

## CINEMATIC SELFIES: FILMS THROUGH THE EYES OF THEIR DIRECTORS

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper offers a comparative textual analysis of three European films and three films from Hollywood. All six of these belong to a film genre - Films about Filmmaking. The three European films included in the analysis are: 8 ½ (1963) by Fellini, Day for Night (1973) by Truffaut, and Cinema Paradiso by Tornatore (1988); three American films included are: The Bad and the Beautiful (1952) by Minnelli, The Last Tycoon (1976) by Kazan, and The Player (1992) by Altman. Analysis of plots, themes, characters, and motivations reveals that European directors view their work differently than their American counterparts. While European films deal with inner or interpersonal conflicts of the characters, American films about filmmaking are concerned with producing films as a commercial commodity. In so doing, the paper builds a case about the basic approaches to filmmaking in Europe and the United States. The paper suggests that Hollywood treats movie making as a business while the Europeans filmmakers have focused on the artistry and the artists involved in making films.*

***Keywords:*** media and society; media effects; European cinema; American cinema

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### ***1. Introduction***

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A hundred years later, the movie audiences worldwide still view Charlie Chaplin as an adorable tramp. It was 75 years ago when the audiences heard Clark Gable utter his famous exit line in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), "Frankly my dear I don't give a damn!". It's been more than 50 years when Sean Connery offered his trademark introduction in *Dr. No* (1963), "Bond, James Bond." It was nearly 35 years ago when *E.T.* went bicycling across the clouds. These are but a few examples of memorable characters, images, lines, and behaviors from the films that have affected children and adults around the globe. Motion pictures, within two decades of their inception, gained the status of a social institution. Not only were movies a hugely successful entertainment industry, these were also considered an important instrument for education, opinion formation, and political propaganda (Mast, 1986).

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Cinema is an art, a craft, a business, and a social force. How films strike a balance between these requirements differs from culture to culture. Movies, as these are referred to in the US, are primarily an entertainment business (McClure, 1971). In many parts of Europe, films are considered a serious art form offering a great deal more than entertainment. Hence, cinema's role and function in a society are perceived differently from country to country - its functions ranging from entertainment and escape to information, social commentary, political criticism and propaganda (Huaco, 1965). When one compares the place of "films" in Europe with "movies" in America, it is as if one is comparing two dissimilar cultural artifacts.

Historically, the European filmmakers have envied the American filmmakers their big budgets and access to the most sophisticated equipment, studio facilities, and guaranteed international distribution leading to a globalization of Hollywood cinema since the early 1920s. However, despite a huge share of world screen time, majority of Hollywood fare has been viewed as something less than cinematic art.

Interestingly, the American filmmakers have also been envious of European filmmakers on two accounts. (1) Many European productions receive protection, support, and funding from local governments (Guback, 1969). No such subsidies exist for the American filmmakers. (2) European filmmakers enjoy a greater freedom in choosing and dealing with sensitive social and political topics while mainstream American cinema still operates at the lowest common denominator taking a somewhat puritan approach towards serious (*adult*) and taboo themes (Kardish, 1972; Sklar, 1975).

In the United States, going to the movies is a social activity. It is often done collectively or in pairs. People go with family members, with friends, and in groups. Going to the movies is considered a safe choice for a "first date". What movie one sees (story type) is secondary to whom one goes with. Company matters. Hardly any one goes alone. In Europe, it is quite common that people go to the cinema by themselves, and go to see a specific film. Content matters.

Movie audiences in all corners of the world seem not only interested in watching new releases but are also curious about the lives of the people that make movies. There is a long history of fan clubs, fan magazines, and fiction about the film personalities. People read novels; they are not particularly interested in the lives of the authors or the workings of the book publishing industry. People buy clothes and makeup products; the interest in designers or clothing and cosmetic industry is not at the same level as the interest in film stars, film directors, and the workings of the film industries.

