1914, and programmed to be an author ever since then, Budd couldn't grow up quickly enough. Reading Moving Pictures: Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince (1981), his autobiography of his childhood and adolescence, one gets the feeling that there was a literary party going on in the 1920's, and Budd was stuck inside at the kid's table. Throughout his life, Schulberg has maintained a yearning for the 1920s, a decade he spent in short pants. He writes about the lost, tight-knit literary community of The Lost Generation: "In the Jazz Age it was still literary etiquette for a young man of promise to send politely autographed copies of his new book to Edith Wharton, T.S. Eliot, or other

¹⁴Parker and B.P. Schulberg had an affair in the late 1920s. (Frewin 211). B.P. was also known for sleeping with the leading ladies in his films. His marriage to Budd's mother broke up because he refused to stop seeing actress Sylvia Sidney.

established literary figures of his day. There was every sort of exchange, from Scott Fitzgerald's genteel tea-time encouragement from Edith Wharton and Eliot, to his Long Island drinking bouts with Ring Lardner" (The Four Seasons of Success 3).

Like Schulberg, in the mid 1920's Nathanael West was feeling the pain of coming of age as a writer a few years too late. For many American artists of the period, the road towards becoming a man of letters ran through Paris, the literary and cultural capital of France, and West prepared for his trip abroad not by studying travel guides, but by reading fictional accounts of expatriate life. In August of 1926, Nathan Weinstein legally became Nathanael West, and two months later, with a new name on his passport and an early draft of the novella The Dream Life of Balso Snell in his suitcase, he sailed for France on a trip funded by his uncles. For the rest of his life, West would mythologize this trip, telling friends and acquaintances made-up stories about fleecing American debutantes who were fresh off the boat, working as a gentleman detective for a rich family, engaging in sex marathons with exotic women, and/or living in abject poverty.

Although James Light's 1961 Nathanael West: An Interpretative Study led the way for future biographers, it prints many such West lies as fact. The truth was, during his time abroad he mainly went sightseeing. Jay Martin sees West in Paris as more of a tourist than an expatriate. The young author hung around far more than he wrote. He spotted Hemingway wearing yellow gloves and a homburg. Another day, he got a quick glimpse of Eliot. A friend arranged for him to meet Henry Miller, but the two bored each

other. When West wasn't writer-watching, he frequented a parlor where nude models casually walked around a furnished room, seemingly oblivious to the paying customers staring at them.

Asked about Jazz Age expatriate life in Paris, Archibald Macleish once remarked:

There was no "community" in the sense in which you, I think, are using the word. No Americans-in-Paris community. That notion is a myth concocted after the event by critics with fish to fry. There was the literary-tourist world of the Dome and the Rotonde, but no work came out of that. (Plimpton 278)

This "literary-tourist world" is featured in an unpublished piece of fiction by West entitled "The Impostor," a send-up of artists, like Fitzgerald's Anthony Patch, who make no art. The story's narrator arrives in Paris and discovers that all of the artists are poseurs, and that all of the good artistic poses have already been taken. The only products these artists create are themselves. After hiding in his hotel for a week, not daring to show himself "at the Dome for fear of making a bad impression" (Novels 411), the narrator decides that his costume will be a business suit; he'll be the crazy bohemian who looks respectable.

As our narrator's Wall Street attire indicates, posing as someone who has dropped out of the economy is a full time job: "We came to the business of being an artist with the definitions of the non-artist and took libels for the truth. In order to be recognized as artists, we were everything our enemies said we were... In those days, if not these, art critics, like Hollywood directors, insisted on typecasting" (411- 412). The binaries between high culture (art critics and museums) and mass culture (Hollywood and

magazines), and between art and commerce, are always collapsed in West's fiction. He never lets us forget that culture -- even "elite" culture -- is an industry. Foundations and museums, supported by the radical bourgeoisie, offer funding to those who simply look and behave like artists. Magazines and newspapers boost their circulation by covering -- and offering publicity to -- those artists who behave outlandishly (Scott and Zelda) or say outlandish things (Dorothy Parker). The public may not know art, but they know what they like their artists to be like.

Although it quickly devolves into an expatriate version of Weekend at Bernie's, with much of the humor centering around a corpse that a sculptor lugs around in order to show to his financial backers that "all modern sculpture is wrong" (416), the first third of "The Impostor" demonstrates that Nathanael West had learned the lesson that Scott Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker had figured out already: Make it new isn't only a modernist call, it's a market call as well. Artists fashion their works -- and their artistic personas -- with markets in mind. Of these three authors, however, West was the one most interested in exploring this theme in his fiction. Following the lead of "The Impostor," avant-garde artists in Balso Snell and A Cool Million realize that cultivating the myth of the reclusive bohemian has mass appeal. There's money in disinterestedness about money, and sometimes the best market strategy is pretending to have no strategy at all.

Scott Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker took a different route from West in mapping out their careers. Both actively promoted themselves as professional authors and as public figures. They were, however, more vocal about some sources of their writing income than they were about others. As Fitzgerald often boasted to interviewers and

friends, since the release of This Side of Paradise (1920) he had supported his family solely by writing, a quantifiable marker of an author's success. But like most Americans, he and Zelda always spent more than they made. Although famous throughout the twenties, Fitzgerald was surprisingly never a best-selling novelist. The Beautiful and Damned (1922) and The Great Gatsby (1925) both sold sluggishly.

Disappointed in Gatsby's performance, Scott complained to Perkins that he would now be forced to hack out some short stories: "I shall write some cheap ones until I've accumulated enough for my next novel. When that is finished and published I'll wait and see. If it will support me with no more intervals of trash I'll go on as a novelist. If not, I'm going to quit, come home, go to Hollywood and learn the movie business" (Letters of FSF 180). Fitzgerald talks as if the movie business was as far away from the literature business as the cereal business, but, as we've noted, subsidiary rights -- and "cheap" short stories like "The Camel's Back" -- helped keep him afloat. The novels This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned were both sold to the film industry, and while, as a book, Gatsby barely broke even, Fitzgerald's agent had quickly set up deals that would make it generate \$20,000 of extra income on the stage and on screen (West American Authors 130).

Similarly, with "Business is Business," written in collaboration with George S. Kaufman, Dorothy Parker had found a way to capitalize on both the stage and the screen simultaneously -- though you would have to dig pretty hard to find this out. Like the early poems she considered too saccharine, the author dropped the piece from collections of her work. Parker's biographers (Kinney, Frewin, Keats) and chronologers (Breese, Calhoun) mistakenly list "Business is Business" as Parker's first original film script, but a

look at the June 2, 1925 review in The New York Times reveals the work to be a live action play, performed in movie theatres,¹⁵ about a shoe manufacturer with a get-rich-quick scheme (9).

In these "open secret" ways, Fitzgerald and Parker made good money in the 1920s. The profession of authorship, as they practiced it in this period, gave them the freedom to command their own time. But Nathanael West didn't have this luxury -- and never really would. With the building trade slowing down to a halt, West's family couldn't afford to support him anymore, and he returned from France in January of 1927 in need of a steady job. Through an aunt, he was hired as the night manager of the Kenmore Hotel on East 23rd Street; later he took a position at the slightly more upscale Sutton on East 56th. The work wasn't terribly taxing, and he was able to get some writing done in his office. He was also able to lend a hand to some of the literary friends he was making. By providing free rooms to writers like Lillian Hellman, Dashiell Hammett, James T. Farrell, and Erskine Caldwell, West supported the arts and began accumulating favors and goodwill.

He began spending the majority of his time in the company of other writers. Along with friends from college, including his brother-in-law S.J. Perelman, the aspiring author explored Greenwich Village, running into E.E. Cummings and Edmund Wilson. Through Perelman, who had begun writing for The New Yorker, he was also introduced to Dorothy Parker and other contributors to the magazine. Unlike Parker's midtown circle,

¹⁵The film industry during the studio era wanted to provide its patrons with "An Evening's Entertainment" (Kozarski), and at higher priced houses, in major American

who wore their love of money on their sleeves, the downtown crowd had the air of pursuing art for art's sake. West was attracted to the Village community. As with Paris, however, he had the feeling that he'd arrived too late. The real action was already over. Once a hotbed for progressivism and experimental lifestyles and literature in the teens,¹⁶ by the late twenties the neighborhood had begun to gentrify. Bohemian-themed restaurants opened up for business, catering to tourists and slummers.

Walking through Greenwich Village reminded West that once big business finds something original, they reproduce it as quickly as possible. In another unpublished story, "Mr. Potts of Pottstown," West's American hero arrives at the Swiss Alps expecting a natural high, a peak experience. But when he sees a boy from home dressed as a yodeler, he gets him to confess that Switzerland has become "nothing but a fake, an amusement park owned by a very wealthy company. The whole show is put on for the tourist trade -- lakes, forests, glaciers, yodelers, peasants, goats, milkmaids, mountains and the rest of it. It's all scenery" (441). This story demonstrates its author's reservations about multi-national capitalism, but at this early point in his career West, although left-leaning, wasn't as politically active as many of his peers. This would slowly begin to change, culminating in his final years in Hollywood as a union leader, but when Mike Gold tried to inspire him to write for Socialist magazines like The New Masses in the late 1920's, he wasn't interested (Jay Martin 113). At this point, he wanted to make some money as a writer, not write about how money was unequally distributed.

cities, it wasn't uncommon to put on a play to warm up the crowd for the feature that followed.

During the same time in late decade that Nathanael West was trying to weave his way into the New York literary community, F. Scott Fitzgerald was trying to ingratiate himself into the Los Angeles film community. In addition to picking up a truckload of money as a screenwriter, Fitzgerald was also hoping to collect material for a Hollywood novel. This new project, set on the Riviera, concerned a troubled young motion picture technician named Francis Melarky who murders his mother. Fitzgerald told his agent Harold Ober to start fielding offers from the studios, and in January of 1927 -- the month West returned from Paris -- Scott made his first trip to Hollywood. He was paid a \$3500 advance to write a silent film script¹⁷ for United Artists called Lipstick attached to the star Constance Talmadge. If the screenplay was accepted, he would collect another \$12,500 (Brucoli Some Sort 259). The script wasn't accepted, and after spending three months going to parties, pulling pranks with Zelda like grabbing the purses of their guests and boiling them in a pot, drinking and dining with Hollywood power-players, making a screen test, and flirting with the ingénue Lois Moran, Fitzgerald returned home having spent more than the \$3500 he'd made. Reflecting on the experience a decade later, Fitzgerald, who always elevated contrition to an art form, told his daughter what went wrong:

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...Hollywood made a big fuss over us and the ladies all looked

¹⁶See Christine Stansell's American Moderns for an excellent examination of this exciting time in New York City history.

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. (Letters 16).

While Fitzgerald may have at one time been the most popular serious writer in America, it's doubtful that he was ever generally regarded as the most serious. To many literary critics of the time, even to his pal Edmund Wilson,¹⁸ he was just too popular and too sentimental to be taken too seriously. But beyond this, his letter to Scottie is valuable in that it shows that Fitzgerald realized early on that writing for the screen wouldn't be easy, and that it was conceited of him to believe it would be. He had tried to "write down" to the screen, and had produced an unacceptable piece of work. Beyond this, the letter also demonstrates Scott Fitzgerald's career-long examination of -- and his reflections on -- his own talent, fame, and work ethic.

As a young man, he had fought "desperately hard" to become a professional writer, to master his own distinctive style, and to develop a literary reputation. The "Lipstick" experience taught him he'd have to approach film writing the same way. By regarding the screenplay as a easier form to master than the novel, and not thinking he'd need to break a sweat to succeed at it, Fitzgerald had committed a hubristic error, one to which he freely admits. This feeling that he could write film scripts in his sleep, along

¹⁷ In 1926, the Vitaphone was introduced, making synch sound cinematically possible, but it took several years for sound film to become the standard in Hollywood.

¹⁸ Wilson often thought his friend Fitzgerald's writing was too emotional, too slick, and not detached enough: "you might become a very popular trashy novelist without much difficulty" he warned Scott in the mid 1920s (Some Sort 274).

with his nagging fear that -- like The Beautiful and Damned's Richard Caramel -- he was some sort of literary idiot savant,¹⁹ could explain Fitzgerald's "delusion" that he was "some sort of magician with words," but Hollywood films themselves deserve part of the blame.

American films depend upon an illusion of effortlessness. As critic David Bordwell points out, Hollywood's "invisible style" hides the fact that the movie is something made, something created with hands and hammers and machines. If Fitzgerald truly were a "magician with words," the scripts really would write themselves "with no effort on his part," just as Mickey Mouse in Fantasia would soon make the mops do the mopping for him. In the end, the 1927 trip had disabused Fitzgerald of the notion that screenwriting required less effort than fiction writing. He may have been a seasoned novelist, but working behind the scenes had taught him that he was only an apprentice screenwriter. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, he had learned that he still had a lot to learn.

But adapting to the form would still prove harder than he anticipated, especially since the genre didn't play to his strengths. Good film scripts are about structure, not lyricism. Fitzgerald's self-proclaimed "colorful prose style," one that favors description over dramatization, was a liability in Hollywood. Even his most ardent admirers admit his novels reveal him to be a better stylist than a constructionist, a "weakness" the 1922 review of Grit had singled out. Only when the plot is in place, only when the film's outline is traced, can the coloring begin. In cinema, the image, not the words, must be

¹⁹ A slight that has been attributed to both Edna St. Vincent Millay and Edmund Wilson compares Fitzgerald's heaven-sent talent to "a foolish old woman to whom someone has entrusted a diamond."

colorful, and those on set -- during the studio era that group did not include the writer -- see to that. Throughout Fitzgerald's movie-writing career, his scripts would be criticized for not being filmic enough, for lacking a feel for screen rhythm, and for having a tin ear for the sound of spoken dialogue. In the film Beloved Infidel (1958), based on Sheilah Graham's memoir, a movie executive looks at one of Fitzgerald's scripts and shakes his grey head in frustration. "How do you photograph adjectives!?", he finally exclaims, echoing the sentiments of many of his real-life counterparts in studio front offices.

Where Fitzgerald was willing to study movie writing and the film industry in the late 1920s, Dorothy Parker couldn't be bothered. She had no interest in the medium. As she wrote in The New Yorker in November of 1927: "I attend no movies, for any motion picture theater is as an enlarged lethal chamber to me" (The Portable 465). A few months after these words appeared, MGM hired the woman their press release mistakenly called "the author of 'Too Much Rope', the popular novel."²⁰ Arriving in Hollywood in the spring of 1928, she signed a three month contract at \$300 a week, was told she'd be writing dialogue for a project called Madame X, and was pointed towards her office. She received no further instructions. According to Parker, after two weeks or so of doing nothing she went and sought out the film's producer. He didn't know who she was or what she was doing there, so she flew back to New York (Meade 183-194, Frewin 128).

Unlike Fitzgerald, Parker never saw herself as a magician with words. She made no secret of the fact that writing was difficult for her: "I can't write five words but that I change seven" (quoted in The Writer's Quotation Book 47). When she missed deadlines, a

²⁰ 1926's Enough Rope is a book of collected poems.

regular occurrence, her excuse was often: "Someone else was using the pencil" (Silverstein 32). Although Parker didn't like the paperwork, she did, however, like being a writer, and nowhere in the American 1920s were writers more valued than in New York City. Drawn to the limelight of cafe society and to expensive things, her main objective during the Jazz Age was, she said, "to be smarty and cute and hang with the boys" (quoted in Lee 76). But Parker's mind was as sharp as her tongue. She was an excellent book reviewer. While she was often dismissive of her own career and her own writing, she took the writing of others very seriously. Her New Yorker columns, signed "The Constant Reader," possess the world-weary, sophisticated voice that is part of her image, but they also show what a fine -- and funny -- literary judge she can be. Nancy Walker writes that Parker "derives her authority precisely from seeming not to be one at all, projecting personae composed of enthusiasms, prejudices, and personal quirks" (7). Parker's judgments could often be scathing; she tore apart Elinor Glyn and said that reading Milne's House at Pooh Corner made "Tonstant Weader Fwow up" (Portable 518), but her praise for work that met her high standards -- Andre Gide, Ernest Hemingway, Upton Sinclair -- was often effusive. The writer Fran Lebowitz has said that Parker's "best stuff" was her novel reviews and that writing intelligently about books is "really a much rarer talent than being a good short story writer" (Would You Kindly Direct Me to Hell).

Dorothy Parker is not generally regarded as a good short story writer. Regina Barreca writes in her 1995 introduction to the author's Complete Stories: "Parker has been slammed for at least thirty years. One recent critic complains that Parker had 'no disinterestedness, no imagination', and another bows low to introduce Parker with the gallant phrase 'The span of her work is narrow and what it embraces is often slight'" (x).

Dorothy Parker's most famous short story is 1929's "Big Blonde." It's also arguably her best. Like most of her fiction it examines the gap between private and public roles, especially those played by women. Unlike most of Parker's fiction, however, "Big Blonde" contains a fully realized character who changes over time. The price Hazel pays for dropping the "good sport" (105) act is loneliness. The story moves through dramatic action rather than Parker's usual condescending tactic of using the dramatic monologue to force her characters to hang themselves with their own rope. "Big Blonde" is emotionally moving without being as blatantly manipulative or overly sentimental as most of Parker's other work. We sense the pain behind Hazel's "good sport" mask without feeling like we're being solicited to do so.

"Big Blonde," which appeared in the February 1929 edition of the small circulation magazine The Bookman won the O' Henry Award for best short story of the year. FPA, of course, publicized the prize in his column. Amid the buzz over the story, Scott Fitzgerald -- who earlier in the decade had brought Hemingway to Scribner's -- urged Maxwell Perkins to hurry up and offer Dorothy Parker a book contract for the "novelette or novel" she was writing because: "just now she's at a high point as a producer and as to reputation...I wouldn't lose any time about this if I were you" (Letters of FSF 215). Scribner's extended an offer to Parker to send them the novel.

Dorothy Parker didn't have a novel. Her friend Nathanael West, on the other hand, was working on two simultaneously -- with no luck in attracting publisher interest in either one. In late 1929, with a first draft of Balso completed and work on Miss Lonelyhearts underway, he began making plans to join his fiancée, Parker's New Yorker colleague Beatrice Mathieu, in Paris. On his visa, West optimistically listed his

occupation as "writer." But, soon after, thinking it over, he canceled his ticket and broke off the love affair. Jay Martin quotes from a letter to Mathieu in which West tells her he can't go to Paris because he's "yellow ...to try and earn a living writing, hacking, I'd rather work in a hotel" (quoted 119-120). The life of an expatriate hack no longer seemed romantic to West.

But being a domestic hack apparently was a different story. As he sat at his desk at the hotel, collecting a steady paycheck, West began thinking of ways to make some quick bucks as a writer without actually having to write anything. This hack work would allow him to conserve his creative energy for his real work. To this end, he hacked apart an old pile of Field and Stream magazines with a pair of scissors and pasted paragraphs together in new combinations. Then he typed them up and submitted the resulting "new" articles back to Field and Stream. For the literary market, he put passages from Flaubert into free verse and mailed them out to editors under his own name. That these scams might also be viewed as Dadaist artistic statements must have sweetened the potboiling for West, but neither "found" project was purchased. However, in December 1929, he did manage to sell a Bret Harte parody, "A Barefaced Lie," to The Overland Monthly, a magazine Harte had founded. It was West's first professional publication.

Throughout the 1920s, Nathanael West, like many aspiring artists, had flirted with taking an alienated stance and turning his back on money, prestige, and acceptance from the audience -- at least for show, as in his story "The Impostor." Perhaps disinterestedness was the best way to elicit interest. Then again, maybe the whole writing game wasn't worth it. Maybe he should try painting again. He was a member of the New York literary community -- a community that Dorothy Parker ruled over and Hollywood

Prince Budd Schulberg yearned for -- but now he wasn't sure if the life agreed with him or not. Could his prose provide him with a living? Was he a writer who managed a hotel or a hotel manager who wrote on the side? Either way, he was seriously considering becoming a candy manufacturer.²¹

If Nathanael West had grown more disillusioned with his career choice as the decade wore on, F. Scott Fitzgerald had spent the 1920s playing the role he had written for himself in his youth: an author who was beloved, famous, and rich. This member of the "Lost Generation" had actually found his calling early. His first story, "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage," had been published when he was thirteen, and in college he had told Edmund Wilson, "I want to be one of the greatest writers who have ever lived. Don't you?" (quoted in Bruccoli Some Sort 70). He was fond of pointing out to Wilson that the only names we knew from the Elizabethan Age were those of authors. Fitzgerald believed in the writer as hero of the people; he believed in what John Guillory derides in Cultural Capital as the "fantasy...that literary culture is the site at which the most socially important beliefs and attitudes are produced" (152). Yet Fitzgerald's time in Hollywood -- perhaps a better candidate for Guillory's above-mentioned "site" -- had tempted him with the possibility of becoming even more celebrated, even more influential, and even more rich.

²¹ According to friends, West's prototype for "cactus candy" tasted terrible (Martin 106).

Chapter Two: 1931-1932

At the end of 1931, Nathanael West was an Ivy-League educated young man with a beautiful fiancée, a host of literary friends, a debut novel recently published by a respected house, and another, more ambitious book nearing completion. If, from these angles, the portrait resembles Scott Fitzgerald of exactly a decade earlier, a closer look reveals a different picture. This Side of Paradise is a *kunstlerroman*, the story of an artist finding his powers and making his way in the world; West's The Dream Life of Balso Snell is an anti-*kunstlerroman*, the story of the futility of the literary vocation. This Side of Paradise (originally called The Romantic Egoist) celebrates the uniqueness of self; Balso calls the concept of a unified self into question. The publishers behind these two novels were also worlds apart. Scribner's carried a long and impressive publishing history before releasing Fitzgerald's debut, and continues on in that tradition to this day. Contact Editions, the Paris-based press Robert McAlmon had founded in the 1920s, had published a distinguished list of high modernist books over the decade, including works from Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound. But the Contact Editions that published The Dream Life of Balso Snell was run by two bookstore clerks who had borrowed the name from McAlmon. West's book was their first title, and it would also be their last.

A peek at Scott Fitzgerald's life in the closing days of 1931 might also reveal a misleading picture. Many Fitzgerald critics write about this time as if the author's career, finances, talent, and hopes had been lost in the stock market crash. James Mellow's biographical portrait of Scott and Zelda, for instance, devotes 350 pages to the 1920s and

only 100 pages to the 1930s. Biographer Andre LeVot's gloomy chapter titles for Fitzgerald's life circa 1931 and 1932 are "The Beginning of the End" and "Illusions and Depressions."

It had been six years since The Great Gatsby, so the story goes, and throughout the late twenties Fitzgerald had been working sporadically on the project that would become Tender Is the Night. But his chronic drinking and Zelda's madness kept getting in the way. LeVot informs us that when the sirens of Hollywood called, Fitzgerald felt compelled to answer: "His moral conscience would be stronger than his artistic conscience. He would prostitute his talent and kill himself doing it to pay the bills for Zelda, Scottie, and himself" (263). This Hollywood trip, like the last, says LeVot, was a failure: "he had again been humiliated" (264). When Fitzgerald returned East, he immediately got to work on a fictionalized account of the humiliation he had suffered.

But LeVot has it backwards. Fitzgerald hadn't been humiliated in Hollywood; he had humiliated himself, as both the genesis of "Crazy Sunday" and the short story itself make plain. If it comes as a surprise that West's first novel undermines its own status as a first novel, it may also come as a surprise that "Crazy Sunday," the story of Fitzgerald's 1931 Hollywood trip, is not an outright attack on the movie colony. In fact, it celebrates the graciousness and creativity of many of the artists working there. In truth, Fitzgerald hadn't been humiliated; he had humiliated himself, as both the genesis of "Crazy Sunday" and the short story itself make plain.

Furthermore, contrary to popular myth, Fitzgerald wasn't aching for film money in the early thirties -- although he certainly would be later in the decade. He often called himself a poor custodian of his own talent, but he was an excellent record-keeper and

archivist. In his Ledger, Fitzgerald carefully traced his submissions, publications, and payments. The ledger details that 1931 was financially his best year ever. He made \$37,599, \$31,500 of which came from short stories and \$5,400 of which came from screenwriting (novels, book reviews, and other "literary" work accounted for less than a thousand dollars of his income). He had some debt, but with Zelda stabilized and out of the expensive Swiss sanitarium, even without the film work Fitzgerald would have had a prosperous year, so it can't be said that he went to Hollywood for the money alone. He didn't really need to, as LeVot puts it, "prostitute his talent" for the film industry. Fitzgerald could've stayed home and written short stories for that. As he had recently told Hemingway, "The Post now pays the old whore \$4000 a screw" (A Life in Letters 169).

Even if he were prostituting his writing talent to the Post, he'd still be better off than the writers who populate West's The Dream Life of Balso Snell. In 1931, the professional author F. Scott Fitzgerald clearly possessed the writing income, body of published work, and readership that hotel clerk/aspiring novelist Nathanael West lacked. West had been working on The Dream Life of Balso Snell for nine long years, and his professional anxiety pervades the book. Even if Fitzgerald were prostituting his writing talent to the Post, he'd still be better off than the writers Balso meets on his journey through the digestive tract of the Trojan Horse. Miss McGeeney offers sexual favors in return for editorial advice. St. Puce the Flea takes up residence in Christ's armpit as an imbedded journalist. The Phoenix Excrementi, a race of men who eat themselves and are reborn from their own feces, spew an eternal "diarrhoea of words" (Novels 15).

In the minds of most critics of West's novel, Balso isn't the only one being forced to slum it. Readers are in for an unpleasant experience as well. Harold Bloom, who believes the only 20th Century American novelist to surpass the West of Miss Lonelyhearts is Faulkner, dismisses Balso as "squalid and dreadful" (1). Anna Weinstein, West's own mother, claimed: "all it says is 'stink, stink, stink'" (Jay Martin 227). Deborah Wyrick, one of the book's few defenders, sums up the novel's usual place in the West corpus: "critics agree that it is formless, chaotic, a juvenile pastiche of bathroom jokes, college magazine parody, and borrowings from contemporary avant-garde authors" (157). Wyrick then goes on to make a claim for Balso as a Dadaist minor-masterpiece: "Perhaps, in spite of his own intentions, West's aesthetic sensibilities transform ugly material into a beautiful composition...that, by its very artistry, celebrates that which it wishes to destroy" (164). Wyrick seems to believe that West set out to write a bad book, but was too talented to pull it off. The author himself told A.J. Liebling that "he considered the novel a protest against the writing of books" (quoted in Siegel 4).

But The Dream Life of Balso Snell reads more like a book written to make Nathanael West a writer of books. In other words, the novel's form and content are shaped more by its author's vocational anxiety and inexperience than by his disgust for the literary bent. In Balso, West is stumbling towards finding his voice as a writer. He's also wondering out loud if anyone will be there to listen when he does. While shopping the book to publishers, West knew that Balso was inferior to the project he was working on, Miss Lonelyhearts, but he wanted his name on a book jacket as soon as possible. In an arrangement made with Moss & Kamin, the new owners of Contact Editions, West agreed to subsidize the novel's publication (Jay Martin 124-125). It wasn't technically

vanity publishing, but it was close. Moss & Kamin were New York bookstore owners who had decided to branch out into publishing and distribution. It was a business plan that was a throwback to another era, and it was one that could never work on a mass scale.

Throughout the 18th Century and most of the 19th, it was common for American publishers to do their own printing and selling. But since then, the process had grown more complicated and labor had been divided. Companies like Scribner's, the refined house that published Fitzgerald, had long ago distanced themselves from direct contact with the cash register and the printer's ink. By 1931, in order for books to get from writer to reader, they usually had to travel through agents, primary readers, acquisition editors, copy editors, proofreaders, typesetters, promotion staff, sales staff, wholesalers, and bookstore owners. By contrast, the route for getting Balso to market was much simpler. Nathanael West had no agent yet and David Moss had no editorial staff. Moss asked William Carlos Williams, another friend of the book shop and its owners, to critique West's manuscript, and on the strength of his favorable report it was accepted for publication.

Before the book even hit the shelves, West, like Scott Fitzgerald a decade earlier, began practicing the art of self-promotion, ghostwriting an advertising leaflet for Balso which marketed the novel's author as -- and here's where West and Fitzgerald part company in their branding strategies -- "vicious, mean, ugly, obscene and insane" ("Through the Hole in the Mundane Millstone" Novels 397). He thought a little scandal might stir up interest in him, if not for the book, and he nudged his friend Julian Shapiro into firing off a letter to a Paris literary magazine complaining about the scathing reviews

the novel was receiving from the Philistines in the New York City press. These reviews, of course, were non-existent.

Five hundred numbered copies of The Dream Life of Balso Snell were printed under the Contact Editions imprint. Two hundred were earmarked for distribution to Europe, and three hundred were released in the United States. Of the domestic product, West guaranteed the sale of one hundred and fifty units. After Dashiell Hammett helped him do a final polish, the book hit the market in August of 1931. Numbers one through fifteen were deluxe bound and cost ten dollars; the rest were priced at three dollars (Jay Martin 124). Although the book was printed in New York City, its title page read "Paris," which connected it to Contact's first incarnation and to the royal line of modernism. The press run sold quickly, since many of the copies were bought by the author himself. At the end of the decade, he would still have some left.

The first numbered copy of the novel, signed by West, had gone to his fiancée, the model Alice Shepard, to whom the book is dedicated. This isn't the gesture of someone writing "as a protest against the writing of books"; it's the romantic behavior of someone who believes in the Romantic cult of the author. Signing the book, declaring intellectual ownership of everything contained within its covers, cements its authorial claim to be an original work of art that is the product of a single mind. But the book's contents question this philosophy. Some of its writer characters steal, mimic, and appropriate the work of others; a few characters "don't know where literature ends" and they begin.

West's novel makes the point that the texts produced by authors aren't the products of individual creators alone. All writing is the result of a variety of factors: the psychological and emotional state of the writer, the writer's notions of what writing is and

what it does, the writer's notions of audience, the political and social environments in which the writing occurs, the aesthetic and economic pressures that encourage (or hinder) the process, and other variables. Balso reminds us that all discourse is, at least in part, socially constructed. Books are written by authors who intend to ascribe meanings into the texts they produce, sure, but these authors are also people who exist in historical, psychological and cultural frameworks and contexts

Every writer in Balso writes towards an unknowable -- yet achingly desired -- audience. (42). West's title character, like his creator, is a writer who dreams of getting his voice heard over the screaming of competing authorial voices. This battle exists on two fronts: in the writer's head and in the frenzy of the marketplace. West described the book as a series of "elephantine close-ups of various literary positions and their technical methods" ("Through the Hole...." 398), and the novel's structure, such as it is, follows this pattern. However, in ways West did not intend, the novel reminds us that "elephantine" can mean both "large and powerful" and "ponderously clumsy." When West has his title character proclaim: "Interesting psychologically, but is it art? I'd give you a B minus and a good spanking" (22), he seems to be self-reflexively speaking about the book itself. In its randomness and frenetic pacing, in its rejection of the belief that art can edify us, Balso reads more like a diary transcription of an anxiety (of influence) dream than a pointed attack on the Western canon.

The writers Balso meets in his nightmare morph into other writers who engender still more writer characters. There are dreams within dreams; stories within stories; journals within journals; discourses within discourses. Like a set of Chinese boxes of the unconscious, everyone is a figment of someone else's imagination and ego. Everyone in the

novel speaks and writes in voices that aren't their own. It serves to remind us that behind every named author stands multiple sources and influences both implicit and explicit, a complex web of intertextuality. To take one example, Beagle's letters, in which he imitates Hemingway without mentioning him by name, are written by McGeeney, who vocalizes her desire to imitate Fielding. Not only do writers weigh themselves against their contemporaries, Balso demonstrates, but those serious about their art often also measure how they stack up against those who have come before. With no clear set of objective criteria to go by, no system of separating the hack from the maestro, this self-examination can be unnerving. As West's friend James T. Farrell once remarked, "If you read the lives and letters of writers, you will find that virtually every one of them was often a victim of moods of depression and that they had many anxieties about their own writing. Joseph Conrad used to read Flaubert and he would feel that there was no use" ("Letter to a Young Writer" 161).

The Dream Life of Balso Snell is West's attempt to wrest himself away from his literary mothers and fathers, but not before claiming he's their equal. The above mentioned letter West's friend Julian Shapiro wrote to the Paris-based literary magazine The New Review, defending the book from scathing reviews that didn't exist, a document West certainly had a hand in, cleverly uses shaky logic and some quick name-dropping to put the book in good high modernist company: "Mr. Pound recently wrote in one of your issues that Mr. Joyce had complained that no reviewer had ever said he enjoyed Ulysses. Well, the same's true here. West's book is at least funny, but no one has written about that" (quoted in Siegel 47).

This statement manages to have it both ways. It compares the novella to a 20th Century masterpiece (on the wide basis that no critic said it was pleasurable reading¹), and elevates Balso above it because, unlike Ulysses, "West's book is at least funny." Shapiro is claiming that West mixes the highbrow intellectual seriousness of Joyce with a dash of lowbrow comedic entertainment. In fact, some of Balso's attempts at humor come at Joyce's expense. Parodies of him begin and end the novel. Before entering the Trojan Horse, Balso delivers a Stephen Dedalus-like prayer: "O Beer! O Meyerbeer! O Bach! O Offenbach! Stand me now as ever in good stead" (Novels 5). In the sex scene that closes the novel, Miss McGeeney swoons in a Molly Bloomian reverie: "Mooooompicher yaaaah...yes, yes. Drag me down into the mire, drag. Yes!" (53). By mocking Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses, West is saying he's ready to take him on. And the same goes for Stein, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Hemingway,² Freud, Rimbaud, Swift, Huysmans, Gorky, Rabelais, and others. West's sucker punches at artists like Joyce, Stein and Rimbaud, all of whom his friend Edmund Wilson helped canonize in Axel's Castle, published the same year as Balso, are bold challenges to be included in their ranks. In an effort to find his own voice, he apes their styles.

