# Francis Scott Fitzgerald • The Last Tycoon

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

He thought of himself as the heir of his father, Francis Scott Key, who was the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (which became the American Anthem) after whom he was named; the other half the time he felt he was "straight 1850 potato-famine Irish". As a result, he had typically ambivalent



American feelings about American life. He represented the frivolous life of the wealthy class (he called them the beautiful people). His tales of Americans living the high life came to define the brief period of the 1920s prosperity and optimism known as the 'Jazz Age', together with futility and despair. He captured the atmosphere of the time: having fun, dancing, drinking, "being rich together". Tender is the *Night* is an autobiographical account of this type of life led by American expatriates on the French Riviera. Here and in Paris, the writers of the interwar years, called the Lost Generation by Gertrude Stein, deepened their critical view of American society. His most famous novel is The Great Gatsby, made into a film in 1974 and more recently in 2013. His last work, The Last Tycoon, was left unfinished when he died in Hollywood where he worked as a screenwriter.

# ABOUT THE NOVEL THE LAST TYCOON

The Last Tycoon is a novel about a Hollywood producer who finds himself struggling to find love and success in a world of cut-throats. The protagonist, Monroe Stahr, is obsessed with producing high-quality films with no regard for their financial prospects. He takes a personal interest in every aspect of the studio, and especially in the welfare of his employees.

At age 35 he is almost burned out, and the novel is the story of how he loses control of the studio and his life. Elia Kazan adapted this unfinished novel into his final film, *The Last Tycoon* (1976) with a screenplay by playwright Harold Pinter. The title in Italian is *Gli Ultimi Fuochi*.

In 1917, a TV series was made, adapting the same novel. The drama chronicles the desperation that is everywhere around Brady American Pictures, a film studio trying to survive the Depression as well as quarreling among members of the film crew, stupid bankers and dissatisfied employees.

#### THE TEXT

The main characters are flying to reach Hollywood and they are about to land. The passage is taken from the first chapter of the novel.

The motors were off, and all our five senses began to readjust themselves for landing. I could see a line of lights for the Long Beach Naval Station ahead and to the left, and on the right a twinkling blur for Santa Monica. The California moon was out, huge and orange over the Pacific. However, I happened to feel about these things - and they were home, after all - I know that Stahr must have felt much more. These were the things I had first opened my eyes on, like the sheep on the back lot of the old Laemmle studio: but this was where Stahr had come to earth after that extraordinary illuminating flight where he saw which way we were going, and how we looked doing it, and how much of it mattered. You could say that this was where an accidental wind blew him, but I don't think so. I would rather think that in a 'long shot' he saw a new way of measuring our jerky hopes and graceful rogueries and awkward sorrows, and that he came here from choice to be with us to the end. Like the plane coming down into the Glendale airport, into the warm darkness.

awkward: imbarazzante

cut-throat: tagliagole, senza scrupoli

jerky: convulso

roguery: bricconata, mascalzonata

## COMPREHENSION

# 1 Answer the questions.

- 1. Is the narrator a character in the novel?
- 2. Is it morning or evening?
- 3. What was home in the landscape described?
- 4. Where is the plane going to land?
- 5. Does the narrator feel empathy towards Stahr?
- 6. Are there any references to movies?
- **7.** What is the prevailing simile?
- **8.** Did you like the passage? Justify your answer.

## **ANALYSIS**

# 2 Read this extract and tick the correct answer.

The Beautiful and the Damned is not the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel that Amazon has chosen to adapt, but it could serve as an alternate title to the handsome and romantic drama *The Last Tycoon*, a lovely period piece that contains several wonderful performances.

The series recalls the melancholy elegance of some of the best films of the 1930s, which is when this story is set. The drama chronicles the desperation that characterises the film studio trying to survive the Depression. Just about everyone on the screen is either rich, famous or both.

From camera techniques to costumes to the very good music, the show pays homage to classic cinema; like the '60s-set *Mad Men*, it's likely to make a viewer dream about a world they wouldn't like to live in. And yet the Amazon series doesn't hide the foundations of its story — one that Fitzgerald told over and over again, about the glittering lives of people who appear to have it all but who feel an acute emptiness. Fitzgerald's men and women — the beautiful, the damned and especially the rich — are often skilled at looking as if they didn't have a care in the world, especially if that pose accelerates their social position.

The Last Tycoon was published more than seventy years ago, but almost everything the TV adaptation from Billy Ray and Christopher Keyser touches on could have come from a contemporary Variety headline. Studio executives Pat Brady (Grammer) and Monroe Stahr (Bomer) want to make a meaningful picture that will allow them to comment on the rise of Fascist populism, but employees want more money and are going to create problems.

Adapted from: https://variety.com/2017/tv/reviews/last-tycoon-review-amazon-matt-bomer-kelsey-grammer-jennifer-beals-1202506846/

- **1.** The passage is taken from...
  - a. a book review.
  - **b.** a TV series review.
  - c. a film review.
- 2. The opening paragraph quotes...
  - **a.** both what the passage is about and another novel.
  - **b.** a poem.
  - c. an essay.
- **3.** Paragraph one plays with...
  - a. the title of one of the most famous novels by Fitzgerald.
  - **b.** makes reference to other movies.
  - **c.** shows harsh disapproval of the TV series.

- **4.** The second paragraph contains...
  - **a.** a literary quotation.
  - **b.** a historical quotation.
  - c. a TV series title.
- **5.** The third paragraph contains a...
  - **a.** negative judgement.
  - **b.** positive judgement.
  - c. neither of the above.
- **6.** The show pays homage...
  - **a.** to classic cinema.
  - **b.** to Fitzgerald.
  - **c.** to special effects.
- **7.** In the second part of the article, ...
  - **a.** there is no reference to film techniques.
  - **b.** there are a few references to film techniques.
  - c. there some references to editing.
- **8.** What issue did Fitzgerald talk of over and over again?
  - **a.** Social problems.
  - **b.** Sense of futility and despair of his wealthy characters.
  - c. Resilience.
- 9. When was the novel which inspired the series published?
  - **a.** A century ago.
  - **b.** A decade ago
  - c. Neither of the above.
- **10.** What did the studio executives want to do?
  - a. A musical.
  - **b.** A historical movie.
  - **c.** A movie on what was going on in Europe from a political point of view.
- **3** Translate the following passage.

Fitzgerald's men and women — the beautiful, the damned and especially the rich — are often skilled at looking as if they didn't have a care in the world, especially if that pose accelerates their social climbing.

4 Surf the net to find the movie in which Woody Allen features Fitzgerald's years in Paris, then write a review of the official trailer.

### DISCUSSION

Fitzgerald was disappointed with Hollywood, because the film industry was just interested in making money, and quality and art were not considered very important. Do you think artists should accept compromise or not?