Movie industries around the world have capitalized on this unusual interest and the result has been endless number of film magazines, film festivals and awards to arouse and satisfy the viewers' curiosity about the movie personalities. The gathering of fans at film premiers and special screenings are indicators of audiences' fascination with the people both in front of and behind the cameras.

Movie audiences also want to read stories about filmmaking. The Hollywood novel emerged as early as 1912 (Brooker-Bower, 1983). Among the well-known authors that have written about Hollywood are F. Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley, Norman Mailer, Joyce Carol Oates, John O'Hara, Harold Robbins, Gore Vidal, and P.G. Woodhouse (Slide, 1995).

The early 1940s saw the Hollywood novel using the film industry as a metaphor for capitalism or America itself; two important Hollywood novel of that time were F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (French, 2010).

While working as a writer in Hollywood in early 1940s, Scott Fitzgerald published 17 short stories about a fictionalized Hollywood script writer, Pat Hobby. The collection culminated into *The Pat Hobby Stories* (1962). Harold Robbins was a movie executive at Universal Pictures; he wrote a Hollywood trilogy - *The Dream Merchants*, *The Carpetbaggers*, and *The Inheritors*. These two authors have offered a first-hand and an insider's view of the movies industry.

For movie business, unlike other professions, there also exists a vast body of non-fictional literature about the works and private lives of actors, directors, writers, producers, and the executives that ran major studios. No other business or industry seems to generate this much autobiographical or biographical material as does the film industry. Public's interest in cinema easily surpasses other professions such as architecture, engineering, law, medicine, and science.

Shortly after Charlie Chaplin began making movies; he appeared in *A Film Johnnie* (1914), a one-reel comedy about a movie fan and moviemaking at Keystone Studio. This genre of films about movies has flourished ever since (French, 2011). In every film producing country, there have been films about filmmakers and filmmaking. With pictures ranging from Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* (1950) to Satyajit Ray's *Nayak* (1966), these films offer an interesting insight into the filmmakers' own assessments about the role and place of films in their own cultures.

While most movies about movie making are set in Hollywood, two of the very best are by European directors: Fellini's *8½* (1963), and Truffaut's *Day for Night* (1973). These are included in the analysis in the present paper along with *Nueve Cinema*

*Paradiso* (1988). Three American films to counter-balance the analysis are *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), and *The Player* (1992).

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## **2. European film about filmmaking**

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### **2.1 *8½* (1963). Directed by Federico Fellini**

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A stressed out, famous, filmmaker of somewhat depressing films, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) is experiencing "director's block". He is burned out after finishing his latest movie. He is tired of his wife, bored with his mistress, and in need of a vacation. Concerned about his mental and physical condition, he turns to a health spa where he is continuously pestered by a parade of aspiring actors and actresses, empty-headed writers and blubbing yes-men, all trying to get hired for his next film. These distractions make it difficult for Guido to focus on his project. In flashbacks, he wanders between the past and the present recalling the ups and downs of his love affairs. As he writes the script he realizes that vignettes from his personal life are creeping into his writing and the film is becoming uncontrollably autobiographical. *8 ½* is the story of a tortured genius of a filmmaker. Federico Fellini is the director and co-writer of this film about a film director trying to make a film.

The title of the film - *8½* (*Otto e mezzo*) is derived from Fellini's directorial accomplishments up to 1963. He had directed seven features, two shorts - accounting for one film, and co-directed another film with Alberto Lattuada that counted as half, thus, *8½* (Kezich, 2006).

It is an extremely personal film if not about Fellini then certainly about a film directors working in Italy in the early 1960s - working on tight schedules and limited budgets, coordinating the work of a hundred artists and technicians into one unified piece of art while dealing with their own personal relationships and the relationships between the cast and the crew. Thematically, *8½* is about artists' struggle during their creative process. Guido is not only a reflection of Fellini, but also of common people striving for greatness while attaining only the ordinary and familiar. The protagonist of *8½*, Guido has run out of ideas and is unable to finish his film, whereas Fellini did, delivering a film overflowing with stimulation and inspiration (Marcus, 2002).