The results will start paying dividends in West's later novels, books more accomplished than Balso. The hard boiled prose of Hemingway and Hammett that Beagle Darwin slips into in his second series of letters -- passages where the attitude is tough

¹The only "authentic" review the book received, a mixed one from V.N. Garofolo that appeared in the literary journal Contempo run by West's friends, concedes that despite its shortcomings Balso "makes for excellent reading" (Siegel 45).

² Hemingway's first novel, The Torrents of Spring, was Ernest's attempt to exorcise the influence of Sherwood Anderson by satirizing him.

and the description spare -- later becomes the comic tone of Miss Lonelyhearts. And the notes of the mock heroic struck during Balso's journey sound a lot like A Cool Million will. Throughout the novella, despite its choir of voices, the individual timbre of much of West's recognizable style is present, especially his flair for mixing highbrow allusions and gross-out comedy. But more importantly, at least for our purpose here, within the pages of Balso West begins to explore many of the issues that would shape his later work and career, particularly the role of the artist in society.

An early draft of the novel opened with Kurt Schwitters' Dadaist motto: "Tout ce que l'artiste crache, c'est l'art." This sounds liberating, especially in French. After all, if everything the artist spits out is art, so is Balso. But West is also aware of the pitfalls inherent in the German artist's proclamation. If everything the artist spits out is art, does that mean everyone is an artist? Especially since, as we saw earlier in "The Impostor" and The Beautiful and Damned, there are no regulations on who can call themselves one. If everyone is a writer, then no one is a writer.

The horse's ass Balso Snell travels through is inhabited solely by "writers in search of an audience" (34). And as B.S. quickly realizes, they're all full of shit, some of them literally so. He's constantly being forced to read their tales, to pay them attention, to pay them money, to listen to "a diarrhoea of words" (15). But shit begets shit. If all art is waste material, no matter how sublime, then the book itself must be waste material. Every book, says library employee John Gilson, eventually end up smelling "like the breaths of the authors...like a closet full of old shoes through which a steam pipe passes" (17). Instead of being a pristine and timeless monument, the printed word in the world of the novel is transitory and decaying, read not by scholars and young aspiring writers but

by people looking for "pornography and facts about strange diseases." It's all disposable, all trash.³ Each time someone gives Balso something to read, he scans it quickly and tosses it away.

West's anxiety that the market was already flooded with books unpurchased and unread was justified. O.H. Cheney's 1931 economic survey of the American publishing industry, for example, called for a cease fire in the "excessive numbers of titles" (89) being released. With so many titles to choose from, many books and their authors were going unread. People were reading more than ever before, and more was being written than ever before, but this didn't translate into sales for experimental fiction like West's novel, especially during a time of economic depression, when the avant-garde gets hit the hardest for lack of sponsors. The early 1930s was a tough time to begin a career as a literary novelist, especially since the chasm between middle class and highbrow reading tastes was growing ever more vast. As Gertrude Stein pronounced, only in the 19th century could a serious artist make a living writing. In the 18th century there were too few readers, in the 20th there were too many, and "too few is as many as too many" (quoted in Fischer ii).

On the other hand, there's evidence that West believed that the fewer the readers and the lower the economic gain, the greater the artistic profit.

Throughout his career he complained about not being able to make a living from his fiction. But unlike Fitzgerald, who consciously produced dumbed down and "jazzy"

³Djuna Barnes, who met West at Shakespeare & Co. in Paris and also published a book with Contact Editions, demanded that a special hardback edition of her novel Nightwood be printed on paper that would last a thousand years. When this proved ridiculously expensive, her publisher, James Laughlin at New Directions, got her to settle for five hundred years (Plimpton 323).

stories like "The Offshore Pirate" (Correspondence 71), at no point did West attempt to make his fiction more commercial. A letter to the editor that appeared in the October 20, 1931 edition of The New York World-Telegram, gives us an insight into Nathanael West's vocational philosophy:

I have had some experience with the little magazine and think that such a statement as the one recently made by Mr. Frank Shay in connection with Contempo ought not to pass unchallenged.

When he wrote about "panhandling magazines," he was taking a crack at one of the few decent things in American letters. Apparently he is unacquainted with their sponsors and ignorant of the purpose they serve.

As to the sponsors, it would be hard to find greater idealists in the literary world. Invariably they have spent money and given time to what they knew from the start was to be a losing venture. As to purpose, the little magazine in the past has found audiences for such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Ben Hecht, Ernest Hemingway...

Surely the unpaid writer for that type of magazine has little to complain of, since he and "litrachoor" -- but never the sponsors -- get anything out of it.

(Jay Martin 769-770)

The little magazine West claims experience with, the place of authority he speaks from, is the second coming of the 1920s Paris literary journal Contact, which was gearing up to

put out its first new issue under the sponsorship of Moss & Kamin. The rebirth of Contact would be taking place without the assistance of one of its founding editors, Robert McAlmon, but the other, William Carlos Williams, had accepted Moss & Kamin's offer to run the magazine. Because he had been impressed with The Dream Life of Balso Snell, Williams had asked West to assist him in reviving the journal. This was the opportunity -- and the validation -- West had been waiting for.

The readers most coveted by Balso's writers are other writers, since they are the ones most likely to keep a literary reputation alive. For example, Miss McGeeney wants to write the biography of the man who wrote the biography of the man who wrote the biography of the man who wrote the biography of the man who wrote the biography of Boswell. She hopes another writer will take the hint. Similarly, recognition from an esteemed writer like Williams and an invitation from him to join a literary magazine made West feel like part of something. Jay Martin writes: "It is true, certainly, that by virtue of the publication of a book by Contact Editions, West could claim a very distinguished and special place in the literary fellowship. But the associate editorship of Contact was even more tangible evidence that he was gaining a special place among his fellow writers" (144). West eagerly set to work compiling a historical bibliography of the little magazine, placing Contact II -- and by extension, himself -- into a distinguished tradition.

Although there's no system of credentials for becoming a writer, as there is for entering the dental profession or the carpenter's union, with a newly released novel and an editorial position at a literary magazine that had introduced many Americans to modernism, it can be said that Nathanael West had now become a full standing member of the club. It was understood that he would be doing most of the actual labor in putting

Contact II together -- the running around, the calling, the collecting. And obviously, he'd be doing it all for free. But it wasn't about the money. Even though he couldn't make a living at literature, he was a published author who was quickly developing a reputation as a "writer's writer," an artist whose poor sales his friends took to be evidence of the purity of his intentions. With each new commercial failure, West would become an even greater success.

In The Beautiful and Damned Anthony claims that authors write because it's their "mode of living," the way they make their money. In Balso Snell, on the other hand, Beagle writes because "literature has deeply dyed" his brain "its own color" (Novels 42). His fellow writer John Gilson knows that art is probably a dead end, yet "Because of some great need I am forced to make the attempt" (17). As it is with his characters, writing wasn't simply a way for West to try to make money; it was his vocation and identity. He was compelled to write despite economic uncertainty and audience apathy. He was well aware that public recognition usually never comes -- if it does, it's usually after death. In fact, as his "little magazine" letter to The New York World-Telegram shows, West was now more convinced than ever that the less the financial return, the greater the nobility of the artistic venture.

In October of 1931, the month that Nathanael West was asked to work on the literary magazine Contact II for free, F. Scott Fitzgerald was offered \$750 a week to work at the Hollywood studio MGM. A year earlier, Fitzgerald "had a hunch that the

talkies would make even the best selling novelist as archaic as silent pictures" (The Crack Up 78), and he wondered if screenwriting could help him reach a larger audience. The medium's power and influence could no longer be denied, and a tour of duty in Los Angeles would provide him the added benefit of soaking up material for his new book -- if he ever finished writing it -- which throughout its false starts had dealt with Hollywood to varying degrees. When MGM came calling, Fitzgerald decided to do what any professional writer would do -- he tested his market value by holding out for more money. That November, Fitzgerald accepted a \$1200 a week Hollywood contract, placing the author on one of the top rungs of the screenwriter pay scale (As Ever 178-180).

Upon his arrival in California, Fitzgerald was assigned to work on Red-Headed Woman, a project being adapted from Katherine Brush's best-selling novel. MGM, the "Tiffany Studio" that touted itself as the richest and most prestigious outfit in town, had the desire and the capital to pursue "pre-sold" properties, like Brush's, that had first been successful in other media. It made good market sense. Films adapted from novels, plays, and short stories had a built-in audience of those who had enjoyed the originals, and a larger potential audience of those who recognized the title of the source material. Most authors, like Fitzgerald himself, were happy to sell the screen rights to their fiction, and equally happy to disown what had been done to them. This also made good market sense. Novels and short stories carried the outward signature of one name alone, so most of the praise or blame for these products was directed at the author. But adaptation allowed for scapegoats. If the adaptation was successful, the author of the source material could claim all the credit. If not, Fitzgerald joked with his aunt and uncle: "you can always say, 'Oh,

they put on the movie in a different spirit from the way it was written!"

(Correspondence 466).

But not all authors were as willing as Fitzgerald to separate themselves from film adaptations of their work. A 1931 court case that pitted Theodore Dreiser against Paramount Pictures illustrates the extent to which studios controlled the properties they bought, and how little they cared about the alleged sacrosanctity of source material. Dreiser was deeply unhappy with the film that had been made from his An American Tragedy. He had liked the script prepared by Sergei Eisenstein in the late twenties, but B.P. Schulberg, Paramount's head of production, had found it unfilmable. The new creative team assigned to revive the project, Dreiser believed, had bastardized his novel. A psychological study of a man's decline had been turned into nothing but a murder plot, and Dreiser wanted to stop the picture from being released (Hamilton 53-56). With the courtroom as his stage, the publicity loving author rose to his feet, banged his fists on the desk, and hollered that art and the artist were under attack. After telling him to sit down, and telling him again, the judge ruled in favor of the studio, declaring: "In the preparation of the picture the producer must give consideration to the fact that the great majority of the people comprising the motion picture audience will be more interested in justice prevailing over wrongdoing than that the inevitability of Clyde's end clearly appear" (quoted in Swanberg 454).

The judge's words are true enough. But producers and adaptors have more to consider than the sophistication levels of the respective audiences for motion pictures and print literature; they must also take into account the differences in the two media. Joseph Bloeckman makes exactly this point in Fitzgerald's The Beautiful and Damned. "So many

novels are full of talk and psychology," he says. "It's impossible to make much of that interesting on the screen." The movies want "plots first" he tells Caramel and Patch (96). Adapting a work of literature often necessitates cutting everything that doesn't drive the story forward. To get back to the Dreiser example, moviemakers and moviegoers alike are more interested in what happens to Clyde than they are in why it happens to Clyde. In a visual medium, action sheds light on character -- not the other way around. Novels can be contemplative, but films must be immediate. Individual readers consume a novel at their leisure, with time in between each word, sentence, or chapter to stop for reflection. But films (at least in the days before home video) unfold all at once and must move an audience en masse.

On the historical level, the Dreiser affair makes clear that studio properties were produced and marketed towards attracting the largest audience possible. In 1931, that audience appeared to be shrinking. Hollywood was beginning to feel the Depression. Over sixty percent of the American population, about seventy million people, still went to the movies every week, but that was ten million fewer than the year before. The price of an average ticket had fallen from thirty cents to twenty cents, but films themselves were getting more expensive to make (Balio 13). With sound becoming standard, and times getting tougher, Hollywood felt it could no longer afford to aim films at narrow markets. Many more people had heard of An American Tragedy than had read it, and these people couldn't care less if it was faithful to the book. Like Sister Carrie (1900) before it, the novel had a reputation for being "lurid," and that was enough to arouse public curiosity about the film version.

Red-Headed Woman had a similar risqué appeal. MGM cast Jean Harlow in the title role, and Charles Boyer would play the chauffeur she gleefully runs away with after leaving a wake of destruction behind her.⁴ At first, Fitzgerald seemed like a good choice to write the screenplay, since Brush's source novel imitates his themes and style. It's filled with gin-soaked "new women" who sin without being punished and contains lyrical passages which simultaneously deride the rich and glorify them. Sam Marx, the young story editor at MGM, admired Fitzgerald and hoped he could provide characterization for the script, and something even more important -- spoken dialogue (Taylor, "Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood" 68).

Since 1927, the year The Jazz Singer was released and the last time Fitzgerald had been in Hollywood, sound had become standard. To help decide who would be speaking and what they would say, the studios began offering contracts to "talk men" from the East Coast -- novelists, dramatists, comedians, newspapermen, copywriters, songwriters, and press agents. As he began working on the "Red" script, Fitzgerald hoped that this screenwriting experience would be more satisfying than the previous one. But as he recalled to Scottie years later: "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 gypped out of command. I wrote the picture and he changed as I wrote. I tried to get at Thalberg but was erroneously warned against it as 'bad taste'. Result -- a bad script" (Letters 16-17).

⁴The film still pops up at film festivals and on TV as an example of "Forbidden Hollywood." Soon after its release, the film production code, enforced by the movie

If novelists expected deference and hero worship in Hollywood, they were soon disabused of that notion. Screenwriting old hands like Marcel de Sano, who had recently been promoted to director, often resented newcomers like Scott Fitzgerald. Furthermore, accepting a studio contract placed authors into a structure and hierarchy where time and function were measured, institutionalizing a process that was supposed to be creative. Writers, used to being on their own, were asked to assume work roles that served studio needs. They found themselves within an industry that had divided its labor and routinized its work sequences. Each studio was organized around hierarchies of power designed to squeeze maximum value out of employees and the physical plant itself. Writers were often expected to punch clocks and put in a full day. If the typewriter stopped clacking, if you took a few moments to think over the next plot point or bit of dialogue, a producer might poke his head into your office and ask why you weren't working. Jack Warner at Warner Bros. believed his writers were lollygaggers and often used binoculars to spy on them from his office window.

At MGM, where Fitzgerald worked, the atmosphere was more genteel, but the product was more expensive, and therefore more hands were involved in assembling it -- beginning with the script. Aaron Latham writes of the Red-Headed Woman screenplay: "All that remains of the work which Fitzgerald did for Thalberg is an unfinished seventy-six page script, the one de Sano reworked" (63). Fitzgerald claimed in his letter to Scottie that he himself "wrote the picture." But even had he worked on the script solo, it still would have only been a blueprint for the picture. Fitzgerald struggled with the fact that

industry's self-censoring board, began to get a lot more strict, and women like Lil "Red" Andrews were denied happy endings.

scripts are sketches, parts of a larger whole, invitations to collaborate rather than stand-alone works of art.

In addition to having difficulties with the screenwriter's craft, he also had troubles with the screenwriter's function. Fitzgerald had learned his lesson in the 1920s about how much practice and study it would take to write a good screenplay, but he would never learn to be a team player or respect a chain-of-command. It's somewhat ironic that he would think of going to Thalberg to complain, and that he would come to admire him so much. As the head of production at the richest studio in Hollywood, Thalberg was the architect of the MGM screenwriting system that Fitzgerald so hated, a system soon adopted on the other lots. The policy of multiple writers working on a single script -- in collaboration, in competition, in pieces -- was Thalberg's idea. He believed that pitting writers against one another caused them to do their best work. Once an individual or a team produced a finished script, that script, in whole or in part, was often sent to other writers to be rewritten. The rule of thumb appeared to be that the more people working on a film, and more money spent on it, the better the finished product.

Producers, working with relative independence but ultimately accountable to a central producer like Thalberg at MGM or Jack Warner at Warner Bros. or Daryl Zanuck at Fox, often took the best from each contributor and put together the shooting script. Here the writer's contribution ended. Once the film went into production, writers were assigned to another project or fired. Following the same pattern, once the movie was shot and moved into post-production for editing, the director was usually shuffled to another sound stage. The studio system operated like an assembly line, and in 1931, the year that Ford made its 20 millionth car, the film production machine was humming. That this

system resulted in many wonderful films and a studio lot that was busy one hundred and sixty-eight hours a week there is no doubt. But behind the practical efficiency lay a will to power. Screen credits were sometimes withheld out of spite or granted to secretaries or lovers on a whim. In an attempt to make the assignment of credits more fair, writers like John Henry Lawson and Dudley Nichols tried to start a union in late 1931, but the producers quickly crushed it. Executives wanted labor divided up in such a way that the guiding vision behind individual films remained their own. Fitzgerald couldn't have gotten "gypped out of command" on the Harlow picture. He was never in command.

What Fitzgerald claimed he most hated about screenwriting was having to collaborate. But what he really hated was being forced to work under or alongside men he considered his intellectual inferiors. After all, he had been collaborating his entire career, lest we forget that commercial book publishing is a group enterprise. Maxwell Perkins had convinced him to rewrite the first person narration of This Side of Paradise using the third person point-of-view, and under Perkins' guidance the character of Jay Gatsby had become rounder and more prominent (James West The Making of "This Side of Paradise" 56-60, 90-97). In addition, Fitzgerald often benefited from the advice of other writers. For decades, scholars such as Brucoli, Mitford, and Turnbull have documented the influence that Ernest Hemingway, Edmund Wilson, and Scott's wife Zelda have had on Fitzgerald's work. But for the most part, Scott Fitzgerald viewed these people as his peers. Most of his film collaborators he considered to be beneath him, believing his taste and judgment was superior to theirs.⁵

In Irving Thalberg, Fitzgerald thought he saw a kindred spirit, a former "boy genius" like himself. No Hollywood producer's instincts and judgment were more respected than Thalberg's. He and his wife, actress Norma Shearer, were the closest thing to Hollywood royalty. One Sunday after a week spent on Red-Headed Woman, Fitzgerald went to an afternoon tea party at their home. What happened next would inspire the story "Crazy Sunday."

Nervous about making a bad impression, he began throwing back cocktails. Things devolved after that. Fitzgerald made fun of actor Robert Montgomery's riding breeches. He then told Shearer he wanted to sing his "Dog" song. Ramon Novarro agreed to play the piano. According to writer Dwight Taylor, who had accompanied Fitzgerald to the party, the crowd: "gathered in a half circle near the piano, but not too near, their faces devoid of expression, like people gathered at the scene of an accident" (Joy Ride 243). Fitzgerald's song wasn't funny. At first, the group listened politely, but after the second verse, they grew restless. Taylor recalls that Lupe Velez and John Gilbert booed (244). Some people slipped away, and others soon followed. Thalberg stood across the room, saying nothing. Fitzgerald realized what an ass he'd made of himself, and left the party.

The following day, nursing a hangover and a bad case of regret, he went to the studio commissary and found himself sitting next to Daisy and Violet Hilton -- Siamese twins.⁶ After lunch, Fitzgerald returned to his office. Waiting for him was a telegram from

⁵ In Moving Pictures, Schulberg portrays de Sano as sneaky and backstabbing, but a film genius nonetheless (136-145).

⁶The Hilton sisters, along with their castmates -- pinheads, dwarves, chicken ladies, human skeletons, and giants -- were on the MGM lot filming Freaks (Latham 71).

Norma Shearer that lifted his spirits. It read: "I THOUGHT YOU WERE ONE OF THE MOST AGREEABLE PERSONS AT OUR TEA" (Correspondence 282).

A week later, Fitzgerald was fired.⁷ Aaron Latham, among others, implies that the screenwriter was let go because of the "Tea Party" incident, but this seems unlikely. He had been hired for six weeks, and after five it must have been clear that the script needed some new blood. That's how the system operated. Fitzgerald was replaced on Red-Headed Woman by Anita Loos. Already a fifteen year veteran of the young industry, Loos had a reputation for working quickly, coming up with witty dialogue, and getting a "woman's touch," into her scripts that would appeal to the all-important female audience (who made up the bulk of moviegoers). Thalberg told Loos that: "Scott tried to turn the silly book into a tone poem" (Kiss Hollywood Goodbye 34). The writer had tried to be an author. The employee had tried to be an artist. Loos would receive solo screen credit for Red-Headed Woman. Scott would receive a train ticket back East. He was home in time for Christmas.

Fitzgerald starting writing a story about the experience in early January of 1932, but what emerged wasn't the poison pen letter to Hollywood that might have been expected. In "Crazy Sunday," Fitzgerald's admiration for Irving Thalberg shines through, as does his unwavering belief in the cult of the artist as singular genius. Miles Calman, a prototype for Monroe Stahr of The Last Tycoon, is a maestro trying to remain free from the sticky web of industrial bureaucracy -- a desire clearly not shared by company man Thalberg, Calman's real-life counterpart. Like Cecil B. DeMille or Frank Capra, Calman

is a director who serves as his own producer. He has no supervisor. The vision behind his films is his own, and he has so far been able to fight off interference from Louis B. Mayeresque front office executives like "old Beltzer" (Stories of FSF 411). Like Thalberg and Stahr, Calman is sickly and exhausted, but he refuses to stop working. He must push himself towards greater and greater artistic achievements. When this Hollywood Icarus dies in a plane crash (as Monroe Stahr was ordained to do in the unfinished Tycoon), the screenwriter Joel Coles ruminates on his legacy: "He was the only American born director with both an interesting temperament and an artistic conscience. Meshed in an industry, he had paid with his ruined nerves for having no resilience, no healthy cynicism, no refuge" (416).

Lacking the "healthy cynicism" of a Nathanael West, or even the "unhealthy cynicism" of a Dorothy Parker, Fitzgerald, like Calman, had invested himself heavily in the idealistic belief of the artist as hero. Calman is an artist with the popular touch, much as Fitzgerald viewed himself. Few fiction writers are as autobiographical as Fitzgerald, and in the story "Crazy Sunday" he unabashedly sprinkles his own story, peppered with those of his friends, among the characters. Just as Fitzgerald would pick the brain of Hollywood Prince Budd Schulberg for the character of Cecilia in The Last Tycoon, the screenwriter Joel Coles in "Crazy Sunday" has Dwight Taylor's youth and show business lineage. Taylor was the son of the star Laurette Taylor, and Coles had grown up in the entertainment industry as well: "His mother had been a successful actress; Joel had spent his childhood between London and New York trying to separate the real from the unreal, or at least to keep one guess ahead" (403). Coles writes continuity, which means he

⁷Marcel deSano, Fitzgerald's nemesis, was fired too, Thalberg replaced him with director

works at making all the cobbled pieces of the script fit together. Those assigned to continuity need to have the ability to translate narrative into cinematic terms. It's a marketable skill, but not a very creative one. Despite this, on the whole, Coles likes screenwriting: "He had had what were considered nice assignments since his arrival six months before and he submitted his scenes and sequences with enthusiasm. He referred to himself modestly as a hack but really did not think of it that way" (403).

Accompanying Coles to the party is the "heavy drinking, highly paid," and profligate Nat Keogh, a man with Fitzgerald's c.v. and spending habits. But it's Joel who makes a fool of himself by performing an inappropriate song at the tea party. This writer among actors then proceeds to impersonate the ethnic accent and comic malapropisms of a respected movie executive. The silence Joel receives from his audience, writes Fitzgerald, is "the resentment of the professional towards the amateur, of the community towards the stranger, the thumbs down of the clan" (407). Despite Joel's slip-up, all is forgiven. Like a magical do-over, "Crazy Sunday" transforms Fitzgerald's frustrating screenwriting trip into a fictional one where the writer gains the respect and affection of the patriarchal producer and sleeps with his beautiful, nurturing wife. The primal scene that ends the story couldn't have been scripted any better: When Calman dies, Stella runs into Joel's arms for comfort.

If The Dream Life of Balso Snell shows West dramatizing his vocational fears in the form of a series of nightmarish scenes, "Crazy Sunday" often reads like a laborer's daydream of being invited to move into the CEO's mansion. Yet the two works have a lot in common, especially where the role of the creative artist in society is concerned. In

Jack Conway before shooting on Red-Headed Woman began.

"Crazy Sunday," the writer Joel struggles to "separate the real from the unreal" by staying "one step ahead" (403). In Balso, John Gilson writes in his journal: "If only I could discover the Real. A Real that I could know with my senses...I must devote my whole life to the pursuit of a shadow. It is as if I were attempting to trace with the point of a pencil the shadow of the tracing pencil" (Novels 14-16). Robert Emmet Long writes of the book: "The pretension of art to know what reality is, and thus to raise man above the disorder of his condition, is rejected as a deception and illusion" (34). Artists are supposed to see things that the general public cannot. They are supposed to see things as they really are. But in "Crazy Sunday" Joel Coles gets pulled into the center orbit of the couple he is observing and has to fight hard to separate fact from fiction. For example, when they hear the news of Calman's plane crash, Joel and Stella wrestle with the possibility that the director might have staged it: "This is part of his scheme. He's torturing me. I know he's alive" Stella says. She looks at the telegram "as though it were a black lie" and Joel wonders if Calman is "really dead" (416-417).

"Crazy Sunday" and Balso Snell are both populated by frenzied artists who are always performing, forever pitching, always working an angle. Joel tells Stella: "Everybody's afraid, aren't they?...Everybody watches for everybody else's blunders, or tries to make sure they're with people that'll do them credit" (404). In the following passage, Fitzgerald lets us eavesdrop on the drone of "shop talk," the Hollywoodized version of West's "diarrhoea of words":

There was the endless detail of script revision -- "Instead of a lousy dissolve, we can leave her voice on the sound track and cut to a medium shot of the taxi from Bell's angle

or we can simply pull the camera back to include the station, hold it a minute and then pan to the row of taxis." (411)

Just as Balso's more arcane literary references are meant to shut the reader out, this cinema argot seems meant to confuse us. We're not supposed to be able to make heads or tails of it, and the phrase "endless detail" trivializes the work being done.

But just as West's literary parodies serve to display his erudition and authority, the above passage shows Fitzgerald announcing that he's picked up something about sound film grammar and the concept of asynchronous sound. Fitzgerald and other novelists working as screenwriters in the 1930s needed to learn to take into account things like mise en scene, gesture, music, sound, camera angle, and length of shot. Taken out of context, it's impossible to get the total picture and know what would work best for the scene the screenwriters in "Crazy Sunday" are discussing, but the last option, the "pull back, pause, and pan," is the most seamless way to join the scenes in that it requires camera movement instead of a continuity edit. Furthermore, if it can be done "simply," it probably means it's the right way to convey the visual information within Hollywood's "invisible style." But perhaps more important than all this, the passage shows Scott Fitzgerald thinking about ways to move from scene to scene in a filmic manner.

In addition to an advance in Fitzgerald's film sense, "Crazy Sunday" continues a darkening in the tenor of his writing that had begun in recent stories such as "One Trip Abroad" and "Babylon Revisited." This change in tone wasn't good for Fitzgerald commercially, but artistically it produced some of his best work. No one is better at writing about disappointment, disillusionment and loss. Here he describes a 1931 trip to the roof of the Empire State Building:

Full of vaunting pride the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was not the endless succession of canyons that he had supposed but that it had limits -- from the tallest structure he saw for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless. And with the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not the universe, the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground. (The Crack Up 32)

This note of wistfulness in the author's prose was increasingly being viewed by magazine editors as too somber and unglamorous. After years of crafting stories for quick market sale, Fitzgerald appeared to be writing from his heart rather than his checkbook. Ober was still placing most of his work, and he supported the darker direction Fitzgerald's fiction was taking, but it was getting harder to find a home for it. "Crazy Sunday" was no exception. Redbook passed on the story. The Saturday Evening Post, once Fitzgerald's cash cow, rejected it on the grounds that its ending was too unexpected. Cosmopolitan, owned by William Randolph Hearst, also declined (Piper 167). Finally, George Jean Nathan and H.R. Mencken's American Mercury took the story, falsely promoting it -- on Fitzgerald's advice -- as a piece written for Cosmopolitan that was killed by Hearst because of its unflattering portrayal of his colleagues in the movie business (Correspondence 295).

The American Mercury -- like West and Williams' Contact II -- was free from the pressure of having to appease conglomerates and soap advertisers. Consequently, though, neither magazine operated at a profit and neither paid its authors very well. Fitzgerald

received \$200 for "Crazy Sunday," a fraction of what he usually commanded for a piece. Yet he didn't seem to mind. He knew the story was of the first rank. He knew it was "litrachoor," as West's letter in defense of little magazines had accented the word. "It's a little too good for the popular magazines" Fitzgerald wrote to Mencken about the story (Correspondence 295).

It's worth pointing out that the "little" when referring to "little magazines" like Contact II or The American Mercury doesn't refer to payment or paper size -- it refers to the number of readers being targeted. Both magazines enjoyed a literate and sophisticated reading audience -- one that consisted almost solely of other writers. Mencken's editorial policy of bashing the middle class, coupled with a high cover price, assured that his audience in the Depression heartland would be small. Likewise, Contact II's mission to publish a distinctly American modernist literature (Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams 125) -- and its inability to define what exactly what that meant⁸ -- assured that it would have trouble attracting contributors, not to mention attracting readers. After three issues, the magazine folded. But not before publishing several excerpts from the novel that soon would become West's Miss Lonelyhearts. Williams wrote Contact II's eulogy, saying that it had at least "given birth to at least one excellent writer who would not otherwise have had means to develop. Contact has produced N. West. Now it can die...[West's writing] would offend the paying subscribers if it appeared in the large monthly magazines. Which makes one wonder if they will ever let it enter their consciousness" ("A New American Writer" 49-50).

The publisher Contact Editions and the magazine Contact II had given birth to an excellent new author, but both of these parents were now dead, and neither had left West a financial inheritance. To make matters worse, his hotel job, his security blanket, was in jeopardy. With no "paying subscribers" for his novels and stories, the very fear he had tried to face in The Dream Life of Balso Snell come to life, how would West make a living? A flippant letter he had written to Williams in May of 1932 as they were putting together the final issue of the magazine would prove to be a harbinger of things to come: "Business is lousy and my company is close to bankruptcy. New money has to be raised or I guess I'll have to go to Hollywood or start a Brook Farm experiment and wait for THE REVOLUTION" (Novels 776-777). In December of 1932 West and some friends bought an 83-acre farm in Erwinna, Pennsylvania. West planned to live there and devote himself to writing full time. The events of 1933 and 1934, however, would soon force him to resort to plan B -- going to Hollywood and writing the screenplays for B movies.

⁸For an examination of Contact II's struggles to find its purpose and identity, see Chapter Three of Jonathan Veitch's American Superrealism.

Chapter Three: 1933-1934

In the preface to a mid-1930s reprinting of The Great Gatsby, Scott Fitzgerald singles out Nathanael West as a promising young novelist whose career is in trouble because of critical neglect and "from sheer lack of a stage to act on" (vii). Fitzgerald's theatre metaphor reminds us that professional writing is an performative act, that writers take on personas, and that authors are entertainers. Like the actors who populate Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night (1934), Dorothy Parker's "Glory in the Daytime" (1933), and West's A Cool Million (1934), writers need audiences. They also need backers to provide them with a means to reach these audiences.

The typical writer of the 1920s had viewed himself as an independent economic agent who lent out his products and creative services to "backers" like the print industry, the theater industry, and the film industry. But in the period of 1933-1934, as the Depression reached its lowest point and labor issues were on America's mind, Hollywood employees such as West and Parker were starting to realize that writers were workers, and in order to protect themselves (and their work) from the whims of studio management, screenwriters had better stick together.

Contact with Hollywood in the 1930s showed Fitzgerald, West, and Parker new ways to look at their vocations. It also provided grist for their creative mills. The fiction these authors published in 1933 and 1934 often pointed to the entertainment industry's artifice, but the unfairness of working conditions in the dream factory was very real, as was the effort these writers put into ameliorating the screenwriter's lot. The unionizing zeal of West and Parker -- and the vocational support offered by Fitzgerald to both of

them -- demonstrates that Hollywood writers in the mid 1930s were actively engaged in responding to crises in the profession of authorship.

As Parker and West were beginning to fight for the newly formed Screen Writer's Guild, on a different front Fitzgerald was continuing to offer aid to his fellow writers. After Ring Lardner's death in 1933, Fitzgerald, who was living in Baltimore and readying Tender is the Night for publication, wanted to assure his friend's place in literary history. He published an emotional tribute to Lardner in The New Republic, a piece that the usually acerbic Dorothy Parker told Fitzgerald was "the finest and most moving thing I've ever read" (Correspondence 318). Shortly afterward, Zelda's paintings were shown in New York,¹ and Fitzgerald and Parker spent a good deal of time together in Manhattan, drinking and reminiscing about the 1920s (Mellow 427, Meade 235). They had always had a lot in common. In addition to mutual friends (like Lardner) and a bent towards pouring their innermost thoughts and emotions into their writing (unlike Lardner²), they shared a love/hate relationship with the rich, a tendency towards self-pity, a tragic view of life, and a fear that they were squandering their talents. Ever generous with his praise and help, Fitzgerald reminded Parker of his promise -- the same one he had delivered on for Lardner and Hemingway in the 1920s -- that when she wrote the novel she was planning he would make sure it got to the right people at Scribner's (Kinney 27).

¹ Parker bought two of Zelda's watercolor drawings for a total of \$3500 (Correspondence 359, Mellow 427).

² Fitzgerald writes: "one is haunted not only by a sense of personal loss but by a conviction that Ring got less percentage of himself on paper than any other American of the first flight" (The Crack-Up 38).

But Parker's novel would never emerge from the planning stages. By her own admission, she was a painfully slow worker, someone who began editing a line before she was even done writing it. Furthermore, After Such Pleasures, a 1933 compilation of her short fiction published by Viking, demonstrates why her gifts may not have been ideally suited to the longer form of the novel in the first place. Although some works in the collection, such as "The Waltz," "Horsie" and "Sentiment," stand out, and the author's narrative voice is charming in short stretches, stacking one story upon another like this reveals her limited range and leanings towards sentimentalism. Piece after piece recounts the self-pitying, sharp-tongued, boozy despair of discarded women. Lynn Bloom writes of the limitations of Parker's brand of fiction: "Such narratives, with their fixed perspectives, exploitation of a single petty issue, and simple characters, have to be short. To be any longer would be to add redundance without complexity, to bore rather than to amuse with verbal pyrotechnics" (5).