Every sequence in *8 ½* may not have come from Fellini's own life, some probably did. Some things may be true, other imagined or wished for. In Fellini's vision, Guido's search and inability to find true personal happiness in a fragmented life is the result of modernization. Reviewing the film for *The New Republic*, Kauffmann (1963) wrote, "In terms of execution I cannot remember a more brilliant film". Calling the film "autobiographical" he went on to add.

*In terms of execution I cannot remember a more brilliant film. In image, visual ingenuity, subtlety of pace, sardonic humor, it is stunning. We see a wizard at the height of his wizardry, and it has something of the effect, given in contemporary reports, of Liszt playing Liszt ... The genuine raison d'etre of the picture is in the opportunities it provides for Fellini. The reason that certain operas exist is that certain singers existed who could sing them. The prime reason for this film is that Fellini is a prodigious film virtuoso (Kauffmann, 1963).*

Writing for *The Guardian*, Malcolm (1999) called the film Fellini's "real masterpiece, and the most potent movie about film-making, within which fantasy and reality are mixed without obfuscation". The film was re-released in the movie theaters in 2015 and reviewing it for *The Guardian*, Bradshaw (2015) called it Fellini's "compellingly fluent and sustained meditation on films as dreams, memories and fears, and the way they offer a fascinating but illusory way of rewriting and reshaping one's own life".

*8 1/2* is a film without much of a plot. Yet, Fellini's miracle in *8 1/2* is that he tells the truth about himself. According to Stone (1995) Sigmund Freud held that people only see themselves as they really are when they are depressed; Fellini's *8 1/2* is an inspired depiction of that moment of self-comprehension.

*8 1/2* won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and the Grand Prize at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Moscow International film Festival where Stanley Kramer and Satyajit Ray were among the jury members. It is on the top-10 lists of the British Film Institute, The American Film Institute, and the prestigious British film journal, *Sight and Sound*. "Newsweek" praised it as, "beyond doubt, a work of art of the first magnitude" (Alpert, 1988); *Chicago Sun-Times* declared *8 1/2* as "the best film ever made about filmmaking" (Ebert, 2000).

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## 2.2 *Day for Night* (1973) Directed by François Truffaut

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*Day for Night*, its French title, *Je Vous Présente Paméla* (*Meet Pamela*), chronicles the making of a banal melodrama starring an aging matinee idol, Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Aumont), a former diva Séverine (Valentina Cortese), a young heart-throb Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and a British film star, Julie Baker (Jacqueline Bissett) who is recovering from a nervous breakdown and the scandal of her marriage with her doctor. Apparently she had wrecked the doctor's marriage. And there are a handful of sub-plots about the crew-members' affairs, romances, and break-ups. The director, Ferrand (played by Truffaut himself) is trying to navigate through these problems and trying to finish a picture on schedule. The crises include a discovery that a secondary actress who is to appear in a bikini is pregnant, the leading man's fiancée leaves him for a stuntman, the accommodating

British star sleeps with the leading man to ease his pain who in turn takes the one-night stand as a sign of love and tells her husband of the affair.

*Day for Night* depicts the experiences of a film crew that comes together at the Victorine Studios in Nice to make a film, an illusion that, for the duration of its production, is more important than life itself, and its major concerns are people working at a profession they love, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else (Canby, 1973).

The film is a Pirandellian affair as it reminds the viewer of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* where a family of non-actors offers a theater director the opportunity to recreate their family tragedy. The result is a play where the real and the imagined became intriguingly entwined.

Ebert (1997) called it “a poem in praise of making movies... film about people for whom the end product - the film itself - is only the necessary byproduct of their real reason to be in the movie business, which is to be on the set. To be making a movie”. Not unlike Fellini, Truffaut lived for the rootless intensity of loves and friendships on a film set. The cinema is like real life – only better! (Bradshaw, 2011).