The more successful stories in After Such Pleasures achieve their power, as "Big Blonde" had in the 1920s, through their ability to pick apart the discrepancy between female private and public selves, between inner rebellious cynicism and outward passive compliance. In "The Waltz," a young woman's gracious comments to her dancing partner belie her bitter interior monologue:

Oh, no, no, no. Goodness no. It didn't hurt the least bit. And anyway it was my fault. Really it was. Truly. Well, you're just being sweet, to say that. It really was all my fault.

I wonder what I'd better do -- kill him this instant, with my naked hands, or wait and let him drop in his traces. Maybe it's best not to make

a scene. I guess I'll just lie low and watch the pace get him. He can't keep this up indefinitely -- he's only flesh and blood. Die he must, and die he shall, for what he did to me. (Complete 210)

Critic Emily Toth writes of the story: "Parker's satiric target is neither the clumsy young man nor the bruised young woman, but the social roles they're locked into -- in short, the affectations and hypocrisies of a patriarchal society" (77).

But if we look more closely, it's a little tougher than that to separate the dancer from the dance. Toth fails to mention that the waltzer goes on waltzing. Perhaps the public self reveals the dancer's true feelings, and the inner voice is the one that should be regarded with suspicion. Could it be that the woman is enjoying herself, despite herself? In the illuminating "Trapped Like a Trap in a Trap," a deconstructive reading of the story, Paula Treichler identifies: "a series of verbal redundancies that play upon each other...the language doesn't mock social realities but affirms them" (56). After the song is over, the young woman has her chance to stop dancing, but she doesn't.

Treichler's close reading of the story can easily be extended to Parker's own writing career, especially her waltz with a frequent partner she considered clumsy, and beneath her -- Hollywood. In the mid-1930s Parker told Nathanael West she hated writing for the movies (Jay Martin 209), the same thing she told anyone who would listen (Fine 13). Yet she continued to do so, despite being financially solvent (Meade 194-195). In this way, the waltz represents Parker's social dance -- one that shares many of the same steps as Fitzgerald's -- between high culture and popular culture, between being recognized by the many and appreciated by the cognoscenti.

While occasionally a liability on the printed page, Parker's tendency to mix the maudlin and the amusingly acrid was a good fit for 1930s romantic comedies such as the films Here Is My Heart and One Hour Late. Parker, who sometimes didn't say the remarks attributed to her, worked on dialogue for Here Is My Heart (1933) -- a film in which Bing Crosby's disguises himself as a waiter in order to win the love of a princess played by Kitty Carlisle -- without screen credit. That we think we hear her smart mouth in some of the comebacks of Carlisle's character, as we do in Gail Patrick's vitriolic barbs at her husband in One Hour Late (1934), doesn't provide hard evidence that she wrote these particular lines, but it does give us a clue as to why she might have been hired to do so. Parker often thought of her wit as a prison, but it was also her greatest commodity. If you were a producer who wanted Parkerisms, maybe you should hire Parker to write them. Her renowned gift for blending schmaltz and sass³ made her a speedy generator of spoken dialogue, and she was rewarded well for her services -- just as guys who knew how to script a good food fight or women who could chart the rise of a beautiful orphan girl were rewarded for theirs.

The Paramount Pictures salary of \$5000 a month given to her and husband Alan Campbell, but mainly to her, made her one of the highest paid screenwriters in Hollywood (Silverstein 40). Often enlisted to punch-up or fix-up poor scripts, Parker and Campbell were a potent re-write team. Married in either 1933 or 1934, depending on which biography you read, when Dorothy was around forty and Alan was just shy of thirty, they would rack up fifteen screenwriting credits during the first five years of their

marriage. From the outside, it may have looked like Campbell was riding on Dorothy Parker's mink coat-tails, but the truth was that he did the majority of the work (Hamilton 107-108). An actor who wrote short stories good enough to be published in The New Yorker, Alan proved adept at script construction. His job was to build structures to house Dorothy's dialogue. Collaboration was supremely important in Hollywood, as was linking up with the right people, and in Campbell Parker had found a match.

The pair knew how to handle the bosses as well, a skill Fitzgerald never mastered and West didn't care to learn. Writers often dreaded story conferences, where ideas and plot points and scenes that had taken days to come up with and map out were shot down with a few words from a producer. For a writer who felt that the bosses were idiots -- a writer like Fitzgerald -- story conferences were often torture. By all reports, Parker felt that movie executives were intellectually beneath her, but she didn't let it show. She invested her talent in her scripts, but, unlike Fitzgerald, not her sense of self. Parker's ego was fragile when it came to her fiction and poetry, but she felt less possessive of her script contributions. She would knit during story conferences, playing the role of pleasant middle-aged lady as Alan pitched their ideas and took notes for rewrites (Hamilton 107-108). Still, it's hard not to imagine Parker gritting her teeth and muttering under her breath during her meetings with producers. Beneath her cashmere sweater beat the heart of a leftist radical.

Although she purchased new hats at whim, and she could frequently be found at the ritzy Garden of Allah apartments lounging around the pool with famous old friends

³ Characters based on Dorothy Parker abound in the books and plays of her friends. In 1934, for instance, Kaufman's stage version of Merrily We Roll Along and Brackett's novel Entirely Surrounded featured Parker-types (Silverstein 11).

Robert Benchley and Alexander Woolcott (Fine 134), Parker didn't spend her time and money selfishly. Despite her immense financial success -- or perhaps because of the guilt associated with it -- she lobbied hard to improve the working conditions of less powerful screenwriters. When "Mrs. Parker" spoke, people listened. Her reputation as a famous wit, the label she believed hurt her chances for being regarded as a serious author, made her a powerful organizing voice for the nascent Screen Writer's Guild. Although she was often called "a swimming pool red" and "a pixie revolutionary," her money and celebrity, and her ability to reap the rewards of the Hollywood studio system, offered her a platform from which to effect change.

One problem the Screen Writer's Guild faced was getting rich and powerful writers, who had the least to gain, to join the union. Most writers in Parker's income bracket, a very exclusive club, were content to keep a low profile or align themselves publicly with management. In Hollywood, writers were often judged (even by other writers) on the basis of their weekly salaries, a factor which served to classify them and, more importantly to the anti-union studio management, divide them. In studio cafeterias, thousand dollar a week writers would sit with other thousand dollar a week writers. Writers making two thousand a week shunned them and five hundred dollar a week writers resented them. But salary in Hollywood meant more than how much money you had, it also told you -- and those around you -- where you stood in your profession.

For example, Parker and West spent time together with mutual writer friends in New York and were country neighbors in Bucks County, but in the eyes of Hollywood executives they would forever remain acres apart. Dorothy Parker was famous; her friend Nathanael West was not. In the minds of studio executives, the reason Dorothy Parker

made more money than Nathanael West was because she was a better writer; the reason she was a better writer was because she made more money. At Paramount and MGM it was widely believed that the more money you spent on a picture the better that picture was likely to be, and the more money it was likely to make. Why would you hire one \$350 a week writer like Nathanael West when you could have three \$1250 a week writers?

On the other hand, Harry Cohn at Columbia believed that if you worked for him you must not be very good, so he paid guys like West accordingly. The further down you were in the writing pecking order, the more likely it was that you would be dismissed without prior notice, denied a paycheck, or denied a screen credit. The Screen Writers Guild wanted to be an advocate for all screenwriters, not just those, like Dorothy Parker, who would need its protection least. But along the road to reform, the writer's union would encounter tenacious opposition from the studios.

In early 1933, carpenters, painters, stagehands, and electricians were among the few unionized studio workers. In the minds of movie producers, allowing manual laborers to join IATSE⁴ couldn't weaken the foundations of the studio system. But if writers became unionized, as they had tried to do in 1931, the assembly line could grind to a halt and profits would evaporate. Not only were writers troublesomely intellectual, annoyingly articulate, and dangerously political, but if they were allowed to organize they

might be able to gain control of access to screen properties. For example, if screenwriters were to align with the Dramatists Guild, and a strike was called, source material from Broadway could be held for ransom. In writer solidarity, blockades could be put up to stop the flow of novels and short stories into Hollywood as well.

Film producers liked the way things functioned now: screenwriters worked within the walls of corporations, were subject to dismissal at any time and for any reason, didn't own their scripts, and had no control over the final product. Unionization might disrupt this imbalance. Besides, the studios argued, there was already a writer's branch in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the film industry's house union and the sponsor of the Academy Awards. In the minds of writers, however, getting anything done through AMPAS was -- in the words many attribute to Dorothy Parker -- "like trying to get laid in your mother's house. Somebody was always in the parlor, watching" (quoted in Schwartz 13).

In March of 1933, crying poor, the studios instituted pay cuts. Writers couldn't help noticing that the only employees exempt from the cuts were the members of IATSE. On April 8, 1933, The Screen Writers Guild was born. In The Hollywood Writers' Wars, a labor history of the SWG, Nancy Schwartz explains: "One hundred and seventy-three charter members each contributed a hundred-dollar membership fee, with some giving more for their less solvent brethren...the intent of the union, though led by many of these prestigious literary figures [Donald Ogden Stewart, Parker, Dudley Nichols] was really to protect the young, beginning writers" (21, 25).

⁴ The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

When salaries were restored a short time later, interest in bolstering the union waned. But a small group of Hollywood writers, most of whom had met back East in the 1920s, kept pressing. They wanted the studios to stop lending out screenwriters without consent. They wanted written notice of termination. They wanted to end the practice of writing on speculation. They wanted fewer hours and higher wages. They wanted notification if other writers were working on the same project simultaneously. They wanted an end to blacklists, such as the one which would appear in 1934 containing the names of writers who refused to "donate" a portion of their salary to Merriam's campaign for Governor against Upton Sinclair, the liberal candidate many screenwriters supported (Schwartz 36). But most importantly, these writers wanted the Guild -- not the studios -- to decide who would earn screen credit. Money and security were important to these artist/workers, but so were recognition, respect, and acknowledgment.

A few members of the SWG wanted to use the movies, a medium they had once scoffed at as being hopelessly lowbrow, to get radical leftist messages to the masses -- despite the insurmountable obstacle that artists in the film industry don't own the means of production. A handful of members, most notably John Henry Lawson, wanted to use the Guild as an offshoot of the Communist Party. But the majority of those in the SWG had the more reasonable goal of forming a professional organization to protect and support the interests of workingmen in general and the Hollywood writer in particular.

The SWG's aims were largely professional and political, but the organization served a social purpose as well. Safe from the eyes and ears of the studios, writers met secretly at each other's homes to plan and talk and eat and drink and commiserate. This was not normal Hollywood behavior. Hortense Powdermaker found that friendships in

Hollywood were often purely utilitarian. People socialized with either the people they were currently working with on a specific project or those they wanted something from in the future. You were only as good as your last picture and moral support was almost non-existent. If you were having a run of bad luck, whether personal or professional, people stayed away from you for fear of catching it (30). But the SWG and the community of writers it brought together seemed to be an exception. Every writer in Hollywood didn't want to join the SWG -- far from it -- but those that did found a spirit of unity. As Nancy Schwartz points out: "Apart from the socializing, the move toward unionization gave many writers a sense of commitment and common destiny that they had never before shared. With all the purpose that the 'lost generation' had lacked, the writers had entered the New Deal" (25).

The work these Hollywood writers were doing on behalf of the people in their industry was a local version of the master narrative of the prototypical American writer of the 1930s as charted in Malcolm Cowley's Exile's Return. The expatriate aesthete of the 1920s returns home a decade later, contrite and with a new belief that the artist should help his country and its people. Like Cowley, many Depression writers were beginning to realize that the myth of the suffering genius starving for art kept intellectuals at a distance from political, economic, and social concerns.

An attempt to bridge this distance between writer and society forms the thematic basis for Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts. Published in April of 1933, the same month the SWG was born, the novel continues Balso's exploration into the laws and limits of the artistic vocation, but it's a much more powerful work than its predecessor. West's savage black humor is present, but so is a new note of empathy, and the result is

that we care about the characters in a way we don't in Balso. The novel is tight and expertly crafted. Stylistically, West would never write better than this. Ironically, the book is about a writer who can't find the right words to connect to his audience.

The novel begins with an advice columnist reading the letters on his desk, searching for a way to connect through language to those who write to him for help. The tales Miss Lonelyhearts reads are of illness and lack. With their mis-spellings and tortured English usage, the newspaper letters show that the suffering of their authors is infinitely greater than their ability to express their inner turmoil. But Miss Lonelyhearts can't help them. When he tries to construct a cogent response to their pleas, he can only compose in clichés. The cynical writer has been rendered impotent by real feelings.

The action then cuts to a new chapter, just as the features editor Shrike takes a scalpel to the words of Miss Lonelyhearts both inside and outside of the newsroom. West originally conceived of the novel to be "in the form of a comic strip. The chapters to be squares in which many things happen through one action. The speeches contained in the conventional balloons" (Novels 401). In this avant-garde book, West borrows from the mass cultural form of the comic strip to examine mass culture itself. According to critics like Rita Barnard and Thomas Strychacz, West's modernist desire to separate himself from mass culture forced him to study and imitate mass culture within his works, a literary version of "anything you can do, I can do better." But as Louis Menand cautions: "When we examine a modernist literary work as an instance of modernist theory in practice, we can never quite be certain whether we are looking at an example of the critical prescription being applied successfully or an example of the disease the prescription is supposed to cure" (113).

Writing a novel "in the form of a comic strip" is also West's way of announcing that the traditional ways of telling stories -- the loose, baggy monsters that are the novels of the 18th and 19th centuries -- are irrelevant to a culture in frenzy. Miss Lonelyhearts' short chapters give the novel a sense of modernist disjunction. The narrative is constantly being cut into sections. The action is always forced into a new panel. Like Parker's waltzer, "enclosed in a circle of her own words" (Treichler 53), the confining "balloons" West envisioned are language traps for his characters, preventing any clear message from being delivered.

Early in the book, Miss Lonelyhearts, the frustrated communicator, walks through a park towards a "speak easy." West's language in depicting this journey through the Wasteland is powerful, evocative and direct: "the air smelt as though it had been artificially heated" (Miss Lonelyhearts 4); "mouthfuls of the heavy shade" (4); "It had taken all the brutality of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt" (5). West's circle of friends all praised this advance in his style, and in July of 1933 his pals at the journal Contempo dedicated an entire issue to discussions of the novel, one hagiography after another attempting to canonize West as a writer other writers should emulate. William Carlos Williams states about West's gift for controlling the written word:

..his "material" is writing itself -- he has invented a new manner, he has invented a means that allows him the full expression of his sentiments....It conveys the real, incredibly dead life of the people and the incredibly dead atmosphere of the book itself

(quoted in Jay Martin 154).

Where the characters fail in their efforts to communicate and achieve communion, West succeeds through the use of vivid metaphors (ones not unlike Williams' own poetic images, it's worth mentioning). Although "the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser" (5) and "a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine" (5), West's words remain effective, grounded and intact.

Miss Lonelyhearts is not endowed with the same success with language as his creator. When the newspaperman tries to speak to his fiancée Betty, his tongue becomes a "fat thumb" (11). At every attempt to verbally respond to the world or its inhabitants, the writer finds that "no repeated words would fit their rhythm" (11). He finds that often when he opens his mouth, the words that come out are Shrike's, his surrogate father. Later, at the DoYLES', Miss Lonelyhearts is awkwardly silent because "when he did speak it would have to be in the form of a message" (48). But the message never comes to his lips. He doesn't have his minister father's gift of rhetoric, and his "Christ complex," his longing to be the Word made flesh, makes him aware of this void. Miss Lonelyhearts, the college-educated writer and "priest of our time," hears the cries of the faceless masses but can do nothing to hush them. His frequent silences and multiple retreats to the womb of his bed signal a desire to return to a nascent state, a time before language.

Although the women of the novel try to "baby" him, they can't successfully return Miss Lonelyhearts to a sense of wholeness. Miss Lonelyhearts grows frustrated with Betty's maternal complacency and his own inability to settle for her narrow view of the world. Betty is a movie stock character, the wholesome girl who will teach the cynical hero how to love. But Miss Lonelyhearts is beyond reformation. He sadistically tugs at her breast before leaving her in tears. Our hero returns to the "speakeasy" and listens to

stories of women writers being violently gang raped. These tales are told by newspaper men who once "had believed in literature, had believed in Beauty and in personal expression as an absolute end. When they lost this belief, they lost everything" (14).

Here, as in the previous scene with Betty and in a later scene with Fay Doyle, as well as smeared throughout Balso Snell, male writers who cannot master words take out their frustration through violence against women, lashing out at what the critics Ann Douglas and Andreas Huyssen have identified as an American mass culture that is coded as both feminine and inferior.⁵

The men who write for the newspaper have come to realize that a belief in art, truth, and beauty is useless in a world where young girls are born without noses and husbands try to murder their wives by scaring them to death. Where can hope or escape be found? Hunchbacked women pick romance magazines out of the garbage and spend their last nickels on movie tickets, but Miss Lonelyhearts discovers that "although dreams were once powerful, they have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers" (14). Whether mass culture responds to our dreams or feeds them to us, the result in West's world is the same -- disappointment and disillusionment. And as Shrike's mockery of Miss Lonelyhearts' dreams of the aesthetic life (Huysmans-like feasts of licorice and black coffee and/or painting noble savages on remote islands) makes clear, high culture has already been played out too.

But as with The Dream Life of Balso Snell, West's recognition of the impossibility of the concept of "high culture" remaining unsullied didn't necessarily stand in the way of his literary aspirations. In fact, he complained to friends that Horace Liveright, publisher

of Miss Lonelyhearts, wanted to "advertise the book on a very low level, not as serious literature but as a smutty expose of the columnist racket" (Novels 778). As it turned out, marketing strategies would be the least of West's woes. Miss Lonelyhearts was a victim of the type of rotten luck that befalls its title character. Liveright declared bankruptcy as the book was being issued; the printing company refused to release 1,400 copies that had not yet shipped (Novels 814). The novel received good reviews, but there was no product in the stores to capitalize on them. Harcourt, Brace soon managed to buy the rights to publish the novel, but by the time they got Miss Lonelyhearts to market in June the buzz had stopped.

While the publication of Miss Lonelyhearts hadn't allowed West to support himself as a writer, it had brought him to the attention of the studios. The film rights to the novel were sold to Fox, and in late June of 1933, Sam Goldwyn contacted West about working on a script for the Russian actress Anna Sten, Goldwyn's beautiful, English-challenged mistress. The Sten project was dropped before any real work was done, but West settled in Los Angeles anyway and accepted an offer to work at Columbia Pictures in July (Jay Martin 203-209). Columbia, like Universal, was a "major minor" -- a studio that specialized in providing the richer companies in the oligopoly with "B" films for the bottom of double bills. It wasn't the most prestigious studio in town, but West was nonetheless happy to be there. The \$350 a week Harry Cohn paid him at Columbia Pictures was big money for the Depression. It was more than West's old \$60 a week salary at the Sutton Hotel, and it was immensely more than he was making as a fiction writer.

⁵ See also volume one of Gilbert and Gubar's No Man's Land.

However, for any pals back East who still might be under the mistaken assumption that screenwriting was a soft racket, and that a smart writer could fake his way through it, West filed this dispatch:

This stuff about easy work is all wrong. My hours are from ten in the morning to six at night, with a full day on Saturday. They gave me a job to do five minutes after I sat down in my office -- a scenario about a beauty parlor -- and I'm expected to turn out pages and pages a day. There's no fooling here. All the writers sit in cells in a row and the minute a typewriter stops someone pokes his head in the door to see if you are thinking. Otherwise, it's like the hotel business. (quoted in Jay Martin 205)

West's letter, written shortly before he joined the SWG (Novels 808), demonstrates how the studios often threw writers into screenwriting assignments without giving them any training in film grammar or any real instruction on what exactly it was they were supposed to be doing. Despite this, management expected writers to learn to work their part of the studio assembly line and to Taylorize their own creative process, a difficult task for many used to the world of publishing.

In Books: From Writer to Reader, Howard Greenfeld writes of the profession of authorship: "There are no regular routines, as in an office, and it is impossible to order a writer to work a certain number of hours per day or per week and expect that author to obey" (3). Here, West had a slight advantage over some of his screenwriter colleagues. Working an office job in "the hotel business" had taught him to be able to follow a daily routine, and composing his novels while manning the desk had given him the ability to

write with people around. He quickly produced a "treatment"⁶ for "Beauty Parlor"; the studio accepted it and told him to begin drafting the screenplay. It looked like West's film career was off to a good, fast start -- but Columbia aborted the project. He then went to work on an original story for the screen entitled "Return to the Soil," but the studio let that one languish too (Jay Martin 206-207). When Columbia let him go in late August, West stuck around Hollywood anyway⁷ -- he wanted to see how the movie version of Miss Lonelyhearts was turning out.

Daryl Zanuck at Twentieth Century had bought the movie rights to the book for \$4000 (Dardis 140), but no one is really sure why. Because of the publishing snafu with Liveright, the novel had sold poorly, so there would be little (or no) audience awaiting its adaptation. Like Faulkner's Sanctuary, made into a movie in 1933 and advertised with cheesecake shots of Miriam Hopkins lounging on a bed of corncobs similar to the one Popeye rapes her with, West's novel had somewhat of a reputation for being dirty in an artsy way, but it's unlikely the studio bought it for this reason. Jonathan Veitch speculates that Zanuck wanted the property for its title or to capitalize on a cycle of newspaper movies (76-77). Zanuck biographer George Custen believes that the novel's good reviews, coupled with West's obscurity, made for a prestigious, affordable film prospect for a young studio on the rise to purchase.

⁶ a detailed scene by scene breakdown of the plot.

⁷ West no longer had someone to come home to. His fiancée Alice Shepard had broken off their engagement in 1933 after she learned that "West had spent the night with Lillian Hellman" (Novels 808).

In any case, the film made from Miss Lonelyhearts, released under the title Advice to the Lovelorn, has virtually no connection to its source. A novel depicting a journalist's impotence in the face of mass suffering emerges from the film factory as a peppy love story of one guy's redemption.⁸ The movie received dismissive reviews and didn't fill many seats. But West had still come out ahead. He had gotten his foot in the door at the studios and the \$4000 he'd received for the film rights to his novel far exceeded his royalties for the novel's dismissal sales.

Besides money, Miss Lonelyhearts had also gained West some new fans -- one of which was Scott Fitzgerald. Although Fitzgerald's motives in helping struggling new novelists like West were undoubtedly genuine, as was his support of established authors like Dorothy Parker, the complaints of reviewer silence he makes in his 1934 Gatsby preface in defense of West are also meant to complain about the indifference shown to his own work. If he was too popular in the 1920s for highbrow critics -- like his friend Edmund Wilson -- to take him seriously, in the 1930s he was too irrelevant for Marxist critics -- like his friend Edmund Wilson -- to take him seriously. Fitzgerald felt like a forgotten man. His article "Auction: Model 1934" equates glamorous objects from Scott and Zelda's high life in the 1920s with ancient relics stripped of their value. There's no market for these things now. No one wants them (The Crack-Up 56-62). Fame can expire quickly, and in the 1930s Fitzgerald was having trouble renewing his contract with the public.

⁸ In American Superrealism, Veitch traces the "process by which West's darkly critical text was censored -- through a series of demurrals and evasions, displacements and substitutions, even outright repression -- in order to make it acceptable to the screen" (78).

Besides a fellow neglected talent, Fitzgerald may have also seen a disciple in West. In the novels of both men, love is essentially yearning and frustration. For both authors, the city dominates the character of the United States. There many thematic, stylistic, and dramatic similarities between Miss Lonelyhearts and The Great Gatsby as well. Both books blend vulgar speech and dialect, poetic description, and passages of dark comedy. Both books depict New York City as a Wasteland populated by grotesques and love triangles. Gatsby and Miss Lonelyhearts are both gunned down by "impotent" men. In short, praising Miss Lonelyhearts, a new book, in the new preface to Gatsby, an older book, might have been a way for Fitzgerald to prove to himself that his creative vision and critical judgment still mattered to younger writers and readers.

Whatever Fitzgerald's motives for wanting to help West, a man he had never met, a letter he received shortly after the Gatsby preface appeared would test how far he was willing to go with his support. Dated September 11, 1934, it read:

You have been kind enough to say you liked my novel, "Miss Lonelyhearts". I am applying for a Guggenheim Fellowship and I need references for it. I wonder if you would be willing to let me use your name as a reference? It would be enormously valuable to me. I am writing to you, a stranger, because I know very few people, almost none whose names would mean anything to the committee, and apparently the references are the most important part of the application. (Correspondence 384)

In this letter we sense West's desperation and professional anxiety. A Cool Million, published in June 1934 by the small press of Covici-Friede, had sold poorly, and the

reviews, unlike most of those for Miss Lonelyhearts, were negative. West tried to tell friends that he had written the book as an inside joke to them and never intended for it to be a commercial property (Jay Martin 242), but his aspirations to be a successful novelist -- to live by his writing for a prolonged period of time and produce books the public would buy -- makes this hard to believe. As he wrote to Edmund Wilson in the mid 1930s, "I want to write. Why I don't know, but I do" (Novels 780). Yet after three novels, he had made only \$780 in book royalties (Jay Martin 247).

West wasn't having much success with other genres either. His agent, Max Leiber, couldn't place his short stories with the big magazines, and a play he was working on with Perelman, a satire on the publicity given to a woman writer who confuses her fiction with real life, couldn't find any backers. Hollywood hadn't invited him back either. Columbia Pictures had bought the rights to A Cool Million when it was in galleys, getting West some cash at a time when he needed it, but no one believed the film would ever get made. It was common practice for the studios to buy properties to avoid other studios scooping them. By warehousing source material, the studios assured themselves of always having projects ready to go in case of strikes, difficulties in finding the right vehicle for a particular star, or sudden upswings in the value of a particular writer's oeuvre. Many of the works the studios bought weren't turned into treatments, many of these treatments weren't turned into screenplays, and many of the screenplays weren't turned into movies. Jay Martin writes, "even though West kept up his membership in the Screen Writer's Guild all through 1934, no Hollywood offer was prompted by the purchase of another unproducible novel" (245).

By applying for a Guggenheim, and badly needing to get one, West was asking for help from the same type of institutions he had skewered in "The Impostor." Fitzgerald was happy to write West the recommendation, but as the Gatsby preface had done, his letter in support of West's grant application avails itself of the opportunity to take the literary establishment to task: "I have sometimes felt that you have put especial emphasis on poetry while I think that the most living literary form in America at the moment is prose fiction. In my opinion, Nathanael West is a potential leader in the field of prose fiction." Fitzgerald, who feared that he "had been only a mediocre caretaker" of his talent (The Crack-Up 71), ends the letter with a flippant salute "to the custodians of the great idea" (Correspondence 385). Despite the recommendations of Malcolm Cowley, George S. Kaufman, Edmund Wilson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald -- the "most important part of the application" -- Nathanael West didn't get the Guggenheim.

The novels that West and Fitzgerald were publishing in the mid 1930s didn't fit with a writing climate that was drifting farther and farther left. In a move Michael Denning traces in The Cultural Front, critics were calling on authors to publish books that would advance worker's causes. Writers were no longer religious keepers of a flame, "custodians of the great idea," but citizens necessary to American society. West and Fitzgerald didn't heed this proletarian call in their fiction. They were artists before activists, neutral observers rather than partisans. West believed that there ought to be a place for the writer "who yells fire and indicates where some of the smoke is coming from without actually dragging the hose to the spot" (quoted in Jay Martin 336). Fitzgerald claimed that the mark of a first rate creative intelligence was "the ability to hold two

opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" ("The Crack-up" 69). Like West, he had no interest in writing tracts.

Brian Way believes that Fitzgerald took from ideologies such as Marxism "only what he could use as an artist: a more dramatic sense of economic relations and historical change; fresh metaphors of disaster; a confirmation and toughening of his own observation of manners" (148). Fitzgerald held on long and tight to the idea of the writer inhabiting a world apart. It's not that he didn't care about politics and the plight of the common man -- he did. But as he wrote to H.L. Mencken in 1934: "It is simply that having once found the intensity of art, nothing else that can happen in life can ever again seem as important as the creative process" (Life in Letters, 256). American writers were being called to activism in the service of their country, but Fitzgerald believed in answering to a higher power.

Both West and Fitzgerald took heat from reviewers on the 1930s left for being self-indulgent. One reviewer of Tender is the Night warned Fitzgerald that the revolution was coming, and when it did he wouldn't be able to "hide from a hurricane under a beach umbrella" (Scribner xii). Marxist critics believed that Fitzgerald wrote about pretty people in a pretty style. Even though many came to see that the novel is an indictment of the rich, not a celebration of them, Fitzgerald was still considered far too interested in the inner lives of the wealthy, the glamorous and the famous -- a privileged class of Americans. West was concentrating on the right segment of the population, his Miss Lonelyhearts had probed the suffering of the common man, but it was wrapped in a modernist package the common man couldn't open. Plagiarized in large chunks from Horatio Alger (Veitch 96), A Cool Million was a satire of the American Dream that some

reviewers misread as ultimately a celebration of fascism. After its hero, Lemuel Pitkin, is killed by Communist spies, he becomes a martyr for a right-wing uprising, led by former President Shagpoke Whipple, bent on saving the population from sophisticates, cosmopolites, unions, Jews, and Marxists.

No one is spared by West's satire, not even himself. In *West*, the villain isn't capitalism running amok, it's the human race. Too pessimistic, goofy, and iconoclastic to be a good lefty, West pokes fun at radical writers and the manifestos they write. The character Sylvanus Snodgrasse in *A Cool Million* is a frustrated writer who turns to terrorism to compensate for his lack of talent. Because his overblown allegories about bad capitalists have failed to find a public, he has decided to make the public pay. He's lost faith in himself, and he's made it his mission to undermine the country's faith as well. His desire for anarchic revenge is cloaked in Communism, just as Shagpoke Whipple's fascist will-to-power is masked by folksy rhetoric. West's politics in the book are neutral, if neutral can mean hating both sides equally.

Tender is the Night is also an ideologically ambivalent book. There's little doubt that it glamorizes the Riviera lifestyle, but it also shows a growing awareness, aided by Fitzgerald's tours in the Hollywood dream factory, of those who must work hard so that others can enjoy a life of leisure. In the most memorable passage from the novel, Fitzgerald writes:

Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil. For her sake trains began their run in Chicago and traversed the round belly of the continent to California; chicle factories fumed and link belts grew link by link in factories; men mixed toothpaste in vats and drew mouthwash out of

copper hogsheads; girls canned tomatoes quickly in August or worked rudely at the Five-and-Tens on Christmas Eve; half-breed Indians toiled on Brazilian coffee plantations and dreamers were muscled out of patent rights in new tractors -- these were some of the people who gave a tithe to Nicole... She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately that there was grace in the procedure, and presently Rosemary would try and imitate it (54).

Although the work done to produce enough commodities to allow Nicole to play the role of cool, graceful socialite is very real, Nicole herself is struggling to maintain a facade of sanity. As an actress, Rosemary might find it easy to imitate her. But, much like the cast of writer/performers in West's Balso, it would be an imitation of an imitation.

If West, Fitzgerald, and Parker were failing in 1933 and 1934 to engage economic struggle in their fiction, even though they were succeeding in doing so in their lives as professionals, they were continuing to look at the work that goes behind the construction of artifice. In her introduction to Parker's Complete Stories, Regina Barreca writes: "The gap between how life is dressed up to appear and what it looks like underneath its fancy trimmings is the gap where interesting writing begins" (xiii). For this reason, it's only natural that these authors would begin to drift thematically towards the movies. Their professional contact with Hollywood had put them face to face with real models of such artifice -- actors.

Writers in the studios created dialogue for stars who resided far above them in the studio hierarchy and were often worshipped, famous, and rich -- all the things Freud said writers dreamed of being. It's tempting to read the actor characters in fiction written by

screenwriters as a form of "author's revenge," the same way the Hollywood novels themselves are sometimes read. But if we look more closely at the performer characters created by Parker, Fitzgerald, and West, we see these writers further exploring the questions of art and the function of the artist that had appeared in their work since the beginning of their careers. Parker's "Glory in the Daytime," West's "The Sun, the Radio, and the Gas Station Attendant" and A Cool Million, and Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night all contain portrayals of actors. At a time when their creators were struggling with identity issues of vocation and professional matters of career direction, these performer characters are equated with masquerade, decrepitude, and failure. They are products of the worlds they walk through, American spaces where the artificial has replaced the genuine, where surface is more important than substance, where everything is expendable.

After a crawl through The Chamber of American Horrors, a carnival sideshow where cheese looks like glass and glass looks like paper and a statue of Hercules wears a truss, Lemuel Pitkin, the hero of A Cool Million, winds up as a stooge in vaudeville. His on-stage partners beat him with his own artificial limbs. The actress in "The Sun, the Radio, and the Gas Station Attendant" has her surgically-altered face literally melt off in the daylight, and Lily Wynton, "the great lady of our stage" (Complete Stories 218), in Parker's "Glory in the Daytime" is revealed to be a raving, needy alcoholic. That Wynton is also having an affair with an artsy lesbian only adds to her dissolution, as it does in Tender when Mrs. North takes a female lover.

Lily Wynton refuses to believe that Mrs. Murdoch, a fan who has come to tea, isn't a writer, and she implores the housewife to write her a play which will insure that she "will never be forgotten, because of the years I played in your beautiful, beautiful

play" (224). Art may be long and theatre fame short, a play sticks around forever while a performance in that play does not, but Wynton believes that writers have it easier than actors in the here and now: "To write. To set one word beautifully beside another word. The privilege of it. The blessed peace of it. Oh for quiet, for rest... You writers -- you don't know" (226-227). Implicit in her statement is the misbelief that writing is a calming, rhythmic, solitary hobby -- like knitting or flower arranging. As a professional actress, someone on the stage, someone public, Lily thinks she has it rough. We are reminded of the paradox exhibited by many famous actors: They are drawn to the profession by their intense need for attention, but they also want people to leave them alone. The pressure of the loving public, her fame, and the accolades of the critics are all too much for Lily to bear. When the grande dame drinks herself unconscious, Mrs. Murdoch returns home forlorn, disillusioned at the reality behind her favorite artist -- a famous drunk prone to fits of self-pity and disastrous flings with men.

In Tender is the Night, Dick's need to be the center of attention and have people adore him contributes to his downfall. When the actress Rosemary first sees him, he's performing for the glamorous group of his expatriate friends. "Oh we're such actors --you and I" (105), she says to him, and in a later scene he instructs this professional actress that a performer's first duty is to entertain, not to inspire thought or emotion. After an unsuccessful screen-test, a tour of a studio backlot⁹ containing a cardboard Moby Dick and other discarded objects, an affair with Rosemary in which neither turns out to be what they appear to be, and a breakdown in his ability to manage his wife Nicole's

⁹ Linking the fictional worlds of Tender is the Night and The Beautiful and Damned Fitzgerald signs Rosemary to Films Par Excellence, Joseph Bloeckman's studio.

presentation of self, Dick fades into obscurity with a manuscript that is always "almost in process of completion." The last novel Fitzgerald would ever complete, one into which he had poured a large part of himself over the course of nine years, ends with a fading snapshot of a failed writer who couldn't control his wife's mental health.

The film adaptation of Tender is the Night that Fitzgerald tried to get Hollywood interested in ended quite differently -- with Dick heroically performing brain surgery on Nicole and making her sane again. Although Tender is a thematically cinematic novel, it's more a psychological novel than a dramatic one, and the attempts to translate it for another medium make for strange reading. In the treatment written by Fitzgerald and his protégé Charles Warren, reprinted in to appendix to Brucoli's Some Sort of Epic Grandeur, Nicole's insanity results from a bump on the head, not incest. Warren, an amateur composer, even wrote some songs for the film they were pitching. Warren then went to Hollywood to bring the treatment door-to-door, reporting back to Fitzgerald that "Your name is big a hellishly well known in the studios. You rate out here as a highbrow writer, a thoroughbred novelist and not a talkie hack and therefore these people look up to you" (quoted in Turnbull 248). Surprised he was held in such high esteem, Fitzgerald wrote to Hollywood players like Sam Marx and George Cukor to try and get them attached to his film version of Tender is the Night, and he once called Thalberg's house drunk to see if Norma wanted to be in it to play Nicole, but Ober eventually told him to stop bothering people, and the project never got off the ground (Correspondence 333, 364; Latham 84, 92).

In the mid-thirties, Fitzgerald's drinking was increasing, and so were Zelda's breakdowns. Taking care of her, and supporting her writing (and dancing and painting),

was taking a toll on him. He wrote to her doctor in 1934 that his work "was more important than hers by a large margin, because of the years of preparation for it, and the professional experience, and because my writing kept the mare going, while Zelda's belongs to the luxury trade" (Correspondence 381). The professional author had concentrated too hard on the work of a dilettante amateur, and it had contributed to what Fitzgerald saw as his own vocational nose-dive. As his support of other writers shows, Fitzgerald had an immense capacity for largesse, but he had an even larger capacity for self-pity. One of the writers who had most benefited from his help, Ernest Hemingway, who usually took pleasure in seeing a friend down,¹⁰ tried to make Fitzgerald snap out of his introspective funk: "You're not a tragic character," he wrote, "Neither am I. All we are is writers and what we should do is write... You are twice as good now as you were at the time you think you were so marvellous" (quoted in Mizener 260).

In terms of morale, 1933 and 1934 were low years for West and Fitzgerald, as they had been for Hollywood and America itself, but better days lay ahead for all concerned, including the Screen Writer's Guild that Parker was cultivating. Fitzgerald would use his feelings of failure as the catalyst for some of his most honest and powerful work. In 1934, he began writing for *Esquire* magazine, which paid \$250 a piece. That was less than the thousand dollars and over that The Saturday Evening Post used to pay, but the essays and stories he would publish in *Esquire*, many about Hollywood, would be some of the finest of his career. As well as giving him a wealth of material, his return to

¹⁰ Fitzgerald's Notebook contains the following entry "Ernest would always give a helping hand to a man on a ledge a little higher up" (#1819). See also Brucoli's Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship. Slightly less illuminating is Donaldson's Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship.

Hollywood towards the end of the decade would also reverse the downward turn of his financial fortunes. Nathanael West would become the most respected and famous disrespected and ignored writer in Los Angeles. Parker would be nominated for an Academy Award by the rival union she was locked in combat with. She would buy new hats and wear them marching on new picket lines. Hollywood provided these authors a living; they provided Hollywood with scripts for the assembly line, some of which proved to be the blueprints for good films. Hollywood allowed West, Parker, and Fitzgerald to keep working on their fiction, enhanced their support of each other, and gave them ideas to write about and new ways to write about them. In short, the American movie industry allowed them to continue being professional writers, despite the fact that it refused to recognize the SWG as a professional organization.



Chapter Four: 1937

In 1937, Dorothy Parker, Budd Schulberg, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Nathanael West were all living in California and were all employed as screenwriters. With greater literary reputations, Parker and Fitzgerald had higher weekly salaries than their two younger colleagues, but neither of these famous writers did any significant literary work during this year. Parker was battling fascism, the studio bosses, and corporate capitalism; Fitzgerald was battling alcoholism, the studio bosses, and self-doubt.¹ West and Schulberg, on the other hand, were finding the time, energy and inspiration to create prose fiction during their off hours from screenwriting. In addition to composing for Hollywood in 1937, all four authors had plans to compose about Hollywood. West had finished a first draft of a film industry novel and Fitzgerald was slowly taking notes towards one. West's book was still two years away from publication; Fitzgerald's would never be completed.

Two Hollywood-on-Hollywood projects that did hit the market in 1937, the film A Star is Born and the short story "What Makes Sammy Run?," offer insider perspectives into what the film industry thinks about when it thinks about itself. A Star is Born, whose script includes the contributions of Dorothy Parker and Budd Schulberg, is a movie about a movie, a self-reflexive work. Schulberg's "Sammy" story, which he would later expand into a novel, draws upon its author's background as a "Hollywood Prince" turned junior screenwriter. The piece is insider's literature written from an outsider's point-of-view. The lives and labor practices of those working in

¹ See Dardis' The Thirsty Muse for a clinical analysis of the exact etiology of Fitzgerald's alcoholism.

Hollywood are reported by a New York City journalist narrator who becomes a Los Angeles screenwriter. Like A Star is Born, "Sammy" introduces us to workers in Hollywood and examines the effort that goes into creating films that look effortless. In its longer version, What Makes Sammy Run? would even devote several chapters towards dramatizing the internal strife within the Screen Writer's Guild circa 1937, struggles for power and authority that Schulberg, Parker, and West witnessed from the front-lines.

As we saw in earlier chapters, one of the issues the SWG wanted control over was the awarding of writing credits. Although Budd Schulberg made significant contributions to A Star is Born (Ames, Fine, Schatz, Thomson), he received no screen credit from producer David O. Selznick for his participation. Once his draft was submitted, he was quickly shuffled to another Selznick project, Nothing Sacred (Beck 7). His name doesn't appear on that film either. Another screenwriter might have thrown a fit, but it didn't worry Schulberg much. Because he was born into the movies, he seems to have understood atavistically some of the things about film writing that took other authors years to realize. As he once put it, "Since I was brought up in the place, I had no illusions about it. I had learned from intelligent producers like Irving Thalberg, David Selznick, and my father that even the wisest of them looked upon the screenwriter as low man on the totem pole" (The Four Seasons of Success 99).

Working hard on scripts was admirable, but becoming cathected to them and crying over the films made from them was unwise. More screen credits meant more money, but they never meant that the movies belonged to you. In the final analysis,

the corporate screenwriter under the Hollywood studio system was more of an advisor than a creator. Unlike the poet or novelist or dramatist, the screenwriter usually didn't start writing because he had something to say. He usually started writing because a book or play needed to be adapted for the screen or because the studio wanted to copy a recent successful film. The front office hired screenwriters to provide creative options; it didn't hire them to make creative decisions. Schulberg grew up knowing that the screenwriter was more of a craftsman than an artist; more of a carpenter than an architect. Scripts weren't written in Hollywood; they were assembled. With so many writers behind each film, said Schulberg, "it was like laying linoleum, different people working on different little squares" (quoted in Fine 118).

Schulberg was given \$25 a week to add his patches to the A Star is Born quilt.² By paying him a junior writer's salary and making him pay his dues, Selznick thought he was grooming his young employee to be a producer. Selznick had been Schulberg's father's assistant at Paramount, and he assumed the dynasty would continue with Budd working for him, and his own son eventually working for Budd.

But in 1937, Schulberg's primary interest wasn't the movies. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nathanael West and Dorothy Parker, he wanted to publish fiction. When Schulberg reminded Selznick of this, his disappointed boss responded by saying: "I know. But I felt that if I kept you with me long enough sooner or later your producer's blood would begin to assert itself"³ (quoted in Fine 111). Following the

²Selznick was so pleased with Schulberg's work on the film that he bumped him up to \$50 afterwards (Van Gelder 2).

"write what you know" creed, producer's son Budd Schulberg wrote about the film industry, a world he knew more intimately than Fitzgerald or West, who were working on their own Hollywood fiction, ever could.

Schulberg's story "What Makes Sammy Run?" provides a rich opportunity for examining concepts of authorship in Hollywood. Much of the scholarly activity surrounding film authorship has focused on authorship as it relates to control of a film's style and meaning. But authorship is more than a particular function; it can also be an imprimatur or branding strategy, one of the many factors that goes into creating a commodity. Humanism isn't the only "-ism" that embraces the concept of authorship -- Capitalism does too. Designating authors allows for categorization, brand recognition, and (hopefully) profit. To this end, sometimes a signature isn't in a distinctive camera angle; it's in a name or number. All Elvis movies are Elvis movies, 007 can stay around 40 forever, Jason can put on his hockey mask to die XXV times, and for years Alfred Hitchcock, the impresario who the critic Peter Wollen once called "at least as important an artist as, say, Scott Fitzgerald" (160), presented televised thrillers he neither wrote nor directed.

By releasing the work of others under his own name, Schulberg's Sammy Glick is attempting to increase the value of the Sammy Glick brand name. The anti-hero of What Makes Sammy Run? is a writer/producer who produces almost no writing. His radio columns are plagiarized from Somerset Maugham; he is invited to Hollywood on the strength of another man's script, and he increases his cultural and economic capital

³ Schulberg told an interviewer: "It became a family joke. If I pricked my finger, my sister, Sonya, would say, 'Be careful. Save it. It's producer's blood!'" ("The Hollywood Years" 122).

as a screenwriter by essentially retyping The Front Page (here called "Five Star Final"⁴). Instead of being ashamed, Sammy brags about it: "I used entirely the same construction scene for scene, only I changed the characters, and I made it funny" ("What Makes" 298). Although the producer Jerry Wald is said to be the prototype for the Sammy character, this type of appropriation is close to what Schulberg's boss Selznick was doing with A Star is Born -- taking the construction of one of his earlier films, What Price Hollywood?, inserting a loveplot for the characters, and, with the help of Dorothy Parker, making it funny.

Sammy shows us that creative ownership in Hollywood can be achieved through means other than artistry. He's a mediocre writer, but a virtuoso at self-promotion and bullying. By end of the story, every movie he works on instantly becomes a Sammy Glick movie. As he leaps from New York copy boy to radio columnist to screenwriter to Hollywood producer, his determination conceals his lack of originality. Who needs talent when you have tenacity? It's apparent that Sammy's star is on the rise, and his friend/enemy Al hitches a ride on this star and acts as his Boswell. Appropriately, Al's last name is "Manners." When his drama column loses space to Sammy's radio column, a blatant synecdoche of art being swallowed up by mass culture, razor-sharp sarcasm is the only weapon he uses in retaliation. But his irony and appeals to conscience are no match for Sammy's iron will and amorality. In the novel, Al goes through a complex moral struggle once he's in Hollywood regarding gentility and artistic integrity, but the end of the short story finds him quickly

⁴Schulberg may have lifted the title from a 1931 film directed by Mervyn LeRoy starring Edward G. Robinson.

capitulated to Sammy's world view. He realizes that the future of film authorship is Sammy Glick: "My agent tells me I may go to work for him next week, and I'd still rather have my name on a Sammy Glick production than any picture in town" (299).

The irony is, of course, that if it's a "Sammy Glick production," it has already been branded with someone else's mark of ownership -- Sammy Glick's. Sammy, and Sammy alone, will decide who gets screen credit. Couple this with the fact that Sammy is an admitted plagiarist, and Al's chances for seeing his name onscreen look slim indeed. The story ends with this glimpse of the once-proud Al Manners as a dried-up and corrupted screenwriter. The writer as gentleman amateur, more interested in seeing the plays than writing about them, has devolved into a credit-hungry whore. Budd Schulberg, a Hollywood favorite son and Dartmouth graduate, has written an expose of the American movie industry's damaging effect on the American artist of conscience.

Like the fictional Al Manners and the real Budd Schulberg, F. Scott Fitzgerald was an Ivy League educated screenwriter with a paucity of film credits. In 1937, deeply in debt, Fitzgerald returned to Hollywood with a six month MGM contract at \$1000 a week with an option of a raise to \$1250 the following year, a salary which again placed him among the highest paid screenwriters in Hollywood (Hamilton 145, Correspondence 475). It wasn't as much as Parker (\$1750-\$2500) was making, but it was a lot more than West's (\$350) and Schulberg's (\$25) established salaries, and it

was a remarkable sum considering the fact that he still had zero film writing credits after years and years of attempts.

That was soon to change, but not in the way he had hoped. In 1937, after a lackluster polish on a script entitled A Yank at Oxford, Fitzgerald began working on an adaptation of Erich Marie Remarque's novel Three Comrades, the film that would be responsible for his first -- and only -- screen credit. As pre-production was beginning, he wrote Scottie of his plan to "keep my hand on the wheel from the start - - find out the key man among the bosses and 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" (Letters of FSF 117). With his Naturalistic talk of "tooth and nail," Fitzgerald sounds a bit like Sammy Glick, ready to engage in a Darwinian struggle for supremacy. He also displays a recognition of the anthropological fact discovered by Hortense Powdermaker that creative groups in Hollywood -- writers, directors, actors, editors, cinematographers, producers -- were dependent on each other, but that they were simultaneously engaged in a constant struggle for control and dominance (29-30).

Still, for every piece of information Fitzgerald was picking up about Hollywood codes, there were other messages he simply kept missing. Behind the wisened-up language we continue to hear him clinging to the notion that a single writer, and only a writer, can author a motion picture. Fitzgerald needed the bump in his salary working solo on a picture could offer,⁵ as well as the glory, but there was still

⁵ In 1937, Fitzgerald's debts exceeded \$40,000 and his agent Ober had been unable to place his stories for over a year (Bryer 106).

another reason he wanted to be "alone on the picture." Unlike West, Schulberg and Parker, who accepted the collaborative system -- though certainly not its unfair assignment of credits and its labor practices -- Fitzgerald hated working with others, especially those he considered his literary inferiors. Submitting his draft of the Three Comrades screenplay to producer Joseph Mankiewicz, Fitzgerald felt confident that he would receive sole writing credit and that the script wouldn't need any more "cooks" (Correspondence 478). But a few days later, Mankiewicz assigned Ted Paramore, a writer Fitzgerald thought was a fool,⁶ to assist Fitzgerald in revising it.

The chain of events that followed their pairing isn't surprising. Fitzgerald thought Paramore would be working beneath him to help with technical language and form; Paramore wanted to make extensive content revisions; Fitzgerald grew furious that the Hollywood hack dared to think himself his creative equal. Claiming possession of superior taste and judgment -- the gold bullion of highbrow cultural capital -- the famous author then fired off an angry letter to his collaborator:

I prefer to keep responsibility for the script as a whole...
 when you blandly informed me yesterday that you were going
 to write the whole thing over yourself, kindly including my
 best scenes, I knew we had to have this out...If you were
 called on this job in the capacity of complete rewriter then
 I'm getting deaf...I didn't write four out of four best sellers or
 a hundred and fifty top-priced short stories out of the mind of

⁶ Fitzgerald had satirized Paramore, whom he had known in New York, in The Beautiful and Damned.

a temperamental child without taste or judgment.

(Letters of FSF 559)

Most screenwriters learned quickly that there's no such thing as "the script as a whole." Even if one person is responsible for making the entire component, it's still only a part crafted to make the larger vehicle run more smoothly. The screenplay isn't meant to exist on its own, not even to the extent that a dramatic work for the theatre, by Samuel Beckett for instance, might come alive on the page. The mediocre businessman Shakespeare may not have realized that he was the great playwright Shakespeare, but to this day there's still no Hamlet of screenplays. The Hollywood script is a written invitation to make art, not a literary artwork in its own right.

Furthermore, ultimately producer Joseph Mankiewicz -- not screenwriter F. Scott Fitzgerald -- would bear the "responsibility for the script as a whole." Powdermaker writes: "Although movies are made by many people in the setting of a big industry, certain individuals have power to strongly influence them, while others are relatively powerless" (3). The studio system was hierarchical, not collaborative. MGM wasn't a collective or a kibbutz. Everyone didn't have equal say in making decisions; everyone didn't have common goals. MGM paid their writers a lot of money to do it the producer's way. Ultimately, Mankiewicz had creative control over Three Comrades. After the Fitzgerald/Paramore draft of the script was submitted, the producer skimmed off the cream and then rewrote the screenplay himself. In his hands, power translated into something resembling authorship.

When Fitzgerald read this revision of the revision of his adaptation, he sent Mankiewicz a letter even angrier than the one he'd written to Paramore:

I gave you a drawing and you simply took a box of chalk and touched it up...I guess all these years I've been kidding myself about being a good writer...For nineteen years, with two out for sickness, I've written best-selling entertainment, and my dialogue is supposedly right up at the top. But I learn from your script that you've suddenly decided that it isn't good dialogue and you can take a few hours off and do much better...Oh, Joe, can't producers ever be wrong? I'm a good writer -- honest.

(Letters of FSF 563)

Again we see Fitzgerald mentioning his writing credentials, and again he proclaims his superior taste and judgment. Fitzgerald always believed that if he could write a good book, he could write a good movie. But, as we've seen in earlier chapters, the different media call on different sets of writing skills and require different expectations from the writer. Whereas fiction is written for the self and an ideal public, the studio system tried to convince authors that screenplays are written for producers. Every draft of A Star is Born needed David Selznick's approval; each version was a step towards the one he would stamp "FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT". In the mind of the studio, Scott Fitzgerald wasn't writing Three Comrades for the popular audience that consumes "best-selling entertainment"; he was writing for the consumption of Joseph Mankiewicz. This irked Fitzgerald to no end. In his copy of the final shooting script, he crossed out "OKed by Joseph Mankiewicz" and replaced it with "Scrawled Over by Joseph Mankiewicz" (A Life in Letters 343-344).

As for Fitzgerald's claims of superior judgment, he should have realized that

fiction is judged largely on the final product, screenplays are judged largely on competition time. Slow writers were bad writers. Schulberg could polish a script quickly. Parker could rattle off dialogue. West was a bit pokier, but the stakes were lower at the places he worked, as was the quality of the films. By all accounts, Fitzgerald was a slow worker (Behrman 158), and MGM producers were seldom satisfied with the work he submitted. It took him too long to write his scripts, and, to make matters worse, the work he submitted didn't move the narrative along quickly enough. The lyricism of his prose compensates for lackluster plotting in his novels, but Fitzgerald's screenplays can't overcome this weakness.

A script's main requirement is pace: obviously a movie needs to move. There must be little or no character background, and absolutely no digression. Story is much more important than character. A look at the Three Comrades script shows that some of the scenes Fitzgerald pleaded with Mankiewicz to restore would have weighed the picture down. For example, Fitzgerald's version included wordy conversations between characters that used dialogue to convey information about setting and theme that the camera was already going to take care of visually. Even worse, Fitzgerald's dialogue, as Mankiewicz pointed out in later years, sounded ridiculous when read by actors (Latham 121). What looked fine on paper sounded stilted when delivered. The novelist had written for the page, not the screen.

Wheeler Winston Dixon correctly observes of Fitzgerald's Three Comrades script: "[He] relies all too heavily on words to convey his meaning...he sought to interweave two stories into one: the emotional relationship of the three comrades, and a near documentary depiction of social conditions in Germany during the Depression"

(58). Some other segments that Fitzgerald wanted onscreen are comically bad. For instance, here's one character, Bobby, calling another, Pat, for a date:

54: A SWITCHBOARD

with a white angel sitting at it.

ANGEL (sweetly): One moment, please -- I'll connect you with heaven.

CUT TO:

55: THE PEARLY GATES

St. Peter, the caretaker, sitting beside another switchboard.

ST. PETER (cackling): I think she's in.

CUT TO:

56: BOBBY'S FACE

still ecstatic, changing to human embarrassment as Pat's voice says:

PAT: Hello.

BOBBY: Hello.

CUT TO:

57: A SATYR, who has replaced the angel at the switchboard -- pulling out the plug with a sardonic expression.

("Three Comrades": The Screenplay 44)

In addition to being unfilmable,⁷ Fitzgerald's proposed switchboard episode would have been completely out of whack with the rest of Three Comrades -- the story takes place in Nazi Germany and Pat is wasting away from TB. Because Fitzgerald's attitude was that he was writing for the movies, instead of to them, he lapsed into sappiness. Writing down to his material led him into bad writing, and into bad relationships with his collaborators.

A stagnant salary and an excess of professional pride were two reasons Fitzgerald disliked being paired with others, but another benefit of earning a solo credit was that it often allowed you the chance to move on to writing originals for the screen. Rather than adapting someone else's novel or play, Fitzgerald wanted to chase the ghost of authoring his own films. However, MGM, where Fitzgerald worked, had lots of money to buy properties, so they had little desire for originals. On the other hand, Republic, where Nathanael West worked, couldn't afford to buy many properties. A large number of stories originated in-house.

In 1937, West pitched original stories so he could increase his screen credits, which would then increase his weekly salary. Unlike Fitzgerald, he wasn't interested in mastering the craft of screenwriting or in seeing his film vision realized. Friend and fellow Republic Pictures screenwriter Wells Root said of West's detachment from his

⁷ After reading the scene, MGM executive Eddie Mannix screamed: "How the hell do you photograph *that*?" (Latham 135-136).

scripts: "I think he figured in respect to producers and directors that movies were their business, not his. He was a sort of architectural assistant, working on plans for a house" (quoted in Light 143). With this kind of attitude, it seems a little unjust that West got the chance to write an original movie while Fitzgerald did not. One of the films West worked on in 1937, Born to be Wild, the story of two men driving a truck filled with dynamite, was conceived, treated, and scripted by West alone (Jay Martin 404).⁸ And some critics, including Jay Martin and Tom Dardis, believe that West was even able to sneak his own leftist political agenda into some of his Republic films, especially 1936's The President's Mystery and 1937's It Could Happen to You.

The boss at Republic, Herb Yates, didn't like lefties, and West's political activities placed him in constant danger of being fired. Jay Martin writes of the West-scripted, pro-Roosevelt, pro-union The President's Mystery: "When Yates viewed his most recent film in New York in early September, he was outraged. A supporter of Alf Landon, he declared that the picture -- made for \$105,000, the most expensive Republic Picture until that time -- had cost less than he had bet on Landon, and he was determined not to release it. Nevertheless, economics prevailed" (278). There's not much mystery in The President's Mystery: corporate capitalist fishmongers want to shut down a rural cannery collective; fifty-three long minutes later they are foiled -- as we expected.

The following year, much to Yates' consternation, his company put out It Can Happen to You, a film even more overtly political. A card included with a videotape

⁸ The plot of the film anticipates the 1953 classic Wages of Fear.

version of the film⁹ describes it as the story of "an immigrant's son who wants to buy a citizenship school for foreigners, but finds himself involved with the wrong crowd." This "wrong crowd" includes a Nietzschean fascist called "Professor Schwab" who "dreams of the time when his political philosophy will be the rule in America" (Video Yesteryear Recording). After West's treatment was accepted, he worked on the final script with Samuel Ornitz, later famous for being one of the Hollywood Ten. Jay Martin calls the film: a "version of A Cool Million mixed well with Sinclair Lewis's It Can't Happen Here and with large doses of immigrant sociology" (279). Of the four films West worked on that can still be tracked down, this one is the most entertaining. The evil intellectual is very evil and the earnest hero is very earnest. But like all Republic films, except maybe The Quiet Man, the sets look cheap, the acting is wooden, and every scene looks like it was shot with only one set-up and in only one take.

Republic Pictures made movies for rural theatres that couldn't afford the big-city prices charged by the major studios. Because West was involved with the Screen Writer's Guild's battle for recognition, a place like MGM or Paramount wouldn't touch him (Jay Martin 275), especially since he lacked the literary reputation of someone like fellow SWGer Dorothy Parker (or the insider clout of young Communist Budd Schulberg) that might have caused the major studios to look the other way at his political activities. So it was either a "Poverty Row" studio for West or nothing. On

⁹ In 1990, Ian Hamilton called West's Republic Films "extremely difficult -- if not impossible -- to view" (163). Presumably he was talking about their scarcity, not their quality. But through the internet I was able to acquire video copies of The President's

the positive side, working at Republic wasn't without its advantages. The company made so many films, and made them so hastily, that West couldn't help but get a crash course in the praxis and craft of screenwriting. During 1937, he worked on at least nine films, and probably closer to a dozen.

West took no pride in the finished films, but felt no disappointment in them either. Above all else, he liked the money screenwriting afforded him -- it was allowing him to finish a draft of The Day of the Locust and begin work on a play entitled Gentlemen, the War! He didn't mind daily life at the studio too much either. A die-hard pessimist and misanthrope, West was also one of the most gregarious people in Hollywood. He thought writing bad movies was funny, and he liked visiting his co-workers in their offices and feeding them lines for their scripts (Dardis 154, 182). After hours, in the social club atmosphere of the back room of Stanley Rose's Bookshop, West liked bellyaching with writers like Parker and Schulberg about draconian studio management (Four Seasons 147-153).

Although West cared little for screenwriting, he cared a great deal about screenwriters. Most screenwriters at any given time were out of work, and those who were employed were often a whim away from being let go without credit or compensation. At Republic, for instance, it was common practice to fire someone to avoid paying him a bonus or a holiday, then turn around and re-hire him a day or two later (Schwartz 56). West, like most of the other members of the Screen Writer's Guild, wasn't a card-carrying Communist, but he saw the need to foster an organization which would aid writers with the economic and creative struggles they

Mystery and It Could Happen to You. I also viewed collaborative drafts of the

were facing. On the other hand, as Jay Martin writes, "His sympathies, basically, were with people rather than programs... He always remained interested in the guild's goals – and intensely committed to the dignity and freedom of the writer – but he was bored by its rhetoric and gesticulations" (344, 348).

Politically, West lacked the earnestness of Budd Schulberg, the intensity of Dorothy Parker, and the missionary zeal of both of them. In 1937, Schulberg officially joined the Communist Party (Beck 7), a fashionable organization to which fellow traveler Parker already belonged. Eventually, Schulberg would get tired of receiving Party assignments and bristle at how doctrinaire the leaders could be over creative content, but his attraction to worker's issues was more than just a spoiled rich boy's rebellion. He and Parker both rocked the Hollywood boat when they could have easily just gone along for the ride. His bloodline and her fame assured them both of a comfortable living in Hollywood, yet they chose to use their power to aid the less fortunate.

Literary histories tend to paint the 1930s as "the Red Decade," and it's easy to mistakenly assume that most artists of the period leaned to the left. But in truth, as historians such as Barbara Foley and Richard Pells have noted,¹⁰ the majority of American writers between the wars -- like the majority of the American people between the wars -- were a conservative bunch, more interested in baseball scores than how many Loyalists were being killed in Spain. Artists in Hollywood who were politically active, such as Schulberg and Parker, were often accused of being poseurs.

screenplays for these films at The New York State Archives in Albany.

Although membership and meetings were secret, it was widely known that the Communist Party threw fun parties and offered an attractive range of dating opportunities (Schwartz 86, 92). But Schulberg and Parker were more than swimming pool reds; they were socially committed professionals. They weren't radical out of guilt; they were radical out of a sense of justice and equality. It's important to remember that despite its ultimate goal of -- well -- overthrowing the American government, some of the more noble goals of the Hollywood Communist Party were to bolster unions, to aid in voter turnout for local political campaigns, and to fight fascism. Parker was serious about achieving these latter goals, yet after joining the Party her reputation as a "pixie revolutionary" clung to her more than ever. Nancy Schwartz writes: "All of her friends found it amusing to imagine the willful Dottie subjecting herself to Communist Party discipline. The news media was not only amused but irked by the politicization of the former Round Table member" (83).

Dorothy Parker, who was old enough to be a member of the Lost Generation, had found a sense of purpose in Hollywood. In addition to her SWG work, she was a founding member of The League of American Writers, a group dedicated to fighting Fascism (and a Communist Party front organization). In 1937, the same year she was elected to the Screen Writer's Guild Executive Council, Parker helped finance a documentary on the Loyalist cause entitled The Spanish Earth. It was an issue she felt passionate about. Reporting for The New Masses from Spain, Parker writes: "There I was, then, wild with the knowledge of injustice and brutality and misrepresentation...At that same time I saw many rich people and, in this I am not

¹⁰ See Foley's Radical Representations and Pells' Radical Visions and American

unique, they did much in my life to send me back to the masses, to make me proud of being a worker, too" (Frewin 220). Perhaps here Parker is playing a bit of a role, if not being outright hypocritical. But there can be no doubt that she is correct in calling herself a worker. Her work was writing, and that work was very real, as she makes clear in this 1937 editorial for Screen Guild Magazine:

Through the sweat and tears I shed over my first script, I saw a great truth -- one of those eternal, universal truths that serve to make you feel much worse than when you started. And that is that no writer, whether he writes from love or for money, can condescend to what he writes. You can't stoop to what you set down on paper; I don't know why you can't, but you can't. No matter what form it takes, and no matter what the result, and no matter how caustically comic you are about it afterward, what you did was your best. And to do your best is always hard going. (quoted in McGilligan 7)

Her remarks remind us of fellow screenwriter Ben Hecht's famous assertion that "it's just as hard to make a toilet seat as a castle window" (Child of the Century 194). But it's important to note that the "sweat and tears" Parker sheds are over her scripts, not over the films made from her scripts. As we've seen, it's a distinction her friend Fitzgerald was having a hard time making.

Just as a new recruit who is opposed to war can sometimes take great pride in becoming the best soldier in the company, Parker was dismissive of the film industry

Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years.

and those who ran it, but she needed to give the work itself its due respect. Like other writers who first made their bones in another medium, Dorothy Parker quickly came to the realization that screenwriting wasn't easier or less creatively taxing than playwriting or novel writing or poetry writing. It wasn't, as some said, a "soft racket." For her, screenwriting involved labor (sweat) and a measure of personal involvement in that labor (tears). Parker claimed she didn't know why she couldn't "stoop" to her writing assignments, but the answer is clear: She took pride in being a professional writer. She wanted to work hard and do well at the things she could do well. She wanted to produce a quality product. A strong sense of professionalism often trumped her Eastern literary condescension. How her part fit into the whole, or whether it would be used, didn't concern her. For both Schulberg and Parker, the satisfaction of a job well done was often its own reward. Their work on A Star is Born is one such example.

A close look at the production history and content of this film can shed some illuminating light on studio system labor, Hollywood artistry, and movie authorship. A Star is Born begins and ends with close-up shots of a script entitled "A Star is Born." In the opening scene a masculine hand reaches into the frame and marks the document with a "FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT" stamp. This self-reflexive gesture acknowledges that movies are written, not just acted and directed. Furthermore, the word "FINAL" reveals that a Hollywood script goes through several drafts. The entire phrase also implies, and correctly so, that once the movie starts filming the writer's job is finished, but that the screenplay is still subject to change before shooting wraps up.

But the self-consciousness and lifting of the scrim only extend so far. Like all films about film, A Star is Born reveals parts of the movie-making process while keeping others secret. The content of the film demystifies, but the style remystifies. For example, we see the actress Esther Blodgett (Janet Gaynor) being primped by make-up artists before stepping in front of the cameras, but we don't see the actors who play make-up artists in the make-up chair themselves, and we don't see the cameras that film Gaynor's character as she prepares to step in front of the cameras. Along the same lines, the screenplay pictured onscreen doesn't begin or end with a written direction to "show script." No author is credited on its title page. The opening credits to the movie itself, however, announce it as a "Selznick International" production. Only David O. Selznick, producer of A Star is Born, possessed the authority to label the script as final.

Under Selznick's iron-fisted supervision, over a half-dozen writers, among them Dorothy Parker and Budd Schulberg, worked on the script. Parker even received an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. The movie's director was auteur William Wellman, who won the Oscar for the film's Original Story. If Wellman both originated the movie and directed it, he would seem to have the strongest claim to creative ownership. Yet in the final analysis, Selznick is the closest thing the film has to an author. When Wellman was handed the Academy Award, he gave it to Selznick to hold, telling the producer he deserved it more. Selznick pretended to be shocked and flattered, but down deep he agreed. Accordingly, he never gave the statue back.

Selznick managed A Star is Born from inception to completion, bringing the

right people together and making all the major decisions on the film's content and style. In addition to overseeing workers and budgets and deadlines, a producer's traditional roles, Selznick fancied himself a writer who didn't need a typewriter. Like Sam Goldwyn, Darryl Zanuck, and Irving Thalberg -- the managerial/artistic double-threats he modeled himself after -- he wanted to provide the guiding vision behind the films he independently produced. Like Sammy Glick's, Selznick's true genius was for brand management, not just of the marketable product, but of the creative authority over the films themselves.

Jack Stillinger, among many other critics, believes that "as a rule, the authorship of films is so complicated and diffuse as to be, for all practical purposes, unassignable" (174). Because of Hollywood's collaborative work practices, he argues, film authorship isn't a richly complex concept, it's a meaningless one. But, as with the Fitzgerald/Mankiewicz friction, authorship-type issues that appear to be about creative vision are actually matters of power and control. In looking at Hollywood authorial claims, it's usually more fruitful to look at memos, correspondence, and other printed material than it is to look for "signatures" in the frames and scenes of the motion pictures themselves.

Selznick believed A Star is Born was his film, writing in a 1973 letter: "I refused to take credit for it as a matter of policy...The actual original idea, the story line, and the vast majority of the story ideas of the scenes themselves are my own" (Memo from DOS 106). Wellman countered Selznick's claim by saying: "I gave David 'A Star is Born'...Now in his memoirs he said he wrote it. He did like hell! He had a couple of guys come in here and they rewrote it and I rewrote it right back to the way

it was, so it finished up just as it was" (Schickel 218). However, as the opening shot of the film itself makes plain, the script that appears on the page is never the script of what appears on the screen. It is a truth universally acknowledged in Hollywood that any film script is subject to revision at any time before the cameras begin to roll, and usually even after. Characters and scenes can change; the idea usually stays the same. Both Wellman and Selznick claim credit for the idea of A Star is Born, but the narrative geometry of a woman entertainer on her way up and a man on his way down really wasn't original. It's the plot of Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, as well as several other Naturalistic novels, and the films The Blue Angel and Selznick's own What Price Hollywood? -- not to mention the Hollywood marriage of Al Jolson and Ruby Keeler -- chart exactly the same axis.

In still another memo, Selznick claims that the Hollywood community itself -- especially the plots of decline that befell actors John Barrymore, John Gilbert, and John Bowers -- provided all the raw material the writers of A Star is Born needed. He writes of the film's genesis:

We started without anything more than a vague idea of where we were going, and it was really an easy script to write. We had two sets of writers on it, curiously, and Dorothy Parker and her husband, Alan Campbell, did the final dialogue and some amendments in the scenes. But I can say this, that 95% of the dialogue in that picture was actually straight out of life. (Memo from DOS 96)

Actually, three different sets of writers¹¹ (Wellman/Carson, Parker/Campbell, and the uncredited team of Schulberg/Lardner), not two, worked on A Star is Born, but to hear Selznick tell it, all they really need to do anyway was catch some of the anecdotes floating around Hollywood and pin them onto the screenplay.

Statements like Selznick's take the writer out the creative equation, making him or her a collector of material rather than a creator of it. It's almost as misleading as saying that 100% of the words used in the screenplay were straight out of the dictionary; they just needed to be put in the right order. The way that Selznick claims the movie was written replicates the way the writing process is often depicted in the movies. Usually, the Hollywood version of creative genesis finds material getting dropped into the artist's lap. Thinking, rethinking, working, and revision aren't necessary: Shakespeare is in love, so he burns to write about it in Romeo and Juliet; a heterosexual Cole Porter (Cary Grant) in Night and Day is sitting at the piano when he hears birds chirping and a clock ticking, bits of inspiration he instantly incorporates into the lines of the song "Begin the Beguine"; in the final scene of The Player, a writer blackmailing a producer for killing a writer pitches a movie to that same producer about a writer blackmailing a producer for killing a writer.

Behind Selznick's hunch that writing is more transcription than inspiration we can hear the traditional Hollywood belief that someday a system would be figured out to do away with writers entirely. The cliché "time is money" was a perfect fit for the Hollywood studio system, where the assembly-line mode of production fostered an

¹¹ Still another writer, Roland Brown, worked on the script for a few days after Parker and before Schulberg (Kinney 34).

atmosphere of constant crisis. Shooting couldn't start until the writers were finished, so the writers could never be finished fast enough. Part of what rankled screenwriters about those in the front office was that so many of the executives believed that they could do the writer's job faster and better than the writer could. Designing costumes and building sets and composing the film score were jobs for specialists, but the writer's specialization wasn't seen as being very special. If a movie was a hit, the producer would take the credit. If it bombed, usually the script was blamed. A Star is Born was a hit, and Selznick took most of the credit.

Perhaps he deserved to. As can be expected, biographers writing on Parker, Selznick, and Schulberg want to make a claim for their subjects as vital to the finished film. For instance, the movie's famous curtain line: "This is Mrs. Norman Maine!" has been attributed to everyone who worked on the script. Tom Schatz's The Genius of the System is more objective than these accounts, though it relies heavily on Selznick's own notes. According to Schatz, Wellman and Carson's version of the script was too melodramatic, so Selznick brought in Parker and Campbell,¹² at \$1750 a week, to add more comedy. The film scholar Rudy Behlmer has found evidence that Parker and Campbell provided much of the venom in press agent Libby's tirades against Norman (98). After Maine drowns, Libby says of the alcoholic has-been: "It was the first drink of water he's had in twenty years, and he had to get it by accident." And when a delivery boy calls Norman Maine "Mr. Lester," it's easy to hear Alan Campbell's voice protesting years of being called "Mr. Parker."

After Campbell and Parker submitted their draft,¹³ Selznick then brought in Schulberg and Ring Lardner -- at a bargain-basement \$25 a week apiece -- to tighten up the story. Parker's strength was dialogue. Schulberg excelled at plot and structure. According to Schatz, Schulberg took out a scene that had Norman driving drunk and killing a motorist. The junior writer convinced Selznick that such a plot point would steer the film towards being a "social problem" picture¹⁴ (184). All of Schulberg's suggestions weren't implemented however. He also felt that the opening scene, set in the rural midwest, caused the movie to get off to a slow start. But Selznick kept it in, and he was right to do so. Christopher Ames posits in Movies About the Movies that the film's beginning establishes Hollywood as the last frontier, a homeland El Dorado, the epicenter of the American Dream (28).

Selznick had a vision of what the movie could be and should be. Here's Schulberg describing how the final shooting script was put together:

I'll be damned if I didn't see it with my own eyes: David Selznick with a scissors taking the three screenplays, cutting them apart, literally cutting out two lines here and five lines there, making his own David

¹² Parker and Campbell were under contract to Sam Goldwyn, but Parker's cynicism bothered Goldwyn. The producer jumped at the chance when Selznick asked to borrow her.

¹³ Like Schulberg, Parker worked uncredited on Selznick's Nothing Sacred after A Star is Born began shooting. The producer wanted her "to add women's dialogue and bright repartee" (Kinney 33).

¹⁴ At Warner Brothers in the early 1930's, William Wellman made his reputation with social problem pictures like Public Enemy.

Selznick screenplay, and the goddamn thing was one of the best

Hollywood movies of all time. ("The Hollywood Years" 132-133)

After the script was finished -- indeed throughout every stage of production --

Selznick maintained control over the film's style and meaning. Even after A Star is

Born was edited and ready for release, he kept working on it. After a test screening, he

decided to go back and tighten-up Norman's suicide walk into the ocean (Schatz 186),

one of the film's most memorable images.

With this amount of producer input, it's no wonder that the movie executive in Selznick's film, Oliver Niles (Adolph Menjou), comes off as kind, fair, and erudite.

According to Ames, during the height of the studio era such depictions of avuncular

producers were commonplace, most notably in the David Selznick movies What Price

Hollywood? and A Star is Born. Ames goes on to make the following observation:

The image of Hollywood as a working environment demanding a particularly driven temperament is a powerful one. The image recurs in Hollywood literature -- most famously in Fitzgerald's The Last Tycoon and Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? The ruthless producer is not, however, a familiar figure in film until the 1950s...The Bad and The Beautiful in 1952 introduced the tyrannical but brilliant producer to the screen. In the same year, screenwriter Robert Carson [one of the writers on A Star is Born] published a Hollywood novel, The Magic Lantern, which...narrates the story of a movie-producing son of a ruthless, first-generation, movie-mogul father whose career ended in disgrace. David Selznick is clearly one model for these

portraits, as is Budd Schulberg (151).

In keeping with Selznick's debate with Schulberg over whether or not producer's blood is thicker than typewriter ink, A Star is Born's benevolent Oliver Niles is the polar opposite of Schulberg's rapacious Sammy Glick -- save for one respect. Both characters possess goof-proof instincts about what the public wants.

Niles signs Esther on the basis of nothing. As Ames points out, in the fifties remake, Judy Garland's character sings and dances; she's already in show business when she's discovered and has evident talent (53). But in the 1937 version, the producer signs Esther because: "I like you, and I have a feeling the public will too." No major American industry knew less about itself and its customers than the film industry, and producers often projected their own tastes onto the public. Still, despite their best efforts, the studios never discovered the star-making formula.¹⁵ The 1930's A Star is Born tells us nothing about what it takes to be a star. In line with the demystify/remystify sleight-of-hand that characterizes the movie about movies, we see that inside of the star Vicki Lester lives Esther Blodgett, but we never see that inside of Esther Blodgett lives the star Vicki Lester.

Films made in Hollywood about creative people seldom reveal anything about creativity. Actors and writers, with their talents and skills, were often a mystery to producers. Luck and hunches were things those in the front office understood.

Crossing his fingers, the producer in A Star is Born sticks a powdered wig on Vicki's

¹⁵ Several years later, David O. Selznick would fall in love with contract player Jennifer Jones and would try unsuccessfully to make a huge star of her. Darryl Zanuck and William Randolph Hearst were also accused of trying to turn their May romances into famous actresses.

head, casts her in a costume drama, and watches the audience transform her into a celebrated actress. Aside from a comically bad impression of Mae West -- herself by 1937 already a comically bad impression of herself -- we never see Vicki acting for more than a few seconds. Janet Gaynor is a fine actress.¹⁶ It's not her fault we can't figure out what makes Vicki a star. Even if the studios knew the fame equation, they still wouldn't let on.

Explaining stardom would decrease its wattage. Because Hollywood film must always have it both ways, A Star is Born is a warning tale about Hollywood that winds up glamorizing the very dreams it calls into question. On one hand it cautions women not to leave the farm for the footlights, but the deeper message is that maybe you, dear viewer, have that certain something the camera will love. On a certain level, A Star is Born is sobering: stars are born, not made; for every star that is born, one dies. Vicki's star is on the rise; Norman's is on the wane.¹⁷ When she first gets to Hollywood, Esther is shown a room where a half-dozen switchboard operators are being overwhelmed by calls from aspiring starlets. Unlike the switchboard scene Fitzgerald wrote for Three Comrades, this episode is right in synch with the tone and style of the film. The receptionist tells the ingénue that her chances of making it are "one in a hundred thousand." A saucer-eyed Esther replies innocently: "But what if I'm that one?" A Star is Born serves to demonstrate that almost anyone can be a star,

¹⁶ See Gaynor's performance in Sunrise (1927).

¹⁷ It's an interesting bit of reverse-reflexivity that after A Star is Born Janet Gaynor was on her way to retirement while Fredric March would go on to give many of the best performances of his career.

but providence has already decided which ones are. Only a movie producer, that oracle of Hollywood, can divine if you've been kissed by an angel or not.

The film's representation of the path to stardom bears out Frankfurt School sociologist Leo Lowenthal's observation that popular magazine biographies of famous people almost always depicted their subjects as the passive recipients of amazingly good fortune -- much like the way Fitzgerald preternatural talent was often fetishized in the 1920s press. Fame pushed itself on the famous, and these celebrities bent to fame's will. In other words, rising in the world is a matter of going along for the ride. No work is necessary to become famous. You've either already got it, or you don't. It will either be handed to you, or it won't. If Selznick's A Star is Born script can write itself, maybe it's no wonder that its heroine can become a successful actress without acting. Movie producer Sammy Glick uses pluck and nastiness to claw his way up cinema's corporate ladder, but movie star Vicki Lester floats to the top through a bubbly combination of luck and industry kindness.

A Star is Born is more forgiving of Hollywood than is "What Makes Sammy Run?", even in the scenes Schulberg is said to have written. Sammy uses Max Weber's terrible trio -- charisma, bureaucracy, and force -- to cement his power and feed his megalomania, but whatever power Vicki's stardom grants her, it never goes to her head. She begins the film a timid rube, and ends it as a strong survivor. Sammy runs away from his family and a life of urban poverty; Vicki wants to run back to a life of rural simplicity. After a pep talk by her beloved grandmother, she decides to stay in Hollywood. Proudly declaring herself "Mrs. Norman Maine," the widowed Vicki places her husband before her career, and her adoring public --the same public who

abandoned Norman -- now wants her even more for it. If there's a villain in the film, it's the fickle audience. A fan at her husband's funeral tells her: "Don't worry about it, honey. He wasn't much," but Vicki as the grieving widow is her most popular role ever. At the conclusion of the film, Grandma Lettie stands next to her at the microphone and tells the radio audience how happy she is to finally be in Hollywood after all these years. If Norman's decline showed the perils of stardom and the movie capital, Grandma Lettie makes sure we leave the theatre back in love with the movies. She says: "Maybe some of you people listening in dream about coming to Hollywood, and maybe some of you get pretty discouraged. Well, when you do, just think about me. It took me over seventy, um, sixty years to get here, but here I am and here I mean to stay."

Selznick biographer David Thomson believes that Schulberg came up with this finale, as does Schulberg's biographer Nicholas Beck, but the truth will never be known. What's certain, however, is that screenwriters Parker and Schulberg never felt especially attached to the picture, despite the fact that their contributions were clearly significant. As we've already noted, Schulberg was sticking around in his hometown and observing Selznick in order to soak up material for his Hollywood fiction. Parker was proud of her work on A Star is Born when the film came out, but according to biographer Marion Meade, she disowned it in later years when it started becoming a classic (263). She wanted to be remembered as a poet or fiction writer, not as the Academy Award nominated screenwriter of A Star is Born.

Chapter Five: 1938-1939

The twilight of a decade is a natural time for people to take stock of their lives. With the 1930s coming to an end, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nathanael West, Dorothy Parker, and Budd Schulberg were reflecting on where they had come from artistically and where they were headed professionally. Fitzgerald's debts were rising, and his film career was rapidly losing whatever momentum the small push from Three Comrades had given it. Parker was gathering a book of her short stories, Here Lies, but her screenwriting career was slowing down. Schulberg and West were racking up movie credits, but literary fame was the elusive target they had spent the 1930s shooting for. In short, all four authors were frustrated.

Despite their disappointments, each of these writers held out hope for the future. Throughout the decade, writing for the movies not only had provided these writers with money and the occasional shelter of moral support of their comrades, it had also offered them material for their art. After years of work, West was preparing to publish The Day of the Locust, his most ambitious book to date. West's entire corpus had been concerned with dreaming and escape: The Dream Life of Balso Snell was a literal dream of a poet who wishes to escape into literature; Miss Lonelyhearts dreamed of escaping into religion; A Cool Million examined the American success myth; and Day of the Locust would focus on the escape into celluloid. If the Hollywood studio system was truly the dream factory, then West had finally traced back his major theme to its source.

While West was concentrating on Hollywood's outsiders, those who bought fantasy, other novelists were examining Hollywood's insiders, those who manufactured

fantasy. Fitzgerald was beginning a book about the inner machinery of the film industry, and producer Sammy Glick, the anti-hero of several Schulberg short stories, was getting his own novel. The 1939 screenwriting collaboration between Fitzgerald and Schulberg -- or, as we'll see, lack of collaboration -- would eventually find its way into their literary work. In his Fitzgerald biography, Andrew Turnbull calls young Schulberg "an ambitious junior scriptwriter hungry for credits that would push him up the Hollywood ladder" (297). But Budd Schulberg wasn't Sammy Glick -- at least not yet. In 1939, he was hungrier for book deals than movie credits, and he was more interested in peaceful political revolution than in cut-throat office politics. The "Hollywood Prince" had "producer's blood," but being read -- and being red -- were far more important to him. Actively involved in the SWG during the most dramatic period of its existence, Schulberg would mold his observations into some of the strongest scenes of What Makes Sammy Run?

There's also some evidence that Fitzgerald was becoming more empathetic to Hollywood labor issues towards the end of the decade. According to screenwriter Harry Rapf, in the late 1930s Schulberg "got Scott Fitzgerald to say he thought he (Fitzgerald) was a communist" (quoted in Beck 8), and Matthew Bruccoli writes that with it becoming increasingly clear that his immediate financial future rested in Hollywood, Fitzgerald -- under Budd's influence -- had become more interested in the Screen Writers Guild (Some Sort 453). Fitzgerald's attraction to film itself was also deepening. Schulberg has written that Fitzgerald "believed in film as an ideal art form for reaching out to millions who might have never read a serious novel" (Four Seasons 98). But make no mistake, Scott's letters of 1938-1939, especially those addressed to Perkins, clearly demonstrate that he saw

himself as a novelist above all else: "I long to make some picture money and get back to the novel" (Correspondence 537) he wrote to his editor.

Similarly, West had never made a secret of the fact that he was hanging around the movie industry primarily to support his thirst for novel-writing. Although he was gaining more prestigious jobs, leaving Republic Studios for stints at "major minors" like RKO and Universal and gaining a solo screen credit on the A-movie I Stole a Million (Universal 1939), literary success was still his goal. Random House, his largest publisher to date, was putting out The Day of the Locust, and West mentioned to his editor Bennett Cerf that "blurbs from important people" (Novels and Other Writings 784) like Parker, Fitzgerald, and Hammett might increase sales.

Asking for his endorsement, West sent Fitzgerald the novel's galleys. The letter the younger writer enclosed provides us a clear view into his ideas regarding the friction between writing as a vocation (the work he is called to do) and writing as a profession (the work he can market and sell). Thanking Fitzgerald for mentioning him in the 1934 preface to The Great Gatsby, West explains the source of his difficulty in reaching an audience:

Somehow or other I seem to have slipped in between all the "schools." My books meet no need except my own, their circulation is practically private and I'm lucky to be published. And yet, I only have a desire to remedy all that BEFORE sitting down to write, once begun I do it my way. I forget the broad sweep, the big canvas, the shot-gun adjectives, the important people, the significant ideas, the lessons to be taught, the epic Thomas Wolfe, the realistic James Farrell -- and go on making what one critic called

"private and unfunny jokes." Your preface made me feel that they weren't completely private and maybe not even entirely jokes. (Novels 791-792)

In 1939, the year this letter was written, West, like Schulberg, had accepted increased responsibilities within the SWG by serving as an elected member of its board, and he was willing to lend his signature to progressive causes like the Anti-Fascist and Pro-Labor group The Motion Picture Guild (Schwartz 322, Jay Martin 351). Throughout the 1930s, however, West had been unable -- or perhaps unwilling -- to use his books to tout his politics. In a similar letter sent to Jack Conroy he argues that if he were to use The Day of the Locust to depict Hollywood's "sincere, honest people" and their "great progressive fight," it would clash with his satirical aims, and "the whole fabric of the peculiar half-world ... would be badly torn by them" (quoted in Jay Martin 337).

In fact, most writing about honest people struck West as dishonest. He told Malcolm Cowley he was constitutionally unable to believe in the feel-good platitudes of Steinbeck's 1939 The Grapes of Wrath (Novels 795). Unlike Steinbeck's books, West's novels had no progressive message, and they were therefore of little value to exponents of proletarian literature. His books read like cautionary tales, but they didn't specify what exactly we should be looking out for. West senses that something has broken down in American life, but he doesn't tell us how to fix it. Other avenues to critical appreciation were closed to him as well. His writing lacked the beauty, the scope, and the foregrounding of significant ideas that the 1930s highbrow press might have responded to, and his books were too dirty for libraries. Although West was admired by his fellow writers, especially Fitzgerald (Brucoli, Some Sort 451) and critics like Edmund Wilson, he belonged to no marketable "school" or movement.

There are, of course, "significant ideas" in West's books. But just as Fitzgerald had fallen out of critical favor in the 1930s, it would take several decades for West's "half-world" to be appreciated – yet even now "the schoolmasters of ever after" aren't quite sure what to do with him. At bottom, A Cool Million, like the high school reading list staple The Great Gatsby, depicts a quixotic campaign to collect on the promises of the American success myth. Lacking Fitzgerald's lyrical gift for giving his short novels the feel of a big canvas, West's black humor doesn't always make his "lessons to be taught" as clear as Fitzgerald's style might. A darkly comic nihilist in his life and his art, a teller of the type of private and unfunny jokes that would be better appreciated after the coming of 1960s writers like John Hawkes and Thomas Pynchon, West was much less preachy than Fitzgerald, the man he was writing to for help.

As a number of his biographers have shown,¹ as Fitzgerald got older, he got more pedantic in his dealings with other people. Sheilah Graham's College of One tells the story of her 1938-1939 journey through the great works of literature, a tour Fitzgerald carefully mapped out for her and firmly guided. As Schulberg would realize during their screenwriting trip and John O' Hara would discover at around the same time, the flip side of Fitzgerald's largesse was often his desire to attract intellectual disciples. His college-age daughter had decided to become a writer, and his letters to Scottie during this time are full of dogmatic advice. As he admitted in a 1939 letter to her: "I want to preach at people in some acceptable form rather than to entertain them" (Letters of FSF 63). Fitzgerald had done his share of both during his career, but West, like Miss Lonelyhearts, was neither minister nor minstrel.

In the late 1930s, West was struggling without success to build a fiction writing career that could support him. Parker and Fitzgerald were helping him keep hammering away by promising him their endorsement of his book,² but they were experiencing vocational problems of their own. West had spent the thirties hoping to gain a literary foothold; they had spent the decade in constant fear that they were slipping.

In 1939, Viking published Here Lies, a book of Dorothy Parker's collected stories marked by a funereal title that couldn't help but remind her that she had produced very little fiction recently. If Parker was working on fewer scripts as the 1930s were coming to an end, she was composing even fewer short stories. Despite the dearth of new fiction from her pencil, she wanted to bolster her reputation as a fiction writer, and a book of collected stories seemed like a good way to do so (Meade 306). Only three of the stories contained in Here Lies were new -- the Hemingwayesque "Soldiers of the Republic," "The Custard Heart," and a weepie about a poor, blind, black child entitled "Clothe the Naked." These stories mark a move towards dealing with progressive issues and a step away from the witty interior monologues Parker was known for, a timely step with war breaking out in Europe, but none of these pieces is of the same rank as "Big Blonde" or "Horsie."

¹ see Mellow, Mizener, Donaldson, and Brucoli.

² Parker's blurb read: "It's brilliant, savage, and arresting -- a truly good novel." Fitzgerald's comments came too late to be used to promote the novel. He called The Day of the Locust a book with "scenes of extraordinary power" that "puts Gorky's 'The Lower Depths' in the class with the 'Tale of Benjamin Bunny'."

Without a coat of humor to help it go down, the sentimentality in Dorothy Parker's stories is almost impossible to swallow.

As "Clothe the Naked" demonstrates, Parker's fire for civil rights was burning hot, but her interest in labor issues -- like her fiction production -- may have been cooling a bit. The major battle over which organization would speak on behalf of screenwriters, the left-friendly SWG or the producer-supported Screen Playwrights, had ended in 1938 with the National Labor Relations Board having recognized the SWG as the official union voice of writers in Hollywood. During the course of the hearings the studios had argued to the government that writers were artists -- not employees -- and therefore weren't covered by collective bargaining clauses granted to other workers under the Wagner Act. To those writers who felt, as Fitzgerald did, that they had been invited to Hollywood because of their individual creativity only to be punished for it within the studio system, this unfruitful line of reasoning must have seemed like the height of irony. The NLRB had ordered producers to sit down with union representatives immediately, but the studios had responded with more litigation.

During the lengthy struggle for SWG recognition, few union members had worked harder than Parker. At her own professional risk, she had campaigned for equity and collective bargaining, a minimum wage scale and a minimum employment period, advance notice prior to dismissal, and fair distribution of screen credit. She had been the very picture of a successful, socially committed screenwriter. But when a reporter writing an article on the NLRB hearings, entitled "Are Film Writers Workers?", asked her about her work in the movie industry, she told him "I want nothing from Hollywood but money,

and anyone who tells you he is here for anything else or tries to make beautiful words out of it lies in his teeth" (371).

This hardly sounds like the artist who had eloquently described her kinship with Spanish laborers and the screenwriter who had made beautiful words out of her inability to condescend to what she puts down on paper. Even if we make allowances for Parker's difficulty in holding back a caustic zinger, her 1939 response to Pacific Weekly still seems like a failure to get the message of the Screen Writer's Guild -- that writers are workers -- to a wider audience. On the other hand, if all she truly wanted from Hollywood was money -- not fair labor conditions for her co-workers, the satisfaction of a job well done, membership in a writing community, or an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay -- she had earned plenty of it in the recent past. After Nathanael West's sister Laura -- the screenwriter wife of S.J. Perelman -- had gotten pregnant in 1938, Parker and Alan Campbell had taken over her lucrative MGM contract³ (Meade 287).

After working on several scripts for MGM, among them Sweethearts (1938), a hit starring the bankable duo of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette Macdonald, the writing team had contributed to the less successful Trade Winds at United Artists, a movie featuring their friend Fredric March. This had marked the end of the most productive period of Parker's screenwriting life (1933-1938). While her film career was far from over, and she would even be nominated for another Academy Award before she was through, after 1938 she would work less frequently, for shorter periods of time, and often for less money. In 1939, the year she made her comments to Pacific Weekly, Parker did no film work at all.

³ Zeppo Marx was the agent on the deal.

This, coupled with the publication of Here Lies, could account for the increased acidity in her feelings for screenwriting in general and Hollywood studios in particular. Then again, since the 1920s virtually everything Parker ever said needed to be taken with a grain of salt (or arsenic). She still paid SWG dues in 1939, and perhaps her checkbook belied her harsh words. Stuart Silverstein's introduction to Not Much Fun: The Lost Poems of Dorothy Parker documents how Parker forged a hardboiled armor to cover her bleeding heart, leaving out sappy love poems from her collections in favor of tough, cynical verse and crafting a world-weary persona for example (34). But it's also clear that she had a tendency to wear her red heart garishly on her sleeve if she felt the occasion called for it.

An example of this occurred in June of 1939, the same month that "Are Film Writers Workers?" appeared. Parker's address to the crowd at The Third League of American Writers Conference, entitled "Sophisticated Verse -- The Hell With It," finds her turning her back on her early work and early fame in a monologue worthy of MGM by way of Malcolm Cowley. You can almost hear the violins behind her words:

I think the trouble with us was that we stayed young too long. We remained in the smarty-pants stage -- and that is not one of the more attractive ages. And when we finally came to and got out it was quite a surprise to find a whole world of human beings all around us...I think the best thing now about writers is that they grow up sooner. They know you cannot find yourself until you find your fellow men -- they know there is no longer I; there is we. (quoted in Schwartz 144)

With a collection of old stories dressed up and waked as Here Lies, a dip in her interest in the SWG, diminishing film work, a discrediting of the writing that had made her famous,

and discussion of a new generation of superior writers, it looked like Dorothy Parker was ready to consign herself to the dustbin.

But if Parker was looking and feeling like a has-been, Fitzgerald was having an even worse public relations problem. In Beloved Infidel, Graham tells the story of Scott making a surprise visit to a school production of a play based on "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz." The students truly are surprised -- to find him alive. It was a common mistake in the late 1930s. Budd Schulberg talks of being stunned when Walter Wanger, a producer with United Artists, told him that he was being paired with Fitzgerald to write Winter Carnival, a romantic comedy set at an Ivy League college. Schulberg thought Fitzgerald was dead ("In Hollywood" 312).

The tale of the Fitzgerald/Schulberg meeting and the disastrous screenwriting trip to Dartmouth that followed it is one that has been endlessly retold -- especially by Schulberg.⁴ Its outline is as follows: Fitzgerald got drunk on the plane, stayed drunk in New Hampshire despite Schulberg's attempts to baby-sit him, caught a huge cold, acted like a fool at a meeting with faculty and students that Wanger had arranged for the purpose of showing him off, got himself and Schulberg fired when it was revealed no work on the script had been done, and wound up attached to an IV in the hospital. It's a well known fact that this story forms the basis for The Disenchanted, Schulberg's 1950 novel which looks back at the 1930s. Scott Fitzgerald gets poured into the character of Manley Halliday, a drunken novelist whose best days are long behind him. What's less

⁴ After his 1941 New Republic tribute, Schulberg went on to print the story in "Old Scott" for Esquire (1950), his Four Seasons of Success (1972), and Writers in America

well known, however, is that the anecdote finds its way into "The Lost Decade," a powerful Fitzgerald story published in Esquire in 1939 that is a tale of renewal rather than decay.

The February debacle at Dartmouth that would inspire Schulberg's novel and Fitzgerald's short story had come on the heels of a bad start of the year for Fitzgerald. Despite the fact that he was becoming more comfortable with components of film grammar like montage, dissolves, and wipes (The Cinematic Vision of FSF), Fitzgerald still wasn't a skilled screenwriter, nor was he a happy one. He lacked Nathanael West's ability to detach himself from the script, and he possessed neither Budd Schulberg's knack for structure nor Dorothy Parker's ear for spoken dialogue. Yet of the four, Fitzgerald was the one who most wanted to put a distinctive mark on the movies he worked on. "Madame Curie," a script for Greta Garbo he thought was the prestige project that would finally rocket him into the front ranks of Hollywood screenwriters, had gotten shelved when MGM canceled the project a few days into 1939. Shortly after, the studio had loaned him to David Selznick for three days to work on Gone With the Wind. Reports vary on the success of this collaboration.

Fitzgerald had been charged with the primary responsibility of working on characterization for Aunt Pittypat, and Selznick had also wanted him to do a general polish of the script, but many sources report that in the end he had very little impact on the finished film. Fitzgerald had gotten along fine with Selznick, but he had felt constrained. He grumbled to Maxwell Perkins that the producer had forbidden him to use any words in the screenplay that didn't appear in the source novel (The Letters of FSF

(1983). He is quoted commenting on the trip in numerous biographies, articles, and

284), a story backed up by Gavin Lambert's The Making of Gone With the Wind. If Fitzgerald wanted to use a noun or adjective, he had to thumb through Mitchell in search of it.

Selznick had also made him use marginal notes to justify each tiny change he made in the script. Referring to a copy housed at Princeton, Aaron Latham points to an scene where Scarlett wraps a yellow sash around Ashley and the soldier remarks "It looks like gold." Latham notes that Fitzgerald had crossed out the line and had reminded Selznick: "This is Technicolor" (213). Whereas Lambert credits Fitzgerald with tightening the script and making it less talky (71-72), it comes as no surprise that David Selznick -- the self proclaimed author of A Star is Born -- swears that Scott Fitzgerald had no effect on the film whatsoever (Behlmer 444).

Returning to MGM after Gone with the Wind, Fitzgerald had been informed that the studio was letting him go. His salary of \$1,250 a week was far too high to have him just sitting around. During his eighteen months at MGM, Fitzgerald had made \$85,000 (Some Sort 451), but he was still deeply in debt. In a fight that had been brewing for years, Harold Ober, his agent, had refused to lend him any more money, and this argument would result in the two parting company before the end of the year (LeVot 344). In 1938, Fitzgerald had written "Financing Finnegan," a humorous story about a bullying, Hemingwayesque author -- half genius and half con man -- who can't repay the money his agent and publisher have invested in him. By 1939, the joke was less funny. At the time of the Dartmouth trip, Fitzgerald had been a free agent screenwriter on the verge of having no literary agent. Without Ober to broker deals for him, he now needed

documentaries.

Hollywood more than ever. As he wrote to Scottie: "Sorry you got the impression I'm quitting the movies -- they are always there" (Letters of FSF 48).

But while Fitzgerald may have been down, he was far from out. He had some serious writing left in him yet, as "The Lost Decade" demonstrates. In Schulberg's The Disenchanted, pathological drinking thwarts the literary "comeback" of Manley Halliday, the Fitzgerald stand-in. But the successful "comeback" from alcoholism depicted in Fitzgerald's own "The Lost Decade" is even more profound than an artistic or professional one. The story has often been read as the tale of a famous architect's return to sobriety after a decade of drunkenness. But Louis Trimble isn't only free of the bottle, he has also been freed from his stunted imagination and clouded perceptions. Whereas Halliday takes a masochistic delight in constantly torturing himself with self-analysis of his past failures, Trimble faces the future head-on and is ready to soak up the New York City around him.

The Depression is over, the 1939 World's Fair is in town, and Trimble's alcoholic haze has been lifted. The story begins with him visiting a news weekly, which seems to suggest that he is still newsworthy. His baby-sitter for the afternoon is Orrison Brown, a young college graduate who thinks the name "Louis Trimble" belongs to the past. Sharing Budd Schulberg's head and resume, Brown is "a curly-haired man who a year before had edited the Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern" (Stories 470). Rather than revisit old haunts like 21, Trimble wants to have lunch "where there are young people to look at"; rather than look at the buildings he designed, the architect wants to study "the back of people's heads...their necks -- how their heads are joined to their bodies. I'd like to hear what those two little girls are saying to their father. Not exactly what they're saying but whether the

words float or submerge, how their mouths shut when they've finished speaking." The artist wants to observe things as if it were the first time. He wants to "see how people walk and what their clothes and shoes and hats are made of. And their eyes and hands" (471-472). This character -- not to mention this prose -- is a far cry from Schulberg's Halliday, a "disillusioned amanuensis of a dying order."

Just as Halliday makes his screenwriting partner Shep rethink his literary manifesto, makes him clumsily start asking himself if "perhaps ideology wasn't the literary shibboleth he had believed in so dogmatically" (368), Trimble causes Orrison to become hyper-aware of his surroundings. The end of the story finds the young writer feeling "the texture of his own coat" and reaching out to press "his thumb against the granite of the building by his side" (473). Shep and Orrison are very much alike, but Louis Trimble is miles away from Manley Halliday. One is a ghostly presence who dies; the other is a vital artist reborn. One holds on to romanticized memories of the past; the other embraces the tangible reality of the present. If Halliday contains Schulberg's reconstructed memories of a broken-down and distorted Fitzgerald, Trimble projects Fitzgerald's slightly idealized vision of his future self. Aside from a name that suggests the DTs, we don't really sense Trimble's struggle not to get drunk: "There was nothing about him that suggested or ever had suggested drink" (473). Trimble emerges from a decade of abusing himself with alcohol as if he's just woken up from a witch's spell -- a little dazed but no worse for the wear. The architect of the 1920s, like the architect of The Great Gatsby, is ready to start designing new projects again.

Saying that "The Lost Decade" catches Fitzgerald painting a rosy self-portrait doesn't take away from its achievement. Although the story consists of a single episode

and its brevity puts it in danger of being written off as a mere sketch, the piece is fully realized, emotionally honest, and resonant. As John Higgins writes, it achieves a "neat balance of terse dialog and a few well-placed introspective paragraphs that gives the story pithiness without barrenness." Higgins also agrees with the critic Charles Shain that it deserves the title "little masterpiece" (170). "The Lost Decade" demonstrates in both style and theme that although the year had seen Fitzgerald lose his agent, his MGM contract, and a share of his confidence, he had retained his talent and his hope for the future.

Another writer undiscouraged at decade's end, despite numerous obstacles, was Nathanael West. Although West is a far less blatantly autobiographical writer than Fitzgerald, or even Schulberg in The Disenchanted, an early draft of The Day of the Locust found the story being told from the narrative point-of-view of the screenwriter Claude Estee. However, just as "The Lost Decade's" Trimble is an architect rather than an author, having a screenwriter as the focalizer might have been too obvious for West. Claude was demoted to the chorus and the book was rewritten in the third person, with set designer Tod Hackett taking on top billing. Although the change was made partially because the novelist didn't want his main character to be too closely identified with him, autobiographical traces remain.

Both West and Tod received Ivy League educations. When Tod is recruited out of the Yale School of Fine Arts by Hollywood, his friends worry that he's selling out and

will never paint again -- echoes of Edmund Wilson and James Farrell warning West that prostituting in the bad school of the movie business would dry up his creative juices. Yet just as West viewed Hollywood as a means to an end, a place to potboil while he soaked up material for his "real" writing, Tod Hackett doesn't mind hacking at National Films if it continues to provide him with inspiration for his masterwork. Both create dreams during the day and puncture them at night. Both draw upon their observations of Hollywood artifice to produce their art. Both see Los Angeles as site of constant struggle where cultural currents converge and clash.

Where the architect Trimble draws strength from the sights and sounds of the streets of New York as the city itself really is, set designer Tod Hackett bathes himself in L.A.'s atmosphere of simulacra. The novel begins with him at his office window, watching a mob of extras dressed in 19th century military uniforms being chased by an assistant director wearing a polo shirt. In Hollywood, geography, history, and native culture are all malleable. The Gingos are an Eskimo family brought to L.A. to appear in a Nanook-like documentary. When the movie wraps up, they stay in Hollywood, wearing their native garb and surviving on the fish they hunt in Jewish delis. A wrinkled Native American wearing a signboard advertising "Genuine Relics from the Old West" speaks in the shtick of the vaudeville team Weber and Fields. Egyptian temples are next door to Swiss Chalets.

West's version of Modernism and the movie camera both break the world into fragments. Narrative, time, and place are blurred and juxtaposed. As Walt Disney proved by constructing California's Disneyland, not only is it a small world but history is happening co-evally: a 19th century German village is only a few steps away from the

moon in the 22nd century. Homer Simpson's house is decorated in a mishmash of styles and periods. He has two rooms that are furnished and decorated identically. If things are identical, then there can't be an original. Technology allows things to be mass produced, stamping out copies that can't be distinguished from the source. The model is the same as the copy. Mass produced hinges on Homer's doors are made to look like they are hand-crafted, just as the projector makes the artificial look real.

Throughout the novel, especially in those scenes that concentrate on Tod, the natural is described in terms of sets and costumes. The moon is "a bone button"; flower petals are "wrinkled like crepe"; leaves are "heavy with talcumlike dust"; and birds scatter "into a thousand glittering particles like metal confetti" (Complete Works 113). The supermarket, like the studios a purveyor of consumer goods, bathes its products in artificial light to make the natural appear more real, the oranges more orange. The California hills outlined in violet piping (61), match the violet piping on the chairs in Jennings's screening room (74). The clothes the faceless masses wear are just costumes: ladies who have never been at sea wear sailing outfits and people who have never been on a court wear tennis clothes.

Writers have long known that actress characters are good subjects for examinations of artifice. In Faye Greener, West creates a woman who has been created by Hollywood. By reading fan magazines, studying the trade papers, listening to gossip on the studio lots, and going to the pictures, she is trying to discover the formula for becoming a star. The words she speaks on film are delivered badly and her off-screen "lines" are said unconvincingly, but the content of what she says doesn't really matter to the men she comes in contact with during the novel. This audience is too captivated by her beauty to

listen anyway. In Parker's "Glory in the Daytime" we met a great thespian whose age becomes pathetically transparent once she leaves the footlights. In West's "The Sun....." we saw an actress whose face melts in daylight. But Faye's beauty is natural; it is structural, "like a tree" (67). With Faye, we have a bad film actress whose only starring role is in her everyday life. West's narrator writes of Faye's male spectators:

None of them really heard her. They were all too busy watching her smile, laugh, shiver, whisper, grow indignant, cross and uncross her legs, stick out her tongue, widen and narrow her eyes, toss her head so that her platinum hair splashed against the red plush of the chair back. The strange thing about her gestures and expressions was that they didn't really illustrate what she was saying. They were almost pure. It was as though her body recognized how foolish her words were and tried to excite her hearers into being uncritical. (159)

The book's narrative gaze acts like the camera to break the female body into parts: legs, tongue, eyes, etc. The distance between Faye's objectified body and her words, the gap between the signifier and the signified, seems to be the location of her artifice. But her body acts to blur the line between the real and the artificial by protecting her words. Sometimes her body makes "automatic" seductive gestures, at other times she uses a smile or caress as a "reward" (157). Even Tod and Claude, studio employees well acquainted with the production of artifice, can't help falling for her.

When she meets Claude at the post-cockfight party, the actress assumes "her favorite role" of being "very much the lady." No one is convinced by her act, if that's what it can be called, yet they make fools of themselves to get her attention. The men

laugh at Faye's "voice stiff with hauteur" (156), yet when Claude speaks to her:

"Everyone was aware of the begging note in his voice, but no one smiled. They didn't blame him. It was almost impossible to keep that note out when talking to her. Men used it just to say good morning" (158). As a person she's a joke to them, but as an object she is irresistible. Her body "excites her hearers into being uncritical" and makes them lose control over the timbre of their own words.

In an early attempt to analyze his feelings for her, to distance himself from the spell she has over him, Tod convinces himself that Faye's affectations are "so completely artificial" that he finds them "charming" (103). It is precisely her artifice that draws him to her, as if by magic. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin writes: "the cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity" (231). Although Tod prides himself on being immune to the lure of artifice -- after all, it's his job to create it -- he's caught up in a frantic desire to possess Faye as an object. Angry with her rejection of him, the artist tries to cast a mojo of his own. He rolls up the sketches he's made of her, binds them with a string, and locks them in a trunk. He believes, like a "witch doctor" (142), that if he can control the image, control the fetish object, he can control the person.

Tod makes repeated attempts to take Faye by force. Like the "cheated" he has come to Hollywood to paint, he erupts with sexual violence born out of frustration. As the novel ends, he loses the ability to distinguish between the real and the artificial. He escapes the riot by imagining he's working on his art, and mistakes a police siren for his own voice: "He felt his lips with his hands. They were clamped tight. He knew then it

was the siren. For some reason this made him laugh and he began to imitate the siren as loud as he could" (185). Copying the artificial, confused about what's the original, Tod is captured by the very phenomenon that he has been studying. The ethnographer has gone native and gone mad.

Of the major characters, only Faye Greener, the Carrie Meeber of the movies, makes it through the book relatively unmarred. She has built a shell around herself that keeps out reality. She has become an object that needs only to relate to itself. The conquering male, Tod wants to penetrate what he believes is a female unified self: "It was her completeness, her egglike self-sufficiency, that made him want to crush her" (107). Tod wants to place himself inside of Faye, to make her need him like he needs her, but her self-possession, her "egglike self-sufficiency," cannot be cracked. Tod has "a whole set of personalities, one inside another, like a nest of Chinese boxes" (60), but Faye refuses to see herself as a construct. Her single-minded dreams of being a star someday, and her constant performance of that self, cannot be punctured. In Miss Lonelyhearts, West writes that Betty's "sureness [is] based on the power to limit experience arbitrarily" (Novels 71). The same thing can be said of Faye -- and of the movies themselves.

Faye has built herself so thoroughly around the image of the screen siren, an object of male spectatorship and desire that appears available but is not, that it is impossible to pinpoint where the performance begins. When the actress isn't pounding the pavement looking for extra work, her favorite activity is lying in bed and mentally shuffling through a pack of vaguely pornographic fantasies. One of her daydreams is a variation of the Cinderella plot, another concerns a muscled man battling a snake. She realizes that her method of artificially selecting what should be natural is a bit mechanical, but isn't aware

that the "content for a vigorous life of imagination" that she draws upon consists of B-movie plots -- much like the ones the screenwriter West was called upon to produce for Republic Pictures -- filled with Freudian snakes and fat orchids. Faye can laugh at the process, but not at the product.

In this way, she's more like Tod, and like the average moviegoer, than he realizes. He laughs at her fantasies, but soon he's constructing fantasies of his own about how he will finally possess her. He sees her artifice, but falls for her anyway. He laughs at his feelings for her, but can't help acting on them. He is lured in by Benjamin's "phony spell of a commodity." Faye not only wishes to turn herself into a commodity, but her dreams as well. She even has a fantasy of selling her fantasies to a movie studio in order to make some dough until her big break comes. For her, the movies are reality.

In Hollywood, you are what you pretend to be. Faye is "an actress who had learned from bad models in a bad school" (104), and most critics have seen her as a link in a long gilded chain of screendom's "dumb blondes," as West's parody of Hollywood pouring itself into an empty vessel shaped like a curvy woman. Often censure of her slips into angry misogyny. Stanley Edgar Hyman writes, for instance, that Faye "has a brain the size of a walnut" (31). But Faye isn't as dumb as she appears, and West has infused her with more agency than many critics have realized. She knows what genres are in vogue at the studios and she goes to the movies as often as she can to study. Unlike Esther Blodgett, Faye wasn't born a star, but she believes she has the raw materials to make herself one.

An important lesson she has learned from "bad models" such as Red-Headed Woman's Jean Harlow in the "bad school" of movie theatres is that sex sells. Faye may be

a bad actress, but she is trying to lay the groundwork towards becoming a good star. She knows that beauty, platinum hair, and sexuality are bankable commodities for a woman in Hollywood, and she will invest them to get whatever she wants. On one level, like a lost member of the Frankfurt School, West is parodying someone copy-cattling a mass produced film image of a Jean Harlow copy, adding Faye Greener to a group that includes the early Alice Faye and Fay Wray, but he has also inscribed the character with a strong individual desire to ape them in order to join their ranks.

At one point Faye says that the rumors that fat girls will be in next year is just publicity for Mae West, and the implication is that Mae is not one of her models. But the two have a lot in common when it comes to attaching value to their sexuality and controlling that value. In this way, both women write their own roles. Robert Sklar, analyzing Mae West's screen persona, could also be talking about Faye: "Sex is the only game she can play, and though she disclaims dependence on any man, she depends on her capacity to attract men for her livelihood. What's most astonishing is her lack of sentiment" (185). Tod says a few times that Faye is not sentimental (68, 92). She refuses to accept his love because he has neither looks nor power to offer her. His limited value to her resides in his willingness to listen to her dreams of stardom. She'll flirt with him, but she won't provide him with a mercy lay. When he meets her, she is a virgin. Sex is all she has in the bank, and philanthropy is not in her nature.

Without regret, as a simple business decision that will allow her to pay her father's funeral bill and support herself, Faye signs up for a tour of duty as a call girl, selling to men with "pork sausage fingers" (174) the only thing she has to sell. Tod offers to pay for the burial costs, but Faye won't let him. It's been made obvious to her from his

declarations of love coupled with his rape attempt that he wishes to possess more than her body, and she doesn't want to be in his debt. Her "break" comes when she enters into a "business arrangement" with Homer and makes the transition back from supporting herself by selling sex to supporting herself by selling sexuality. Played as a sucker, Homer gives her the "star treatment," providing Faye with room, board, management, and costumes in exchange for simply being near her. It's a situation Homer has been in before. His other "romance" in the novel is with a prostitute who uses her sexuality to dupe him into paying her hotel bill.

As in Dreiser's Sister Carrie, Mailer's Deer Park, Zola's Nana, and the novels of Dumas and Balzac, the line between prostitution and being an actress in The Day of the Locust is a thin one. West reminds us that prostitutes, like actresses and other performers, have handlers. Tod moves out of his first hotel because it was filled with hookers and "their managers, trainers, and advance agents" (62). Audrey Jennings is a former silent film star who couldn't make the transition into talkies and chose not to be demoted to bit player. By opening a bordello, she has remained in the entertainment industry elite. Jennings continues to move among Los Angeles high society, having tea with distinguished matrons and discussing artists and writers in salons. She runs her house like a small movie studio. MGM's Marcus Loew, a mogul from Hollywood's golden age once remarked, "We don't sell tickets to movies; we sell tickets to theatres." In the same spirit, Jennings exhibits silent porno movies in her parlor in order to entice her customers into purchasing the services of the call girls she produces and distributes to wealthy homes across the city.

Early in the novel, a group of characters, among them Tod and Claude, go to Jennings for an evening's entertainment. This episode has either been dismissed or ignored by critics and scholars. George Milburn, in a 1939 review of the novel, faults West for paying so much narrative attention "to an irrelevant visit to a brothel" (quoted in Siegel 68). But the scene is virtually the entire novel in microcosm. In an effort to convince the skeptical Tod to come along, studio employee Claude expresses his admiration for the madam's "skillful packaging" of vice and comments that the "dive's a triumph of industrial design." But Tod, whose job as a set designer is to create artifice, says he doesn't care "How much cellophane she wraps in it," he doesn't like "natch joints" or any depressing places for deposit such as "vending machines." After telling him that they will only be going there to see a movie, to look but not to touch, the screenwriter Claude extends the vending machine analogy:

You insert a coin and press home the lever. There's some mechanical activity inside the bowels of the device. You receive a small sweet, frown at yourself in the dirty mirror, adjust your hat, take a firm grip on your umbrella and walk away, trying to look as though nothing had happened.

It's good but it's not for pictures. (72)

But it is pictures, at least the early ones. Edison's Kinetoscope was designed for one paying viewer at a time, was motor driven, and served a "small sweet" an inch square for about sixty seconds. Furthermore, in comparing sex to a vending machine, Tod and Claude are making the natural mechanized, just as films they work on use a variety of machines to turn the "real" into celluloid.

Film is about seeing, and moviemakers have always tried to figure out what people will pay to see. In 1897, less than a year after the first public screening of a motion picture, the pornographic film Bedtime for the Bride opened in France. In America, stag films were viewed in all-male bastions like the Elks Club, but in Paris, where West spent some time after college, early porno was associated mainly with brothels. The movie Tod and his friends watch at the whorehouse, The Predicament of Marie, is French. The film is closer to bedroom farce or screwball comedy than it is to porn. After a long expositional narrative for a blue movie (Members of a family all desire Marie. She just gets started with one; there's a knock on the door; she hides her partner; the next person comes in; there's a knock on the door, etc.; when the whole family is hiding in her room there's another knock on the door; she thinks it might be a telegram) the projector breaks before any sex happens. The group yells "cheat" and stages a mock riot.

As Linda Williams points out in her book Hard Core, the whole reason the brothels showed the movies was to entice the viewers into purchasing the services of the ladies of the house. She writes of the stag film: "its role seems rather to arouse and then precisely not to satisfy a spectator, who must subsequently seek satisfaction outside of the purely visual terms of the film -- whether in masturbation, in actual sexual relations, or by channeling sexual arousal into communal wisecracking" (74). Even if the projector didn't break, chances are the group wouldn't have been satisfied with the film. One French stag film Williams analyzes ends with a telegram being delivered saying "After seeing this picture, rush over to a nice girl and get taken care of." The telegram being delivered to Marie, at the culmination of one frustrated sexual encounter after another, likely contains a similar message. Tod and his friends sit back down to watch the rest of the movie, but

there will be no sex in the sex film. The whole thing was a cheat from the beginning -- the silver screen always leads to blue balls.

Perhaps the men in The Day of the Locust prefer it that way. As W.H. Auden correctly pointed out, the only type of relation between West's characters is the sadomasochistic (119). Both Homer and Tod experience feelings of guilt and a desire to be punished by Faye. Like Hemingway's Brett Ashley or many of Fitzgerald's women, she is a "bitch goddess," a beautiful woman without mercy. Her power is terrible in its intensity. Tod believes that Faye's invitation:

wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do so with a scream. You couldn't expect to rise again. Your teeth would be driven into your skull like nails into a pine board and your back would be broken. (67-68)

In Love & Death in the American Novel, Leslie Fiedler notes the smooth transition from Daisy Fay to Faye Greener (326). The green light both women seem to be signaling isn't an invitation to possess them; it's an invitation to be destroyed in trying.

At one point the seventeen year old feigns innocence by appearing in a sailor outfit that makes her look like she's twelve. Like America, she seems young, green(er), and virginal, there for the taking. But appearances are deceiving. As immigrants to the United States and West's heartland starers transplanted to California soon discover, the American Dream is not available to all. Everyone cannot perform; some must simply watch and ache. Homer's childlike love for Faye soon turns to violent disillusionment. Like Lolita, and like "Daddy's Girl" Rosemary Hoyt in Tender is the Night, she is a kid

who has learned to use her sexuality to get what she wants from adults. As in John O'Hara's The Big Laugh or Huxley's After Many a Summer Dies the Swan, the actress with the girl's face and the woman's body is a force of sexual destruction.

Faye, as the embodiment of a screen goddess, is a lusted-after object. Her clothes get ripped from her body in the dance/orgy scene. Tod paws her at her own father's funeral. He tries to rape her twice, and has long, detailed fantasies of raping her twice more. In Day of the Locust, people don't want to worship movie stars from afar; they want to hurt them up close. The funeral scene is a Hollywood novel/movies about movies staple.⁵ In A Star is Born we saw fans glad that Norman Maine had committed suicide. In West's novel, Harry's funeral is packed with people looking for a show. Faye's landlady has "produced" the performance: picking the flowers, arranging the "star's" costume, picking the exhibition hall. Dead, painted Harry looks like "the interlocutor at a minstrel show." When no movie stars show up and they start getting bored, the cheated start to leave.

In this way, West's novel is perhaps more deserving of the name The Disenchanted than Schulberg's book. In fact, any of West's novels could fit that title. In the final analysis, The Day of the Locust is no more an anti-Hollywood novel than A Cool Million is an anti-New England novel or Balso Snell is an anti-bowels of the Trojan Horse novel. The problem isn't place or culture -- these are just symptoms. The problem is people. Morris Dickstein writes:

⁵ See Evelyn Waugh's Hollywood satire The Loved One.

If movies like A Star is Born leaven success with loss, stardom with heartbreak, West does something more radical: he shows us those who had nowhere to go, the dreamers, bit players, and hangers-on for whom the California dream was a dead-end. In place of the glamour of a Hollywood premiere he focuses on the madness of the crowd, the rabid violence of the cheated, the bored, and the disappointed. ("What Price.." 31)

By the time West's mob re-assembles at the climactic movie premiere, they are ready to kill. In a section that begins like the movie premiere scene of A Star is Born -- but ends very differently -- a brokenhearted Homer is ripped to shreds when "the cheated" work themselves into a sexual frenzy of wisecracking and frottage that turns murderous.

The Day of the Locust answers its author's own question about why he couldn't get uplifting, populist stories about people like Ma and Tom Joad into his fiction -- West is scared to death of people like Ma and Tom Joad, or, for that matter, all people. In West, unlike in Steinbeck, gatherings aren't about communal solidarity and renewed hopes; they're about violent fascism and death. Day reminds us that "star" begins with "stare" and there's a "fan" in "fanatic." Movies, more than any other product of advanced capitalism, helped to shape the way people perceive the world and themselves. Robert Warshow in The Immediate Experience writes: "The chief function of mass culture is to relieve one of the necessity of experiencing one's life directly...mass culture is the screen through which we see reality and the mirror in which we see ourselves" (38-9). If movies both gave people what they wanted and told them what they wanted, then it stands to reason that people would want life to be like the movies. As the screenwriter Claude remarks: "What the barber wants is amour and glamour" (72). But, of course, he doesn't

receive it in his everyday life, which leads to the feeling of being "cheated." As Tod says earlier as he watches a crowd of Hollywood's disenfranchised: "It's hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance" (61). West's jokes, as he told Fitzgerald, weren't entirely jokes.

Furthermore, as we've already noted Tod himself isn't immune to the lure of beauty and the need for escape. Caught in the mob, he begins mentally working on his painting, but soon he's constructing a movie in his mind. As Thomas Strychacz points out in Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism, Tod's static object of art slowly gains motion by use of active verbs. The boundary between the riot he is depicting and the riot he is caught in blurs: "In the lower foreground, men and women fled wildly before the vanguard of the crusading mob." Faye, like the movies, is always on the move: "ran [note that the tense is not "was running"] proudly, her knees held high...Claude turned his head as he ran to thumb his nose at his pursuers. Tod himself picked up a small stone to throw before continuing his flight" (184-85). Snapped back into reality, rescued from being crushed, Tod lapses back into the artificial. He cannot distinguish the police siren from himself, just as Faye cannot distinguish herself from the screen siren.

The final version of Day of the Locust ends here, implying that Tod's descent into madness is total and probably irreversible. Understandably, this is the way that most critics have read the novel. But an early draft included a scene where Tod recuperates at Claude's house and begins to talk sense again. And even in the novel as it stands, there are hints that Tod will be able to begin creating art again, just as "The Lost Decade's" Louis Trimble will design new buildings. Early on, West's narrator writes: "'The Burning of Los Angeles,' a picture he was soon to paint, definitely proved he had talent" (60). Again,

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verb tense must be looked at carefully. Here it implies that after Tod was taken away in the police car, the painting was completed. Therefore, the artist's experiences and observations in the land of artifice led to the creation of an artwork that "proved he had talent." In this way, the novelist is engaging in some dreaming of his own.

Not surprisingly, The Day of the Locust wasn't the critical and commercial hit West had hoped it would be.⁶ In a June 30, 1939 letter to Fitzgerald, West sums up the novel's reception: "So far the box score stands: Good reviews -- fifteen percent, bad reviews -- twenty-five percent, brutal personal attacks, sixty percent. Sales: practically none. I'll try another one anyway, I guess." On the same day, West wrote to Edmund Wilson that despite the novel's poor sales: "I haven't given up, however, by a long shot...The world outside doesn't make it possible for me to even hope to earn a living writing novels, while here [in Hollywood] the pay is large enough (it isn't as large as people think, however) for me to have at least three or four months off every year." (Novels 795-797). West needed money more than ever -- he was engaged to be married to Eileen McKinney.⁷ If Hollywood could provide him with a steady income and time off to write his fiction, he, like Fitzgerald, was happy to be there.

⁶ Despite his confidence in the novel's content, an early bad omen for West was the book's red cover, which he hated. In Schulberg's inscribed copy of The Day of the Locust, West jokes: "Dear Budd, When the day comes, we can use this as a flag" ("The Hollywood Years" 125).

⁷ subject of writer Ruth McKinney's popular "My Sister Eileen" stories.

Chapter Six: 1940-1941

On Friday, December 13, 1940, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker attended a dinner party at Nathanael West's home. One week later, both West and Fitzgerald were dead.

Fitzgerald had been flipping through a Princeton alumni magazine and eating candy when he suffered a massive heart attack and fell to the floor. The next day, December 22, rushing back from a Mexican hunting trip after hearing the news, West ran a stop sign and was killed in a head-on collision near El Centro, California. Both men were waked in Los Angeles before their bodies were sent back East for burial. When Parker viewed Fitzgerald's body, laid out in the William Wordsworth room, she reportedly called him, quoting Owl-Eyes from The Great Gatsby, a "poor son-of-a-bitch." (Meade 386). Fitzgerald was forty-four. West was thirty-seven. After their deaths, Edmund Wilson, who had advised both writers not to lower themselves by writing for the movies, added a 1941 postscript to his essay on California novelists, "The Boys in the Back Room." He writes: "West and Fitzgerald were writers of a conscience and with natural gifts rare enough in America or anywhere; and their failure to get their best out of their best years may certainly be laid partly to Hollywood, with its already appalling record of talent depraved and wasted" (56).

But, of course, Hollywood didn't kill these authors. Bad driving finished West and years of alcohol abuse took its toll on Fitzgerald. Creatively and professionally, moreover, their last years were not wasted years. In 1940, Fitzgerald continued working

on the Hollywood material that would become The Last Tycoon¹ and published the Pat Hobby stories. West laid out plans for a new novel, a project that would be financed by his increasing success at finding shortcuts as he navigated the screenwriting system. Rather than drying them out artistically, Hollywood had infused West and Fitzgerald with the money and inspiration they had needed in order to keep working at their vocations. They had come to accept and even admire the film industry by studying its culture and products; they were no longer among those who turn up their noses at Hollywood "with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand" (The Last Tycoon 3).

Hollywood years were not lonely years for West and Fitzgerald either. After years of knowing each other mainly through letters and their fiction, they had struck up a strong friendship based on mutual admiration. Living in the same little community also helped this process. As Leo Rosten makes clear in his 1941 sociological study of the film industry, Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers, for all its global reach, Hollywood was still a small town. Despite popular conception, there wasn't a glamorous nightclub scene or an abundance of all-night parties held at mansions. As dramatized in Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run?, the transplanted New Yorker Al Manheim is surprised to keep seeing "the same faces" (50) as he walks around.

To alleviate the boredom and blow off steam, Eastern writers, like a cocoon of émigrés, created their own social scene in Hollywood. After days seeped in the pressure cooker atmosphere of the studios, in various combinations West, Parker, Fitzgerald,

¹ Despite being a draft, and an unfinished one -- published posthumously -- at that, The Last Tycoon is the only Fitzgerald novel that has never been out of print.

Schulberg, and their wide circle of friends dined at Musso & Franks restaurant, drank wine next door in the backroom of Stanley Rose's book shop, and attended SWG meetings across the street at 1655 Cherokee Avenue. With his companion Sheilah Graham, Fitzgerald, no drunken recluse, was a frequent dinner guest at the homes of other writers. And according to Graham, Fitzgerald saw West more often than he did his other Hollywood friends (Jay Martin 386). One entry in Fitzgerald's notebook mentions that he could see himself in West's tendency towards "long windedness" in conversation and another calls the younger writer's novels "doomed to the underworld of literature. But literature" (Piper 225, The Notebooks of FSF Item #1900).

Fitzgerald also had a creative friendship of sorts with Schulberg as well. Unlike the West/Fitzgerald kinship, the personal dealings between Fitzgerald and Schulberg appear a bit less based on amity and far more reliant on opportunism. Schulberg has made a cottage industry out of packaging and repackaging his memories of Fitzgerald, but some critics and biographers posit that the young Hollywood prince was usually more annoyed by the older man than drawn to him. There is some question as to how close they ever really were. Even if we make allowances for Schulberg's justifiable exasperation at Fitzgerald's drinking and poor work habits during their Winter Carnival trip to Dartmouth, much of the respect Schulberg claims to have had for Fitzgerald seems to have developed shortly after his death, around the time the New Republic was looking for essays for a tribute to Scott. Literary biographer Jeffrey Myers reports a 1940 episode in Los Angeles where Schulberg blew off a visit from Fitzgerald to go have dinner with some acquaintances (315).

The two writers read draft versions of each other's Hollywood novels, and while both men voiced praise publicly, each disparaged the other in their more private thoughts. An entry in Fitzgerald's notebook, written after a look at some of What Makes Sammy Run?, labels his former partner "Budd the untalented" (Myers 316, Turnbull 320). In The Four Seasons of Success, Schulberg recalls his reaction to The Last Tycoon material: "It was almost as if I had written the book and Scott had filtered it through his more tempered and sophisticated imagination... Still, the most uncanny experience I've ever had with another man's work. Scott had channeled off into his book some of my energy, some of my emotion and special insights into Hollywood. The sneak thief of vicarious experience had taken possession of Scott" (134).

Leaving aside the fact that taking possession of vicarious experience is precisely what a novelist does, this accusation of metaphysical plagiarism is one more piece of evidence that the relationships among Parker, Schulberg, Fitzgerald, and West were more than social. They were creative and professional as well. Parker and Schulberg had both worked on A Star is Born and Nothing Sacred for David O. Selznick, and in 1941, working from a story and treatment from Schulberg, Parker wrote the screenplay for RKO's Weekend for Three.² Parker and Fitzgerald had blurbed West's The Day of the Locust and they performed the same service for Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run?.³

² The film bombed. Thomas M. Pryor, a reviewer for The New York Times noted "the fine acerbic hand of Miss Parker is only fleetingly detectable in a couple of situations" (quoted in Kinney 141). That same year, Parker added dialogue to the movie version of friend Lillian Hellman's play "The Little Foxes." She was then contacted by Alfred Hitchcock to work on Saboteur. Her dialogue appears in the circus freak scenes and Parker even has a cameo in the film. She and Hitchcock speed by in a car together.

West and Schulberg's Hollywood novels shared a publisher (Random House) and an editor (Saxe Commins), and Fitzgerald had read early drafts of both. After the publication of Schulberg's book, Parker, who serves as a partial model for characters in both The Last Tycoon and What Makes Sammy Run?, rose to the book's defense regarding accusations that it was anti-Semitic. She wrote: "Those who hail us Jews as brothers must allow us to have our villains, the same, alas, as any other race" (What Makes Sammy Run xv).

Parker's novel had never materialized, and never would, but Hollywood novelists West, Fitzgerald, and Schulberg all influenced each other's books in both form and content. As echoes of The Great Gatsby had been heard in Miss Lonelyhearts, so can they be heard in What Makes Sammy Run?, and even louder. On the flip side, during the composition of The Last Tycoon, Fitzgerald boasted to Maxwell Perkins that "There is little published in American fiction that doesn't slightly bear my stamp" (Dear Scott/Dear Max, 261), but the new novel he was working on contained its own trails of other writers. The Last Tycoon -- with a protagonist blatantly patterned after Irving Thalberg and other characters based on, among others, Louis B. Mayer (Brady), Joseph Mankiewicz (La Borwits), and Aldous Huxley (Boxley) -- evokes a scene from The Day of the Locust and contains sizable chunks of Schulberg's biography and memories (The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western xxvii, Four Seasons 134). These three Hollywood novels have different scopes and styles -- West's surreal book observes bottom feeders in the film industry, and Fitzgerald's elegiac manuscript and Schulberg's muckraking novel delve into

³Both endorsements arrived too late for the first printing and only appeared on later runs. Fitzgerald called the novel "A grand book, utterly fearless with a great deal of beauty side by side with the most bitter satire" (front jacket copy). Parker said of the novel: "It has understanding, pity, savagery, courage and sometimes a strange high beauty.

the world of big fish -- but all try to come to terms with Hollywood rather than to eviscerate it. These texts don't show the movies to be the brain drain Edmund Wilson would have us believe in.

In Hollywood, Fitzgerald became less thirsty for celebrity and more focused on the craft of writing, less interested in making it look like writing came easy to him, and more willing to learn new techniques and experiment with different forms. Robert Wilson writes: "It seems likely, from the evidence of his last years in Hollywood and the incomplete fashioning of The Last Tycoon, that Fitzgerald might at length have muted the emphasis as novelist extraordinary and devoted his life more thoroughly to art than had been the case" (11). At the end of his life, according to some accounts, he was even becoming a better screenwriter, growing evermore adept at writing with movie equipment in mind. Wheeler Winston Dixon, a respected experimental filmmaker and critic, finds that Fitzgerald's last scripts show him learning to create more effective scenes by imagining point-of-view shots. Dixon's examination of an early draft of "Cosmopolitan," the script based on the story "Babylon Revisited," discusses the incorporation of p.o.v. tracking shots which use eye movements to reflect little Victoria's⁴ character, as well as a series of long shots to express her isolation.

Sheilah Graham speculates that "Scott wanted to be a movie director because of what he thought could be done" (The Real F. Scott Fitzgerald 183). Fitzgerald himself told Zelda that "Cosmopolitan" was his "great hope for attaining some real status out here

It is written with a pace that rushes you along with it, and a sureness that comes only of great skill. It is good to be present when such things happen" (back jacket copy).

⁴ Fitzgerald named the character in honor of Budd Schulberg's newborn daughter (Latham 242).

as a movie man and not a novelist" (Letters of FSF 125), and that "the standard of writing from the best movies, like Rebecca, is, believe it or not, much higher at present than that in the commercial magazines" (FSF: A Life in Letters 443-444). Even more telling is a letter Fitzgerald wrote in 1940 after seeing a film by Preston Sturges: "They've let a certain writer here direct his own pictures and he has made such a go of it that there may be a different feeling about that soon. If I had that chance, I would attain my real goal in coming here in the first place" (FSF: A Life in Letters 464). But Fitzgerald's plans to direct "Cosmopolitan" -- or even to get the film produced -- never came to fruition. A deal to have Shirley Temple play the starring role fell through, and Fitzgerald never got the solo script in good enough shape for it to go before the cameras.⁵ Decades later, Schulberg discovered it in a banker's box containing other's people's scripts and it was published, with an Introduction by Schulberg, as Babylon Revisited: The Screenplay.

The script is more interesting as a curiosity than as a work of literature. Nunnally Johnson, without a doubt one of the most respected and successful screenwriters of the studio era, someone who found that his talents were better suited to the film medium than to the stage or the page, wrote to a friend that the "Cosmopolitan" script was "crap" that was "padded with junk and nonsense and corn" (Letters of NJ 80). A look at the published screenplay bears this out. Filled with stilted dialogue, a murder-for-hire subplot that smells of the one Fitzgerald was planning for The Last Tycoon, and a superfluous love interest for Charlie Wales that takes away from the father/daughter focus that made

⁵ Later in the decade Schulberg would be hired to rewrite the script for producer Lester Cowan ("Old Scott" 100). This project fell through as well. At long last, after years of changing hands and studios, the skeleton of "Cosmopolitan" finally reached the screen as the 1954 MGM film The Last Time

the short story so powerful, it isn't the masterwork Dixon believes it to be (or would like it to be). However, while Dixon fails in the end to establish Fitzgerald as a gifted screenwriter, the final chapters of The Cinematic Vision of F. Scott Fitzgerald nonetheless convincingly demonstrate that Scott grew less reliant on dialogue and exposition, and more cognizant of shots and editing, in scripts such as Cosmopolitan and Infidelity.

Where 1940 saw Fitzgerald improving at the screenwriting craft, his friend Nathanael West was becoming an autodidact in screenwriting economics. At the time of his death, West's established salary was about to go up to \$600 a week (Jay Martin 391). A string of solo credits had something to do with this bump, but West's exploitation of the system was an even bigger factor. He knew that selling originals to the studios paid better than salary work -- and if it was a screen adaptation of your own source material it fetched an even higher price -- but it was tough to break into this segment of the market. West realized that a nasty, brutal, and short book like A Cool Million was unfilmable, so he slapped the title on a new idea and sold it as an original adaptation. He knew the system well enough to be confident that no one in the studios would bother to check the content of the actual novel. As a result, West and his writing partner Boris Ingster received \$10,000 from Columbia for "A Cool Million," the story of a man whose life suddenly improves when people start mistaking him for a millionaire (Novels 745-754). Having now sold an original, West and Ingster found it easy to turn around and sell another one. RKO paid them \$25,000 for "Bird in Hand." In this treatment, forces

I Saw Paris starring Elizabeth Taylor.

contend to possess a turkey with government secrets tattooed on its back. Both projects never reached the screen.

Despite working on film turkeys, West was held in high esteem among the circle of transplanted Eastern authors in Los Angeles. A fellow habitué of the Stanley Rose bookshop said of him: "he affected writers as Bogart did actors, with his reserve and rock-like integrity" (quoted in Hamilton 158). As far as the screenwriting game went, other writers had helped West along the way, and he was happy to return the favor. In response to a 1940 letter he received from Bob Brown, a friend back East who was asking how to gain employment in the studios, West advised: "If you do take a crack at it, don't make the mistake so many people do of thinking you have to write down for pictures. Look at some of the better ones and try to utilize the best dramatic situations you can think of....you can absolutely depend on my doing everything I possibly can to help you break in" (Novels 798). As Dorothy Parker had realized years before, Budd Schulberg had practically been born knowing, and Scott Fitzgerald had learned painfully, an author can't stoop to what he sets down on paper.

This is exactly the lesson that the producer Monroe Stahr impresses upon the highbrow author George Boxley in The Last Tycoon. New to screenwriting and not much of a moviegoer, Boxley has submitted a ridiculous scene where a duelist falls into a well and needs to be raised up in a bucket. Pressed to admit that he wouldn't put such a sequence in one of his books, Boxley tells Stahr that "movie standards are different" because films are filled with people "wearing strained facial expressions and talking incredible and unnatural dialogue" (31). Stahr's response, worth quoting at length, shows

how far F. Scott Fitzgerald had come in his understanding of writing to the screen instead of for the screen.

"Suppose you're in your office. You've been fighting duels or writing all day and you're too tired to fight or write any more. You're sitting there staring -- dull, like we all get sometimes. A pretty stenographer that you've seen before comes into the room and you watch her -- idly. She doesn't see you, though you're very close to her. She takes off her gloves, opens her purse and dumps it out on a table --"

Stahr stood up, tossing his key-ring on his desk.

"She has two dimes and a nickel -- and a cardboard match box. She leaves the nickel on the desk, puts the two dimes back into her purse and takes the black gloves to the stove, opens it and puts them inside. There's one match in the match box and she starts to light it kneeling by the stove. You notice there's a stiff wind blowing in the window -- but just then your telephone rings. The girl picks it up, says hello -- listens -- and says deliberately into the phone, 'I've never owned a pair of black gloves in my life.' She hangs up, kneels by the stove again, and just as she lights the match, you glance around very suddenly and see that there's another man in the office, watching every move the girl makes ----"

Stahr paused. He picked up his keys and put them in his pocket.

"Go on," said Boxley smiling. "What happens?"

"I don't know," said Stahr. "I was just making pictures." (32)

Hooked by the producer's teasing out of a dramatic, suspenseful scene --caught up in watching Stahr writing out loud -- the writer Boxley, brought to the studio for his verbal skill, has just been taught that film is a visual medium. And, it should be mentioned, this film lesson has taken place within the pages of a novel.

One of Fitzgerald's notes for the novel declares that "ACTION IS CHARACTER" (163), and through the use of present tense verbs, a technique we saw West using in The Day of the Locust when describing Tod mentally working on his painting, Stahr reminds us that film is, in the words of Robert Warshow, an "immediate experience." The repeated use of the pronoun "you" and the peppering of numerous phrases of urgency -- "starts to," "just as," "very suddenly" -- make the lesson even more memorable. Like West in Day, Fitzgerald hints here at the voyeurism inherent in filmgoing. Boxley, of course, couldn't be sitting in a small space watching someone watching someone else without either of these people knowing he's there. Unless, that is, he's sitting in a darkened movie theater staring at these figures onscreen, gradually making the transition from "idly" watching the projected images to being sutured into the film as a silent participant/observer. Just as access to consciousness in a novel allows us to see and hear thoughts we ordinarily couldn't see and hear, motion pictures put us in a position to witness actions we ordinarily couldn't witness.

When we next see Boxley, he is a man reborn. Now, instead of getting advice on film technique and focalization, he is giving it. He tells his screenwriting collaborators: "You have the stuffings of a turkey here...It's not pictures...A lot a beautiful speeches...but no situations. After all, you know, it's not going to be a novel...Let each character see himself in the other's place. The policeman is about to arrest the thief when

he sees that the thief actually has his face. I mean, show it that way. You could almost call the thing Put Yourself in My Place" (106-107).

Like Boxley, Al Manheim in What Makes Sammy Run? is a literary man who comes to appreciate the film medium. The producer Fineman tells him the story of a famous playwright charged with writing a film scene establishing that a husband is tiring of his marriage. Twenty pages of brilliant dialogue later the scene is no closer to being finished. An old hand is brought in, "one of the few men left in the business who got his training in the two-reel comedy school," and the next day the scene looks like this:

INT ELEVATOR MEDIUM SHOT

Husband and wife in evening clothes. Husband wearing top hat.

REVERSE ANGLE

As elevator door opens and classy dame enters.

CLOSE SHOT HUSBAND AND WIFE

Get husband's reaction to new dame. Removes hat with flourish.

Wife looks from dame to husband's hat to husband. Then glares at him as
we

CUT TO:

(159-160)

Inspired by the anecdote, Al can't wait to get working on his new screenplay. "The most exciting way ever invented to tell a story is with a motion picture camera," he says (160).

Over the years, Schulberg's novel has often been read as an indictment of the movies. In a recent essay Chip Rhodes writes: "Al's narration makes clear that Hollywood defiles art and the integrity of those who devote their lives to it" (95). It does no such thing. While the character of Sammy Glick might scoff at art and regard those with principles or integrity as suckers, Al doesn't wind up feeling this way at all. Under the influence of love interest Kit Sargent, like Dorothy Parker a respected Eastern author and successful screenwriter who assumes a leadership position in the SWG, he begins to understand the reasons why an creative artist might be drawn to Hollywood and, more importantly, would want to stay there. It's not always all about the money, as Al explains:

The trouble with Hollywood is that too many people who won't leave are ashamed to be there. But when a moving picture is right, it socks the eye and the ear and the solar plexus all at once and that is a hell of a temptation for any writer. I felt that when I went back for the fourth time to see The Informer. And one afternoon when I happened to catch a revival of the Murnau-Jannings masterpiece The Last Laugh. And even when I saw one of my own jobs, a stinker if there ever was one, but with one scene in it that sang because I happened to stumble on real picture technique. That is what held Kit there. Hollywood may be full of phonies, mediocrities, dictators, and good men who have lost their way, but there is something that draws you there that you should not be ashamed of (234).

You're not required to check your integrity and your artistic aspirations at the studio gates. With its deep pockets and global reach, Hollywood during the studio era was a

magnet for genius -- Germany's F.W. Murnau included.⁶ At no other time in history did so many talented people engaged in the same enterprise reside in so small an area.

What Makes Sammy Run? and The Last Tycoon both point towards the fact that just because a piece of work is the product of a bureaucratic organization doesn't automatically mean it lacks quality or merit. After all, a ballet company divides up labor too. An argument can be made that operas and ballets are put on for art's sake, and Hollywood films are produced to make money. But, again, monetary interest doesn't preclude creative merit, and mass production doesn't necessarily lead to inferior products. What Makes Sammy Run? and The Last Tycoon both acknowledge that the studio system contains its share of "phonies, mediocrities, dictators, and good men who have lost their way," but they also show that artists boiling with creative passion reside there - - and can thrive there -- as well.

However, cold dictator and sensitive genius aren't mutually exclusive categories, as Fitzgerald's Monroe Stahr makes evident. Every movie the studio puts out is firmly guided by his own hand and bears his imprint, yet he modestly demurs from putting his own name on the screen. He pulls a director off a set and fires him, yet he gives a troubled cameraman another chance. Stahr is honest, creative, handsome, and shrewd. He's a tyrant, but Fitzgerald loves him almost as much as the narrator Cecilia does. Turning Boxley into a true believer in the power of cinema and counseling an impotent actor are just two of the many miracles Stahr performs during "A Producer's Day." This section of the unfinished manuscript, Chapters III and IV, is by far the strongest material of the

novel. Each interaction with cameramen, directors, editors, actors, and moneymen reveals Monroe Stahr to be a singular genius in the midst of a bureaucracy. There are even indications that Art is more important to him than Commerce. He holds up the release of a film to keep tinkering with it. He's even willing to make a prestige picture that he knows will lose money.⁷

The characterization of Stahr in The Last Tycoon demonstrates that for all the knowledge F. Scott Fitzgerald had acquired about the movie industry, he still couldn't let go of the romantic belief that art is the product of a single artist/hero. The author wrote of his novel-in-progress: "I invented a tragic story...because no one has ever written a tragedy about Hollywood. A Star is Born was a pathetic and often beautiful story but not a tragedy, and doomed and heroic things do happen here" ("The Last of the Novelists" 466). Because corporate capitalism is taking over the movie business, and, by extension, America itself, Stahr is the last member of a doomed species. Fitzgerald's outline for the book indicates that the future of the entertainment industry will see the rise of venal philistines like Brady and Wall Street lawyers like Fleishacker.

After foiling Brady's plot to have him killed, Stahr was scheduled to die in a plane crash, but we'll never know how The Last Tycoon would have changed in further drafts. After the author's death, Graham sent the manuscript to Maxwell Perkins and they, along with Edmund Wilson, decided to publish the work-in-progress as a memorial to

⁶ It's interesting that Al, a writer, would single out The Last Laugh. The film is entirely reliant on the visual. Not only is it silent, it has no title cards.

⁷ In book publishing during the 20th Century this was a common practice. One best-selling beach book could underwrite, for instance, a volume of poems by a respected poet and a second novel by a runner-up for the Critic's Circle Award.

Fitzgerald. Schulberg claims that he and John O' Hara were asked to shape the material into something resembling a coherent narrative, an assignment they refused because Fitzgerald was too great a writer to tamper with (Beck 27). But Bruccoli notes in his critical edition of the novel that "the testimony is unclear" and quotes from a letter Graham sent to him -- seemingly written in all capital letters for added emphasis -- insisting that "BUDD SCHULBERG WAS NOT ASKED TO FINISH THE LAST TYCOON. HE OFFERED TO DO IT AND EDMUND WILSON INDIGNANTLY REFUSED" ("Introduction" The Love of the Last Tycoon xciv). In the end, whatever the case, Wilson took on the editing duties himself.

From Fitzgerald's notes and outline, it appears as if he had ambitions for the manuscript to be a business novel, detailing the inner workings of how movies get made. But in the edition Wilson cobbled together, Stahr's psychology, especially where it concerns the loveplot, overwhelms the story. In an image salvaged out of Nathanael West's dream dump, Stahr first sees Kathleen drifting down a flooded backlot on the head of a giant statue. This is the first push away from a perceptive Hollywood insider novel as the book floats back towards Fitzgerald's played out theme of the girl who got away. The structure is more episodic and the style more terse than any of his earlier works, possibly due to the influence of screenwriting, and the author's beautiful gift for description and character is in evidence, but so too, disappointingly, is his familiar problem of controlling point-of-view.

Like The Great Gatsby, the novel concentrates on a great man and the world around him. But Cecilia makes for an awkward narrator. In the beginning pages, she seems to share with Nick Carraway the right mixture of distance and involvement, the

correct balance of within and without. She was brought up around pictures -- Valentino came to her fifth birthday party, as he had come to Budd Schulberg's⁸ -- yet, unlike Rosemary Hoyt in Tender is the Night, she isn't in pictures. This should make for a good vantage point, but to focus on Stahr's professional life and private life with the degree of detail needed, the third person point-of-view would have worked out better.

As in The Great Gatsby, the great man is introduced to the reader after the first-person narrator has built him up a bit. But unlike Nick, who is the character most changed by the events he reports, Cecilia has little to do once Stahr enters the picture. Not only does her idealization of him never allow the producer, or the man, to come to focus, but Fitzgerald also forces her to report on events she couldn't possibly have witnessed -- the scene where Stahr sleeps with Kathleen for one. Cecilia knows the contents of Stahr's head and charts his movements with a degree of intimacy a puppy-dog crush could never grant her. Lines like "This is Cecilia taking up the narrative in person" (77) and "This is Cecilia taking up the story" (98) broadcast this problem. But they also remind us that the manuscript was still in its early stages and point-of-view could have changed in revision (as had happened with Tender is the Night). Divining authorial intention is a dangerous business, but isn't it possible that, for instance, instead of being bits of Cecilia Brady's narration, these two lines are nothing more than Scott Fitzgerald's imbedded notes to himself?

⁸"In Hollywood," Schulberg's New Republic piece, makes clear that during the composition of the Stahr work in progress Fitzgerald was upfront about wanting insider Hollywood information from him, and when Schulberg read the manuscript Fitzgerald remarked: "I sort of combined you with my daughter Scottie for Cecilia" (The Four Seasons of Success 134). Despite this, in a recent interview Schulberg claimed that the book "hurt me a little bit" ("The Hollywood Years" 122).

What Makes Sammy Run? has the advantage over The Last Tycoon of being a finished novel built firmly upon the foundation of earlier short stories. Schulberg's book is the insider novel Edmund Wilson applauds Fitzgerald for writing in the postscript to "The Boys in the Back Room." Like Gatsby's Nick Carraway, Al Manheim is honest and genteel. Like Miss Lonelyhearts, he's a newspaperman with a holy man father. Unlike Nick and Miss Lonelyhearts, he's judgmental and a bit of a square. In the short story version, Al devolves into a money-hungry hack, but here Schulberg leaves him at the end of the book just as we found him in the beginning: moral, passive, and intellectual. We feel Al's disgust as he watches Sammy Glick's well plotted slither up the corporate ladder, but we can also understand why he's fascinated by him. How far and how fast can Sammy go? Can anything stop him? Will he get his comeuppance?

Like Gatsby, Sammy is a show-off and a gull. Gatsby wears pink suits; Sammy buys shoes that are as loud as Schulberg's "running" symbolism. Gatsby is a beautiful dreamer; Sammy is an ugly schemer. From the moment they meet in the New York newspaper office, Glick can see that Manheim is a chump, but the older writer possesses the education, carriage, and taste that the boy wants to imitate. Sammy isn't satisfied with being a lowly radio columnist. Radio, although popular, lacks the glamour of film and the highbrow cachet of the stage. Using Al, Sammy looks to acquire a literary reputation that will increase his cultural capital, which he can then trade in for money and power. Sammy wants Al to help him with his grammar and tell him who Silone and Maupassant are, but he wants to help himself to Manheim's connections even more. At a lunch at the Algonquin, Sammy has Al introduce him to a playwright/critic based on Dorothy Parker's

pal George S. Kaufman. The next day's paper carries an item, planted by Glick, which makes the literary man and the young radio reporter seem like bosom companions.

Stahr doesn't want his own name to appear on screen; Sammy can't see "Sammy Glick" written enough. Stahr wants power as a vehicle for achieving artistic purity and greatness. Sammy just wants power. Both are workaholics. Stahr organizes the contributions of hundreds of people; Sammy spends all of his effort on self-promotion. In fact, Glick is so good at padding his reputation as a writer that he never has to write anything. He plagiarizes and bluffs and steals. In one episode, Sammy composes an entire scenario from scratch by going from table to table in the commissary and having each writer add a small piece to his "great idea" which, like stone soup, gets meatier with each contribution. There's no need for the chef to toss in anything himself.

What Makes Sammy Run? and The Last Tycoon both pit a noble producer against an opportunist. Fitzgerald's book focuses on the noble producer; Schulberg's book concentrates on the opportunist. Stahr tries not to fall prey to Brady's treachery; Glick is as treacherous as it gets. Sammy isn't the writer as Hollywood victim; he's the writer as Hollywood victimizer. After chewing up other screenwriters, he graduates to preying upon weak and aging executives like the book-lover Fineman (88), a stand-in for Budd's dethroned father B.P. Schulberg. Manheim chronicles the carnage, and in the process the reader is given a complete tour of the studio system as Glick tears his way through it.

Sammy wants to mentor Al and make him wise-up. But Manheim doesn't want to be taught by the younger writer; he only wants to learn from him. In the final analysis, Glick represents greed gone wild. He would fit right in with The Last Tycoon's

Fleishacker and Brady. He's the spiritual godson of Dreiser's Frank Cowperwood of The Financier. To Al, Sammy's story is "a blueprint of a way of life that was paying dividends in America in the first half of the twentieth century" (276). What Makes Sammy Run? isn't anti-Hollywood; it's anti-capitalism. Glick isn't a purely Hollywood phenomenon; Al could've stayed home and found a dozen guys just like him on Wall Street.

Glick's rise to producer is quick and savage, but what goes up must come down, and so, eventually, Schulberg makes sure Sammy is punished. The two things Glick can't buy, fake, or steal are gentility and an awareness of high culture. Like many an ethnic movie gangster before him and after him, he marries a WASP princess. But Laurette Harrington is a beautiful woman without mercy. At a party she mentions Gainsborough's picture "Blue Boy," and Sammy asks if a foreign studio put it out. After stringing him along a bit, it's finally revealed she's talking about a painting. Laurette laughs at his expense, and Sammy can't conceal his embarrassment (246-247). Later she cuckolds him and Sammy is left to wander aimlessly through the rooms of his huge, Xanadu-like mansion. In portions of these last chapters, especially when Al goes to the Jewish ghetto to uncover Sammy's origins, discovering that what makes Sammy run is fear of becoming like his weak father,⁹ the plot can lapse into a schmaltzy version of "Jews Without Money Call It Sleep," but the majority of Schulberg's book is the documentary novel, narrated by a pitch-perfect participant/observer, we see only flickering traces of in The Last Tycoon.

If the Stahr manuscript has been overestimated by well-meaning critics, especially friends and contemporaries like Wilson ("Far and away the best novel we have about Hollywood...and Fitzgerald's most mature piece of work"), Benet ("the full powers of its author, at its height, and at their best") and Dos Passos ("the beginnings of a great novel"), the story cycle detailing the misadventures of screenwriter Pat Hobby has been underpraised. Brian Way's comments are typical of the prevailing wisdom, which believes that in these pieces the author "shows, as never before, a hard calculated awareness of the exact minimum of effort needed to satisfy his editor and readers" (157). This is unfair -- and ahistorical. It's a well documented fact that Fitzgerald churned out deliberately sub-par stories for The Saturday Evening Post during the 1920s, a time when he had a much better feel for the pulse of the popular magazine market than he did later in his career. Moreover, the record shows that Fitzgerald went beyond the "minimum of effort" with these pieces. Pat Hobby is a lazy hack; Scott Fitzgerald was not. The dates of composition for the stories coincide with the composition period of The Last Tycoon (Mangum 77), and Arnold Gingrich, the Esquire editor who published the seventeen Hollywood tales in issues ranging from January 1940 to May 1941, recalls that the author revised them past the deadline on many occasions and had very definite ideas about the order in which they should appear (The Pat Hobby Stories ix).

⁹ Neal Gabler's An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood makes the point that most movie moguls came from households where the father was ineffectual, weak, or an outright failure.

To be sure, money was a motive in writing the stories. Fitzgerald made \$4,500 from the cycle (Some Sort 473) and his daughter Scottie claimed that Pat Hobby "sent me to Vassar " (Pat Hobby xxi), but the better pieces -- "Boil Some Water," and "Two Old Timers" especially -- rise above the status of potboilers. These Fitzgerald stories are smart and funny, like episodes from a existential movie serial. While less ambitious than The Last Tycoon, on the level of form they are superior to Fitzgerald's unfinished novel. There's no split character focus, and the narrative voice is sharp and direct. There's aesthetic distance from the subject matter, and the plots are simple and sustained. Pat Hobby will never learn. He will never grow. But because he knows how to play the Hollywood game, at least well enough to stay in it, he will always find a way to survive.

A writer who "had never written much" (13), Pat Hobby isn't a Fitzgerald self-portrait. He's Sammy Glick with less drive and worse luck. His laziness makes him a target for Fitzgerald's gentle scorn. Like Caramel in The Beautiful and Damned twenty years earlier, Hobby represents a type of writer Fitzgerald is consciously trying to avoid becoming. Pat steals ideas, kisses up to the powerful, and even toys with blackmail, but his lack of success and comic degradation save him from coming off as evil. Critics have often called Hobby a failure, but the truth is -- he's mediocre. His plans usually backfire, and his big break never comes, but he always makes a living. Many of the Pat Hobby stories concern his efforts to get on the lot and/or to stay there. In addition to writing -- or pretending to -- Hobby also conducts studio tours, baby-sits other writers, acts on camera, poses for artists, and impersonates Orson Welles. Although Pat barely keeps his foot in the Hollywood door, he's a company man who fights to keep outsiders out, especially Communists. In "A Patriotic Short" he rewrites a script written by a "Red"

(117) and in "Boil Some Water" he uses a cafeteria tray to flatten a man in a Russian costume who dares to sit at "The Big Table" reserved for executives. At one point Pat jokes about membership in "The Screen Playwriter's Guild," conflating the names of the Leftist union and the Conservative one. According to Pat, the union wants Finland recognized and "free pencils and paper" (75).

If politics are treated comically in the story cycle, Wilson's version of The Last Tycoon ends with a scene that hints that the struggle over who would speak for writers in Hollywood might have eventually played a serious role in Fitzgerald's Hollywood novel, as it most certainly does in Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? Both books were published in 1941, the year the producers finally sat down with the Screen Writers Guild and reached an agreement.¹⁰ But the road to get there was a rocky one, as these novels chart. Modeled on Irving Thalberg, who, according to Schulberg, "was at the forefront of the fight to break the Guild" (quoted in "Introduction" The Love of the Last Tycoon xxii), Monroe Stahr will fight -- with his fists if necessary -- to keep labor organizers away from his people and his studio. Stahr believes that "writers are not equipped for authority" (120), and, like Fitzgerald himself during most of the 1930s, the screenwriter characters in the novel seem too self absorbed -- or too self protective -- to care about unionization one way or another.

Written by a member of the Guild's Board, What Makes Sammy Run? presents a wider spectrum of writer's responses to unionization, and, by extension, their view of themselves as workers and citizens, as professionals and proletariats, and as artists.

Sounding like Nathanael West, Al jokes with Kit before a union meeting that he likes seeing other people, "but one at a time, not all bunched together" (130). While intellectuals Kit and Al align themselves with the "little guys" (137) of the SWG and opportunists like Sammy cozy up to the powerful and highly paid screenwriters of the house union Screen Playwrights (here called "The Association of Photodramatists"), the aesthete Pancake scoffs at the notion of authors getting together to organize "like a bunch of plumbers" (136). When talk surfaces of a plan to have Hollywood screenwriters align themselves with The Author's League of America, a former movie extra who has risen to respected writer argues that "by God, no bunch of Broadway snobs, who think they are too good for Hollywood, is going to sit around the Algonquin and tell me what to do" (132). Another writer wants to kick out all "the goddam parlor pinks" (137). The producers take this lack of consensus as a sign of weakness and try to break up the SWG through institutional pressures like graylists and stapling resignation forms to paychecks. When Al refuses to quit the union, the studio lets him go without needing to tell him why. His agent says that if there were a blacklist, he'd certainly be on it: "But they don't need anything like that in this chummy little business. All it takes is a couple of big shots happening to mention it over a poker game -- or a meeting at Chasen's and passing the word along. That's why you should have played ball" (191).

In The Last Tycoon, Stahr prefers to confront the threat of unionization face-to-face. Cecilia arranges a disastrous meeting between the producer and a labor leader named Brimmer. In preparation for the conference, Stahr orders a two page treatment of The

¹⁰MGM executive Eddie Mannix began the negotiations by announcing: "There's a war on. So let's just sign this goddamned contract and make pictures for the boys" (Schwartz 182).

Communist Manifesto and watches several European movies. Like a father who believes he knows best, Stahr tells Brimmer he's wasting his time trying to unionize in Hollywood since writers are "like children -- even in normal times they can't keep their minds on their work" (120). Up to this point in the narrative, the novel has stacked the deck in Stahr's favor by bearing this out. Writer characters don't come off very sympathetically: Wylie White is a "an intellectual of the second order" (38), a jealous and drunken smartaleck; Boxley is a terrible snob, and the Dorothy Parker-ish Jane Meloney is a petite, fifty year old, highly paid, highly efficient, witty screenwriter for whom Stahr must "stifle what amounted to a sharp physical revulsion" (38). Monroe Stahr believes that he knows writers better than they know themselves. He's not as smart as a writer, the idiot savant of the industry, but, as he explains to Brimmer, "I always thought that his brains belonged to me -- because I knew how to use them" (125).

Brimmer responds that writers are the creative force behind motion pictures. He declares that "they grow the grain but they're not at the feast" (120). To extend his metaphor, writers are the farmers who plant the seeds that blossom into motion pictures; their brains are more than crops for Stahr to harvest. The studio isn't a kibbutz; it's a factory. Throughout his exchange with the producer, Brimmer's language never lets us forget that moviemaking is an economic system, and writers are workers subject to exploitation. After a heated game of ping pong that Stahr treats as a duel, the producer -- in a move his earlier characterization hasn't prepared us for -- picks a fistfight with the Communist leader and is knocked to the floor. This is Fitzgerald's way of announcing that the type of Hollywood paternalism represented by Stahr, that everyone at the studio is happy to working under him to fulfill his individual vision, will be, like silent pictures, a

thing of the past. The barbarians are at the gate, and Monroe Stahr cannot keep them from coming in. Writers in Hollywood are on the verge of banding together to create a strong union.

Neal Gabler, among others, has written that Jewish movie moguls like Paramount's Adolf Zukor, Columbia's Harry Cohn, and the Warner brothers lived in constant fear that the empires they had worked so hard to build would suddenly be taken away from them. The specter of organized labor infiltrating their lots and shaking up the system was just one of the external threats that kept them awake at night. They could also feel Wall Street and Washington constantly breathing down their necks. Furthermore, anti-Semitism, whether overt or tacit, whether emanating from the country clubs of their neighbors or from the filmgoing audience itself, hung over the moguls at all times. When Budd Schulberg's book appeared, an instant bestseller¹¹ and critical darling¹² that detailed the adventures of a rapacious Jew who thrives in the environment of the Hollywood studios, the town's power brokers felt betrayed by one of their own. Sam Goldwyn banned Schulberg from the lot. Louis B. Mayer wanted him deported (Beck 18).

Heat from the studios would have been bad enough, but the Communist Party was also incensed at Schulberg. He hadn't received permission to print the book, and, even with the narrator's name changed from Al Manners to Al Manheim, the Party still found

¹¹ Still smarting from the poor sales of The Day of the Locust, Random House's Cerf told Schulberg not to expect too much from Sammy since "People who read novels have no interest in Hollywood, and people who go to the movies don't read books" (quoted in "Afterword" What Makes Sammy Run? 321).

the story anti-Semitic. In addition, the Communists denounced the book as too realistic, too depressing, and too decadent. It didn't focus enough on the positive force of the workers. One reviewer, under pressure from the Party, even retracted a positive review of the novel, claiming that, upon further inspection, "the book was elitist in that it only dealt with the writers; it didn't deal with the grips or the electricians, the workers" ("The Hollywood Years" 128). The long episodes of Schulberg's book that deal with the SWG and the Hollywood Writer's Wars repeatedly make the point that writers are workers, but Schulberg was already too fed up with the Communist Party, and with the studio system, to even argue. He decided to leave Hollywood and move back East to concentrate on his literary career: "I didn't want to stay there any longer and, of course, if I had wanted to, I couldn't, and that was it" ("The Art of Fiction" 104).

¹² Beck writes: "The book went through ten printings in 1941, was condensed in Reader's Digest that July, and was selected as 'Best First Novel of the Year' by The New York Times" (17).

Chapter Seven: The 1950s

As anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker makes clear throughout Hollywood: The Dream Factory (1950), her ethnographic study of the movie colony, the pursuit of money and glory often causes the members of the entertainment industry to have short memories. Vendettas are put aside or close ties are abandoned. Budd Schulberg had sworn off Hollywood in 1941, but after World War II he nonetheless continued to produce articles and fiction and testimony about Hollywood, and about the writers -- like Dorothy Parker, Nathanael West and F. Scott Fitzgerald -- he had met while living there. His 1950 novel The Disenchanted, for example, is a fictionalized version of the ill-fated screenwriting trip to Dartmouth that he had taken with Fitzgerald in 1939. The year the book was published, Louis B. Mayer -- who had wanted Schulberg deported for What Makes Sammy Run? -- approached Budd about bringing Sammy Glick to the screen (Beck 71). This seemed like a sudden change in Mayer's attitude, but the mogul was losing his power at MGM and needed a hit film to rekindle his career. When Schulberg turned down the project, Mayer and the studio simply appropriated many of the book's elements and built them into The Bad and the Beautiful (1952), the story of a talented -- but ruthless -- producer trying to regain his footing in Hollywood.

With the studio system on its last legs in the 1950s, Budd Schulberg made an impressive film industry comeback of his own.¹ On the Waterfront (1954) and A Face in

¹Even after his "banishment," Schulberg never really left moviemaking. In 1943, helping out his father, a film pioneer who now couldn't find a job in the studios, he helped script City Without Men. That same year, Schulberg wrote the screenplay for Government Girl (RKO). He also pitched in during the war to make propaganda films for the armed

the Crowd (1957), projects done in close collaboration with director Elia Kazan, allowed him to achieve even greater cinematic success than he had in the 1930s and early 1940s. The first film won Schulberg an Academy Award, the second garnered him the slightly less prestigious German Critic's Circle Award. Both movies, especially On the Waterfront, have cemented him a prominent place in film history. The result of this today is that his renown as a screenwriter has easily eclipsed his importance as a fiction writer. An author can only be a first-time novelist with huge promise once, and Schulberg's subsequent novels, while healthy sellers, have never reached the same level of critical acclaim as What Makes Sammy Run?.

Similarly, Dorothy Parker, no stranger to early success herself, continued to write movies and reviews into the 1950s, but her production of poems and stories was grinding to a halt.² She wasn't writing literature any longer, but in her public role as a literary figure she remained high profile and always amusingly contrary. At a panel on "The Role of the Writer in Society," to which she had invited because of decades of vocal commitment to progressive causes, she surprised the audience by declaring that writers should shut up about politics and just concentrate on the work of writing (Meade 366). A few years later, during a 1958 episode of David Susskind's television show "Open End" -- so named because it stayed on the air until the guests got tired of talking -- a bored-

services. The New York State Archives houses two mid 1940s Schulberg scripts -- written in Spanish -- for the Mexican film industry.

² Parker did manage to have two co-written plays mounted during the decade, "The Ladies of the Corridor" (1953) and "The Ice Age" (1955), but both received negative notices and closed quickly. One favorable review of the former play came from The New Yorker: "Mrs. Parker, who is in the habit these days of deprecating her reputation as a

looking Parker baited young lions Truman Capote and Norman Mailer for over two hours. In the 1950s she began getting recognition from posterity-granting institutions like The American Academy of Arts and Letters, which inducted her in 1959, and she remained a sought-after speaker in the years before her death in 1967, but today she remains more famous than read or taught.

Unlike Budd Schulberg and Dorothy Parker's literary stock, the critical reputations of Nathanael West and F. Scott Fitzgerald -- boosted by friends and admirers like Parker and Schulberg -- grew exponentially in the 1950s. Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise ends with a trip where Amory defends his generation to a middle aged businessman; Schulberg's Fitzgerald novel The Disenchanted (1950) offers an artistic debate, begun on a plane, between the 1920s romantic individualism of Manley Halliday and the 1930s social commitment of Shep Stearns: Halliday wants to leave Hollywood and escape back into his boozy, poetic nostalgia for the jazz age; Stearns wants to push cinema into the hands of the revolution and create a realist art form made by the people for the people. Much of the early part of the novel is given over to Stearns' attempts to nudge his older partner towards the political left. Halliday is endowed with an amplified version of Fitzgerald's character flaws, biography, and appearance, yet Schulberg has always claimed -- never very convincingly -- that Manley Halliday isn't based on Scott Fitzgerald (Breit 140). Before we even meet Halliday, The Disenchanted prepares us for what is to come. Schulberg rolls out part of Henry James' subordinating preface to A Lesson From the Master and Other Stories as the novel's epigraph. It reads:

wit, is responsible not only for the precise and deadly wit that frequently punctuates the script but also for the acute human understanding" (quoted in Gill xxv).

The wondrous figure of that genius had long haunted me, and circumstances into which I needn't here enter had within a few years contributed much to making it vivid...More interesting still than the man -- for the dramatist at any rate -- is the S.T. Coleridge TYPE; so what I was to do was merely to recognize the type, to borrow it, to re-embodiy and freshly place it; an ideal under the law of which I could but cultivate a free hand. I proceeded to do so; I reconstructed the scene and the figures -- I had my own idea, which required, to express itself, a new set of relations -- though, when all is said, it had assuredly taken the recorded, transmitted person, the image embalmed in literary history, to fertilise my fancy... Therefore let us have here as little as possible about its "being" Mr. This or Mrs. That. If it adjusts itself with the least truth to its new life it can't possibly be either.

D.H. Lawrence's maxim "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale" comes to mind. Budd Schulberg must have his Halliday and cultivate his Fitzgerald too. He maintains that Mr. Halliday isn't Mr. Fitzgerald, but he also expresses pride that The Disenchanted helped spark "the popular revival of Scott's work that happily goes on and on" (quoted in Beck 27).

But other canonizing factors, ones more influential than Schulberg's roman a clef, had already been set in motion by 1950. Fitzgerald was well on his way to "being embalmed in literary history." His 1920 wish to remain immortal by appealing to "the

schoolmasters of ever after" was coming true. With the expansion of literary studies in higher education, teachers trained under New Criticism's belief that texts should be read independently from their biographical or social context were finding much for their students to unpack in "romance" (Chase) novels like The Great Gatsby and in symbol-laden stories like "Babylon Revisited" and "Winter Dreams." Even today, Fitzgerald remains a staple of many high school classrooms, where close reading strategies still reign.

Schulberg's The Disenchanted beckons us to gawk at the artist, not to examine the art. Rather than inciting a "popular revival of Scott's work," the book fuels the myth of Scott as movie industry casualty. Tom Dardis writes: "The tradition of seeing Fitzgerald in Hollywood as a suffering man, a failed man, really began with Budd Schulberg's novel of 1950, The Disenchanted" (17). During the time Schulberg was composing the novel, Arthur Mizener was putting together the first major biography of Fitzgerald, and the two compared notes. As a result, both works -- one fiction and the other non-fiction -- are plots of decline. In a rare bit of loyalty, an angry Ernest Hemingway told friends he hoped Fitzgerald was in Heaven working on books entitled "Longevity Pays: The Life of Arthur Mizener and The Schulberg Incident" (Brucoli, Fitzgerald and Hemingway 222). Lionel Trilling's influential essay on a "heroic" (237), hope-filled Fitzgerald in 1950's The Liberal Imagination offers a counter-narrative to Mizener/Schulberg, along the way making a claim that Fitzgerald's prose voice -- a balance between moral judgment and empathy -- is the ideal one for a novelist. Trilling demonstrates that Fitzgerald kept his talent until the end, but the legend that Scott was washed up after the Jazz Age still lingers on.

Of course, seeing Fitzgerald as lost increased the pleasure of rediscovering him. Part of the reason we remember him now, says Leslie Fiedler, is because he always wrote

so well about being forgotten. While perhaps not giving enough credit to the quality of Fitzgerald's prose as a factor in his revival, Fiedler's 1951 "Some Notes on F. Scott Fitzgerald" makes the astute claim that viewing Fitzgerald's life as a study in failure, as The Disenchanted does, actually increases his popular appeal. He writes: "Mr. Schulberg in his recent novel has remarked that in America nothing fails like success, but the obverse is also true: among us, nothing succeeds like failure" (71). The tragic figure holds great cathartic power for the audience. His flaws are what we like most about him. Halliday, like Fitzgerald, possesses a self-styled, self-actualized, romantic persona, the self-pitying, highly autobiographical writer who drinks himself into stupors and appears to spend his enormous talent as recklessly as the rich in his books spend money.

As Schulberg notes elsewhere, Scott Fitzgerald was his own "prime mover in all this god making and god smashing" (Four Seasons 142), something that is equally true of Halliday. Yet even in his darkest periods, Fitzgerald was able to regain faith in his talent and keep his eyes planted on the projects to come. In "The Lost Decade," Louis Trimble emerges from years of drunkenness as a new man. The story shows that Orrison Brown, a Schulberg stand-in, cannot fathom the changes that have taken place in him. In The Disenchanted, Schulberg forces Halliday to keep playing one note. Alfred Kazin writes: "Schulberg pities Fitzgerald, but he does not really approve of him, with that approval which starts from creative sympathy and understanding. That is the trouble with the book all along" (The New Yorker November 4, 1950). Despite the fact that the tail end of The Disenchanted ultimately reveals the older writer to be a productive artist who is still relevant, the bulk of the narrative is Shep's weekend walk with a zombie. Halliday refuses to let go of his death grip on the past, and throughout the novel he is referred to using

terms such as "specter," "ghost," and "shadow." Listening to Halliday's constant self-analysis of his selfish mistakes, Shep thinks to himself, "is like having a corpse suddenly rise and deliver his own funeral oration, or, worse, perform his own autopsy" (184).

At the time the novel was written, Scott Fitzgerald had been dead for almost a decade, so if anyone is performing a lukewarm eulogy -- or, worse, a post-mortem dissection -- it's Budd Schulberg. At the beginning of The Disenchanted Shep thinks Halliday is dead. He then proceeds to treat him as a relic during the trip and finally sees him dead at the end. As he manages to do in most of his fiction, and in most of his life, Schulberg has it both ways.³ Nostalgia for the writers of the 1920s coexists with an Oedipal relief that they are fading away. The capitalist joys of Halliday's early career are sung in flashback chapters entitled "Old Business." These discordant attempts to mimic Fitzgerald's lyrical style alternate with more sober chapters depicting Halliday's decline during the Depression. Schulberg writes of the older writer's nose-dive: "Oh. It was just perfect. It could hardly have jibed more neatly with Shep's theories if he had made it up himself" (74).

On the plane Shep is angry at Halliday's politics and during the trip he resents him for blowing the assignment, but after reading the master's novel-in-progress he has an epiphany:

Then it hit him hard: how was it possible for Manley Halliday
to write this well in 1939?

³In essays and interviews Schulberg details the chain of events that led to himself and Fitzgerald being fired from Winter Carnival, but he has never explained why he was

After all, Shep knew why Manley Halliday hadn't published in nearly a decade: because he was defeatist, an escapist, cut off from "vital issues," from "The People," a disillusioned amanuensis of a dying order...If poor, old Halliday, aware of himself and all his own friends in their own neurotic little world, could do what he promised to do in this new work, wouldn't Shep have to re-examine his own standards? Maybe ideology wasn't the literary shibboleth he had believed in so dogmatically. (368)

Writing a book about the 1920s and 1930s from a perch in the 1950s, Schulberg can safely have the character of Shep become disenchanted with the vulgar Marxism of the 1930s and grow to appreciate the timeless artistry of a forgotten writer/competitor. Just as Budd Schulberg thinks it's a shame Scott Fitzgerald died before completing The Last Tycoon, Shep Stearns pities Halliday for dying before he can finish his masterpiece. In 1939 Schulberg was a certified communist and an unpublished novelist; in 1950 he was neither. In 1939 Fitzgerald was alive and working on his own Hollywood novel; in 1950 he was not. It's easy to appreciate a stronger voice after it's been silenced mid-song.

Budd Schulberg, the Hollywood Prince, wasn't the only one in town who was singing a different tune by 1950. The Hollywood studio system itself had been transformed. The movie industry depicted in The Disenchanted was already a relic when the book was written. During an early morning walk through the empty streets of Los

mysteriously rehired by Wanger. It's also worth noting here that even after Fitzgerald was terminated from the project, he continued to give Schulberg advice on the script.

Angeles, David Selznick told screenwriter Ben Hecht that the movies were "over and done with...Hollywood's like Egypt. Full of crumbled pyramids. It'll never come back. It'll just keep on crumbling until finally the wind blows the last studio prop across the sands" (Hecht A Child of the Century 467). Forced by the government to divest in their theater holdings, the studios could no longer afford their massive payrolls. Stars, directors, and writers were free to hire themselves out on a picture-to-picture basis, working where they wanted to and when they wanted to. As a result, the agent became a more influential figure in the entertainment business.

Dorothy Parker was one of the beneficiaries of this new balance of Hollywood power, and one of the victims of a growing Hollywood climate of political suspicion. In 1950, her name appeared in Red Channels, the industry publication that listed suspected Communists (Meade 343). Temporarily unable to find any film work because of this, her agent, Leah Salisbury, began aggressively marketing the media rights to Parker's stories and started shaking down organizations -- from high school drama clubs to television production companies -- that were using Parker's source material without paying out royalties. In American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900, James West writes that during the 1950s subsidiary rights like these became increasingly more important to authors.⁴ Citing Fitzgerald as an early example of this phenomenon, West details the importance of milking a commodity for all it's worth (142). In such a world, the agent replaces the editor as the writer's new best friend. Worrying about money, so

⁴this later trend coincided with the Screen Writers Guild being folded into the Writers Guild of America, creating a union that would serve writers working for the stage, the page, and screens big and small.

writers didn't have to, agents increasingly began advising authors on career direction, on what media or genres to develop, and on what material to exploit. Claiming they had the writer's best interest at heart, they also began to read and critique manuscripts. After all, the thinking went, editors worked for publishers, but agents worked for writers.

Parker later became a client of MCA, where the resident genius was agent Lou Wasserman, the subject of Connie Bruck's When Hollywood Had a King (2003). In 1950, the year The Disenchanted was published and the year Parker was blacklisted, Wasserman had brokered a deal for Jimmy Stewart that had changed the industry. Instead of a straight salary for Winchester '73, Stewart had received a percentage of the profits, an arrangement that had netted the actor an enormous amount of money and had paved the way for stars, no longer in servitude to the studios, to become formidable economic free agents who could test their own market value. In the process, agents got rich. Bruck's biography also reports that Wasserman, a visionary with a photographic memory, was one of the first people in Hollywood to see that television wasn't a threat to the 1950s film industry. With foreign markets now imposing quotas on the importation of U.S. films, the small screens in American living rooms were a new source of revenue.

Television has often been cited as the cause for decreased movie attendance in the 1950s, but a more likely culprit is the GI Bill. With money to get a college education came less time to go to the movies. With the education and a government subsidy came the additional income to buy a house in the suburbs. This house, miles from city theatres, needed a car in the garage, a dishwasher in the kitchen, and 2.5 children sitting around the dinner table. In short, people started spending less money on the movies because in the 1950s they now had so many other things to spend it on -- including televisions. In 1950,

four million homes contained televisions. In 1954, there were thirty-two million. By the end of the decade, over 90% of homes had one (Balio 315). Still, although a solid case can be made that TV maimed radio, it did not significantly cripple the film industry. Studios like Republic Pictures -- the Poverty Row outfit Nathanael West once worked for -- actually grew larger after renting out their film libraries to television.

But Republic, like the other studios, kept its eyes on the big screen as well. In the early 1950s, one of Republic's divisions, Consolidated Film Industries, introduced a new process called Trucolor that it marketed to filmmakers who couldn't afford Technicolor. Improved color technology was only one of the lures the movie industry was using to draw people out of their homes. With Cinemascope, Todd-A O, 3-D, and Cinerama, the size and dimensions of the big screen were changing too. So were the films themselves. Scripts and stars and directors were now being packaged to the studios, instead of being packaged by the studios, and this left an opening for new perspectives and a wider variety of content. With this loosening of studio control came a slackening in the rules of the Production Code, widening the scope of what was possible. Changes in distribution and exhibition encouraged filmmakers to be at the top of their games. Because block booking had been abolished and theaters could now order what they wanted from the studios without having to buy the entire bill of fare, each film needed to go it alone.

In this climate, Elia Kazan approached Budd Schulberg in the early fifties about doing a film about corruption on the New Jersey docks. It would film on location, strive for a gritty realism, and pull no punches. In what seemed like a radical break from the old studio system, screenwriter Schulberg would be given complete authority over the script. Kazan told him: "Budd, if you'll do this I promise to treat it with the same respect I

would give to a Tennessee Williams play or an Arthur Miller play or a Bill Inge play. I'll advise or argue with you, but I won't change anything. It'll be your play. I won't change a line of dialogue unless you agree (quoted in Schulberg "The Art of Fiction" 111). What Schulberg wasn't told, however, was that a collaboration between Miller and Kazan to develop similar material had fallen flat only months before. In 1949 Arthur Miller wrote a play, "The Bottom of the River," about the efforts of Peter Pano to organize dock workers. Miller rewrote the play in 1950 as a screenplay entitled "The Hook," but Kazan failed to find any backers.

Viewing himself as a novelist who occasionally wrote for the movies, Budd Schulberg began developing the material as a screenplay and a book simultaneously, angling to have the two projects released at the same time. But the novel took longer than expected, and getting the film financed -- obviously of prime importance in the "new" Hollywood -- was more difficult than Kazan and Schulberg had hoped. No longer tethered to studios, actors had the luxury of being picky, and Marlon Brando, the star of 1951's A Streetcar Named Desire, directed by Kazan, was waffling about doing the picture. Darryl Zanuck at Fox wouldn't put up the money without a commitment from Brando. Furthermore, the studio was feeling pressure from the board to have the films they released be shot in wide-screen color, and the Kazan/Schulberg project, then titled The Golden Warrior, was shaping up to be too intimate and character-driven. Zanuck was looking for spectacle. (Behlmer Memo From DFZ 224-230). After Fox turned the property down, Warner Bros., MGM, Paramount, and Columbia did the same. In the end, the film was saved by a savvy independent producer -- proving that the new boss in Hollywood often looked an awful lot like the old boss.

Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni's 2003 biography of Sam Spiegel details how the producer joined the film, convinced Kazan and Schulberg to change the main character from an investigative journalist to a union member, suggested the title On the Waterfront, got United Artists interested in Frank Sinatra starring, dumped both Sinatra and UA when Brando agreed to play Terry Malloy, and brought the package back to Columbia Pictures. Once a "major-minor," Columbia, which had never owned any theatres anyway, saw its market share -- and its cachet -- actually increase after the studios had been forced to divest. On the Waterfront, budgeted at a modest \$900,000, began shooting on location in New Jersey in 1953.

Elia Kazan may have sworn not to interfere with the script, but Sam Spiegel had made no such promises. The producer made Schulberg's blood boil by whispering conspiratorially in Kazan's ear during story conferences and trying to take a red pen to some of the dialogue. Even though he was barred from the set, throughout filming the producer used a barrage of telephone calls to play the director and writer off of each other, trying to drive a wedge between them and gain control over the picture from his booth at Manhattan's 21 Club. Fraser-Cavassoni repeats the Hollywood legend that one day Schulberg's wife awoke in the middle of the night to find her husband shaving in the bathroom. When she asked him where he was going, he replied, "I'm driving to New York...to kill Sam Spiegel" (314).

In hindsight, however, Schulberg had to admit that the producer had improved the screenplay:

To give Spiegel his due, he hammered for tighter structure, and stronger
(and what came to be total) focus on my main character. Precious scenes

that added texture and complexity were jettisoned to the purpose of keeping it moving. The film asks "And then? And then? And then" often with a pang of regret I had to admit that in the interest in relentless storytelling, my pet sidebars had to go. ("Foreword" xvi)

After tussling with Schulberg, Spiegel moved on to Kazan. The producer complained that the film was being shot too slowly, and he tried in vain to enlist Schulberg in getting Kazan to pick up the pace: "Budd, this is serious... We are going to run out of money. You have to make him go faster" (315).

Schulberg, Kazan, and Spiegel all received Academy Awards for On the Waterfront, and all three deserve a piece of the credit for the movie's success. But, as usual, how large a share each ultimately deserves is a subject of debate. Brando, who won Best Actor for his performance, claims in his autobiography that he did more than just act in the film; he also wrote parts of it. With echoes of the attribution controversy over the "This is Mrs. Norman Maine" line of A Star is Born, Brando claims that he improvised the "I coulda been a contender" speech, one of the most famous monologues in film history (193-199). But the words were clearly Schulberg's: Tom Stempel's examination of an early draft of "The Golden Warrior" screenplay found the lines of the taxi cab scene exactly as they were delivered onscreen (165). Furthermore, the published shooting script proves that while Schulberg can't take credit for Brando's performance, or Leonard Bernstein's score, or the confining and threatening city created by Kazan in collaboration with Cinematographer Boris Kaufman and Art Director Richard Day, he is certainly responsible for the On the Waterfront's (1954) tight structure and Terry Malloy's nuanced characterization. It's Schulberg's finest script.

In fact, read side by side with the novel, entitled Waterfront (1955), the screenplay emerges as the better crafted piece of work. In terms of structure, the film contains three parts punctuated with three deaths: 1) Malloy goes along with corruption shown in the 'shape up' scene and sets in motion the death of Doyle; 2) Malloy faces his own corruption climaxing in KO Dugan's death and Father Barry's sermon; 3) Malloy fights back after his brother's death and confesses. The priest's pomposity and moralism, the one weakness of the movie, is amplified in the book version. The novel concentrates more on Father Barry than it does on Terry, and the split focus and sloppy access to consciousness further hurts the book, leading it to wander and get bogged down in Christian allegory. In the script and on the screen (and looking at both in concert reveals just how dependent they are on each other) Terry rightfully emerges as the more complex and more interesting character. Terry is both sinner and saint; he is both brutal and sensitive; he is a loner who is trying to make a connection to others. Terry's inner turmoil is what drives the narrative. Brando may have brought the character to life, but the DNA is right there on the pages of Schulberg's script.

Despite his murderous urges toward Sam Spiegel, Budd Schulberg ended up enjoying his On the Waterfront experience -- a collaboration that wouldn't have been possible under the script-by-committee system during the height of the studio era. Schulberg told an interviewer that working with Kazan made him begin "to feel that, Jesus, you can do the same thing in film that you can do in a book. You can really write what you want to write without any studio interference" ("Art of Fiction" 111). But could a writer author a film like he could author a book? During this same time, the mid 1950s, the "auteur theory" began gaining currency in France. Just when writers were in a

position to be the guiding vision behind films, American directors -- regarded during the studio era as little more than a bunch of interchangeable hired hands -- were being proclaimed authors.⁵ But Kazan has always given Schulberg much of the credit for the movie, and the look and feel of On the Waterfront demonstrates the close collaboration between writer and director that went on during every stage of production. Both of their marks are all over the picture. Michael Denning writes that the film's "synthesis of the docks, the waterfront neighborhood, and the gangsters marks it as the culmination of the ghetto pastorals and proletarian thrillers, a combination of the proletarian avant-garde of Kazan and the Hollywood Popular Front of Schulberg" (257).

The movie has also been popularly read as Kazan and Schulberg's justification of their 1951 testimonies before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. If it is, it offers the pair a shaky defense. Snitching on gangsters who murder isn't the same thing as snitching on screenwriters who hold political beliefs. Still, the two remain adamant that testifying was the right thing to do. In Kazan's autobiography he states that Terry Malloy's defiant cry "I'm glad what I done" speaks for him as well (A Life 500). In Naming Names, perhaps the best account of the HUAC hearings and their aftermath, Victor Navasky reports that Schulberg is sad over having lost some friends over his testimony, but that he doesn't regret having spoken out (242, 377). Like Shep Stearns, Schulberg seems to feel that turning his back on the ideology and the "literary shibboleth" of 1930s Marxism is his way of demonstrating that he has left his youthful indiscretions behind.

Whether or not Budd Schulberg needed to testify at all is a bone of contention. Dorothy Parker invoked the first amendment to the committee, and many others pleaded the fifth. Schulberg's publisher, Bennett Cerf, told him it wouldn't matter to Random House whether he testified or not (Beck 45). Perhaps Schulberg could have been blacklisted in the film industry, but this is doubtful. He had been getting out of jams his entire adult life. Rich and powerful friends and relations certainly played a part in this, but another part is that Schulberg perhaps overstates the "danger" of his beliefs and actions. He very seldom works without a net. For example, he was fired from Winter Carnival for being in cahoots with Fitzgerald, but in his retelling he often elides the part where his father's influence gets him re-hired. He was persona-non-grata in Hollywood for What Makes Sammy Run?, but his "banishment" appears not to have lasted very long. Membership in the Communist Party kept Dorothy Parker from being granted government clearance to go overseas as a war correspondent during World War II (Hollywood Writer's Wars 184), but this same pink mark on Schulberg's record curiously didn't prevent him from getting a commission in the U.S. Navy. To hear Schulberg tell it, he is more sinned against than sinning. He claims Ernest Hemingway and John Wayne both tried to pick fistfights with him (Sparing With Hemingway: And Other Legends of the Fight Game 24-30). Without backing down, Schulberg somehow managed to avoid these beatings.

Along these lines, On the Waterfront contains Schulberg's familiar trope of the powerful bully who eventually gets foiled. This theme pervades the books he published

⁵ In the years since, the careers of writers, cinematographers, and even editors have been the subjects of auteurist readings.

and the films he wrote solo. The backstabbing producer Sammy Glick, the social climbing producer Victor Milgrim⁶ in The Disenchanted, Waterfront's gangster boss Johnny Friendly, the fight promoter Nick Benko in The Harder They Fall, and the singing fascist Lonesome Rhodes in A Face in the Crowd all crumble, their inner rot revealed. Like Terry Malloy, Eddie Willis in The Harder They Fall (novel: 1947, film: 1956) is the type of heroic maverick -- a man standing up to the system -- that Schulberg believes himself to be. Schulberg dropped out of The Harder They Fall, the story of a press agent (Humphrey Bogart⁷) who exposes malfeasance in the boxing game, when Harry Cohn at Columbia insisted -- somewhat anachronistically, given the decentralized system of production that was becoming standard in the "new" Hollywood -- that the script be written on the studio grounds. What Makes Sammy Run? and The Disenchanted had exposed the film business, and The Harder They Fall takes a swing at the business of professional sports. Schulberg's next project, 1957's A Face in the Crowd, looks at a third segment of the American entertainment industry -- television.

The film is based on Schulberg's story "Your Arkansas Traveler" from the 1953 collection Some Faces in the Crowd. Partnering up again with Kazan, Schulberg was even more involved in the shaping of this film than he had been for On The Waterfront. In addition to the original story and the original script, he also wrote lyrics for the movie's

⁶ In an attempt to appear bookish, the power-hungry, prestige-hungry producer Milgrim makes a Freudian malapropism when he calls himself "an omnipotent [omnivorous] reader" (73).

songs. Kazan's introduction to the film's published script, released before the movie, notes that once again Budd was on set each day of shooting and once again the director promised to be hands-off (xvii). In an attempt to make the script more reader-friendly for the layperson, Schulberg's preface to the A Face in the Crowd screenplay includes his definitions of basic motion picture terms like "long shot" and "fade-in" (xxii-xxiv). This glossary, coupled with the fact that the script was published before the film was even released, is Schulberg's attempt to make a case for the screenplay as a stand-alone piece of art. But as with the On the Waterfront script, blueprints, no matter how impressive, only fulfill their promise when we see the objects built from them. A screenplay is always a draft; the film is the finished text.

A Face in the Crowd deviates from the rest of Budd Schulberg's oeuvre in terms of its treatment of the business world. What Makes Sammy Run? and The Disenchanted are both solidly pro film, but staunchly critical of the film industry. On the Waterfront is all for organized labor, but speaks out against organized crime within the union. Schulberg had his own stable of prize fighters and served as the boxing editor of Sports Illustrated, and while the film version of The Harder They Fall calls for the sport to be banned, the source novel merely pleads for the sweet science to be cleaned up a little bit. A Face in the Crowd, on the other hand, reads like a argument for the elimination of television. Other Schulberg works about work call for "the people" to rise up, organize, seize the reins of production, and trample down corruption. In A Face in the Crowd, the people

⁷The Harder They Fall would be Bogart's last film. The star was buried in 1957, the same year Louis B. Mayer died after losing a fight to regain control of MGM and Budd's father B.P. died trying in vain to get rehired in the film industry.

have all been narcotized by their televisions. Lonesome Rhodes (Andy Griffith⁸), a charming hobo turned right-wing demagogue and point-man for an arch conservative senator,⁹ has used the idiot box to fool all of the people all of the time.

Rhodes is exposed as a fraud when Marcia Jefferies (Patricia Neal), the woman who gave him his start, flips on his microphone as he begins joking about how dumb his audience is.¹⁰ Marcia follows the character trajectory of Sammy's Kit Sargent: she's a strong, intelligent woman who finally wakes up and realizes she's in love with a complete heel. Pipe-smoking, glasses-wearing television writer Mel Miller (Walter Matthau) -- the "man without a face" who Rhodes derides as "Vanderbilt '44" -- is a more smug and more impotent version of Sammy's Al Manners. Like Al he wears his lack of success as a badge of honor. But with its fear of mass culture and warnings about home-grown fascism, A Face in the Crowd seems closer to the pessimism of Nathanael West than to the progressivism of Budd Schulberg. Kit and Al and Shep seek to transform the cinema into an art form for the masses. They work towards this end. For Marcia and Mel, however, it's enough to be right about TV being a tool of mass hypnosis. Why bother rolling up

⁸ The Lonesome Rhodes persona -- with a badge, a son, and a heap of decency added to it -- appears to have formed the basis for the character Griffith would later play in his popular TV series.

⁹ The part of the senator is played by Mickey Neilan, a Schulberg family friend who was a hot director in the 1920s and had fallen on bad times since then. In Moving Pictures, Schulberg tells an amusing story of a young Neilan being in bed with wife Bessie Love when his mistress bursts into the room and screams: "You bastard! I knew you were cheating on me!"

¹⁰ Around the same time as the film's release, Howdy Doody's Buffalo Bob, thinking the cameras were off, got caught saying: "That ought to hold the little bastards."

your sleeves and doing something about it? It's hopeless anyway. After the film's climatic scene, which finds Lonesome Rhodes alone with his laugh track machine, Mel tells Marcia that they haven't destroyed Rhodes; the cracker barrel philosopher will be back on a small market station in no time, selling snake oils like Vitajex and grinning his way back into the nation's living rooms.

After seeing a rough cut of the film, Jack Warner told Kazan and Schulberg: "It's a piece of shit and you two don't know anything about politics" (Kazan 415). He released it anyway, to lukewarm critical reception and box office. But history has treated it more kindly. When Ronald Reagan came to national power, the comparisons to Lonesome Rhodes started flowing. In its depiction of commercial television, "the greatest instrument of mass persuasion in the history of the world," the film also seems to anticipate Network (1976), an overrated movie, and Bamboozled (2000), an underrated movie. Sometimes satire is better appreciated in retrospect, and A Face in the Crowd's dark comedy became more appreciated after a few decades went by, a process that had already begun for Nathanael West's black humor of the 1930s.

The year of A Face in the Crowd, 1957, Nathanael West's Complete Works was published. Since his death over fifteen years earlier, influential literary histories like Alfred Kazin's On Native Ground (1942) had ignored West. Franklin Walker's 1950 The Literature of Southern California devotes three lines to him, and in a 1951 issue of Partisan Review Isaac Rosenfeld commented that West was an intellectual who succeeded at writing about pop culture by exploring "the secret inner life of the masses" (quoted in Siegel 14). Later in the decade, W.H. Auden, Daniel Aaron, and James Light wrote appreciations of West, but it wasn't until Farrar, Straus and Cudahy released the one

volume Complete Works -- coinciding incidentally with the premiere of a stage version of Miss Lonelyhearts (Long 174) -- that Nathanael West began to enter the literary pantheon as a major minor writer. Norman Podhoretz's review in The New Yorker declared that the book contained some of the best writing by an American in this century (66-67), and other critics were equally as laudatory. Dorothy Parker's "Best Books" column in Esquire, the magazine that had also given a late career boost to F. Scott Fitzgerald, pronounced: "I can think of no book anyone would want to give and to receive more than The Complete Works of Nathanael West... Wildly funny, desperately sad, brutal and kind, there is no other like Nathanael West" (Portable Dorothy Parker 555).

And there is no other voice like Dorothy Parker's, as her Esquire reviews attest. But getting her to submit those reviews was often difficult for editor Arnold Gingrich. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Esquire and Gingrich were as generous with Dorothy Parker as they had been with Fitzgerald in 1940. Parker's biographers note that the magazine mailed her a check every month whether she had submitted her column or not. As always, in the 1920s and 1950s, she was a writer who would do almost anything not to have to sit down and write.¹¹ Surprisingly, given her acid pen, many of the reviews Parker did manage to submit to Esquire concerned books she wanted to praise. But Beloved Infidel, Sheilah Graham's 1957 memoir of Fitzgerald (appearing the same year as an exhibition organized by Sylvia Beach at the U.S. Embassy in Paris began institutionalizing the Lost Generation) attracted Parker's scorn. She dubbed the book "bone gnawing" and "a possible all time low in American letters" (Frewin 556).

Like Schulberg's The Disenchanted, Graham's tell-all book increased interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald by inviting readers to pity him. Just as gossip columnist Graham made a second career of writing volume after volume containing bits of her daily interactions with Fitzgerald, Schulberg has remained in the public eye by packaging and repackaging his thoughts on West and Fitzgerald, men he knew sort of well towards the end there. Consisting mainly of pieces originally appearing in Esquire, Schulberg's The Four Seasons of Success (1972), examines the highs and lows -- but mainly the lows -- in the careers of several American authors. The book makes the claim that West was "spared by failure" (14), and that Parker and Fitzgerald were ruined by early success. "Put West and Fitzgerald together," Schulberg writes, "and you have a rounded portrait of the artist as a young American strike out victim and home run hitter" (155). In the epilogue, Schulberg calls for critics and readers alike to recognize literary authors and support these artists over the long haul: "so that a Nathanael West is allowed to earn his keep while practicing his art, so that a god hurled down from Olympus into the scrubby marketplace is not forced to hack his stories at \$250 a crack in order to stitch himself together for a desperate, final assault on the ramparts of self-fulfillment, and perhaps with it, immortality" (203).

Nathanael West did "earn his keep while practicing his art," but it wasn't critics and readers who allowed him to do this. It was Hollywood. Fitzgerald had high literary aspirations, but he never viewed himself as "a god hurled down from Olympus into the scrubby marketplace." From the beginning of his career he was a professional writer who

¹¹Hired to compose lyrics for the 1957 Broadway musical Candide, Parker managed to write only half a song (Kinney xv).

was savvy about making money on the commodities he produced. Fitzgerald was less successful writing for Hollywood than he had been writing for magazines like The Saturday Evening Post in the 1920's, but both were markets he studied closely. The Pat Hobby stories, which sold for "\$250 a crack," were not hack work; the author saw them as linked stories and had definite ideas on how they should be arranged. And even if we buy that Fitzgerald needed to be stitched together, it was Hollywood, not Esquire, that had allowed him to purchase the longer piece of thread.

In the new century, Schulberg continues to dole out stories perpetuating the tale of Fitzgerald as Hollywood failure,¹² a fate he also assigns to Dorothy Parker (Four Seasons 10-11, Breit 140). In 2001, he told an interviewer for The Paris Review that Fitzgerald was seen as "marginal" in Hollywood and that he was "pathetic, really, because he thought he could be as good a screenwriter as he had been a novelist" [emphasis mine] ("The Hollywood Years" 120,124). Grumbling about the lack of respect his own literary work gets from literary critics, Schulberg has said:

If there were a literary decathlon, I'd have a shot. Scott Fitzgerald often wished that after Gatsby he had never done anything but just stuck to his last. Sometimes at night I feel that way. I have a little bit of that feeling, that I probably would be more respected as a novelist if I had just stayed on that track. Instead, I have this fatal problem of versatility. Because I was raised in such a writing atmosphere,

¹²Nicholas Beck reports that Schulberg is currently writing a book-length memoir about Fitzgerald (75), which would make this at least the fifth time he has revisited this same material.

it got so I could write anything. I could write a movie; I could write a novel; I could write a play. I could write lyrics, which I did for A Face in the Crowd. Always there were these different strings, so many different ones. I was sort of cursed with versatility. (The Art of Fiction 111).

With his "fatal problem" and talk of being "cursed," Budd Schulberg -- a mediocre novelist trapped in the body of a talented screenwriter -- sounds like the weakened, sole survivor of a dark plague that attacked fiction writers in studio-era Hollywood. Step out of your genre, and you will be poked. The more you try to do, the less you will end up achieving. Schulberg may have created some new interest in Nathanael West and F. Scott Fitzgerald after their deaths, but he's also an epic poet of the myth that these two stars would have burned even brighter, and their brilliance would have been recognized even earlier, if only Hollywood hadn't dampened their luster.

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