*Day for Night* offers the reverse of cinema's tapestry: the viewers see the elegant actors and pleasing visuals, but behind there are the makeup artist and wigmakers and costumers making the actors look pretty; set decorators creating the illusion of a balcony on the third floor with no actual building underneath and making a scene look like night when it is being shot in daylight. The movie shows the audience the simple tricks of its trade: the fake snow, the fake rain, the fake candle, the fake hotel window.

Like Fellini's film director Guido in *8½*, Ferrand too is constantly confronted with questions from his crew, cast and the press - technical questions, creative questions, and questions about life in general, as if like a god, a director holds all the answers.

*Day for Night* opened the New York Film Festival in 1973; there probably has never been a more appropriate film festival opening. The film went on to win the 1974 BAFTA Award for Best Film and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

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### *2.3 Nueve Cinema Paradiso (1988) Directed by Giuseppe Tornatore*

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Salvatore Di Vita, a famous Italian film director, is told by his girlfriend that his mother called to say someone named Alfredo has died. His girlfriend asks him

about Alfredo. Salvatore flashes back to 30 years ago when he was a six-year-old son of a WWII war widow in a small Sicilian village. As a young boy, Salvatore, discovers a love for cinema and spends his free time at the village movie house, Cinema Paradiso. The fatherly projectionist, Alfredo takes a liking to the boy and allows him to watch movies from the projection booth, and eventually teaches him to operate the film projector.

One day the highly flammable nitrate film catches fire. The cinema burns down. Salvatore saves Alfredo's life, but not before a film reels explode in Alfredo's face, leaving him permanently blind. The movie theater is rebuilt as *Nuove Cinema Paradiso*. Since Salvatore is the only person in the village who can operate a projector; he becomes the new projectionist.

About a decade later, Salvatore, is still operating the projector while his relationship with the blind Alfredo has strengthened. Salvatore acquires a movie camera and begins experimenting with film. He meets a young girl, Elena, and captures her on film. Salvatore wins Elena's heart but loses her as her father disapproves of Salvatore.

Elena and her family move away. Salvatore leaves the village for obligatory military service. He writes to her but his letters are returned as undeliverable. Upon his return from the military, Alfredo urges Salvatore to leave his hometown permanently. The old man tells Salvatore to pursue his destiny in the big city and never look back or give in to nostalgia. Salvatore leaves and does not return until Alfredo's death.

Alfredo's widow tells him that the old man has left him an unlabeled film reel. Salvatore returns to Rome and watches Alfredo's reel and discovers that it comprises a montage of all the romantic scenes and scenes of kissing that the village priest had ordered to be removed from the movies. Alfredo had spliced the sequences together to form a single film. Salvatore watches the montage with teary eyes.

*Cinema Paradiso* is not a film about filmmaking. It is a film about the social significance of cinema in the lives of the people in the small village and the impact films made on screenwriter/director Giuseppe Tornatore. Reviewing the film for *The Financial Time*, Quirke (2013) wrote, "[...] *this is a film about nostalgia and sentimentality.... Its confidence is staggering. And its commitment to a classic narrative that is also essentially a parable story, markedly unusual. They really don't make them like that anymore.*"

Even though the old man's advice to the youth was, "*Don't look back. Don't write. Don't give in to nostalgia*", the film is a love-letter to cinema. The montage of the censored kisses remains one of the most delightful and affecting of all movie

endings (Viner, 2013). Fitzherbert (2013) called it “a celebration of childhood, friendship, romance and the power of cinema”.

Kempley (1990) wrote:

*There are films as lovely, but none lovelier than "Cinema Paradiso," a folkloric salute to the medium itself, flickering with yesterday's innocence and lingering on the mind like bubbles in wine.... It is, in a word, exquisite.... Cinema Paradiso is cherished regret. Tornatore, who also wrote the film, was inspired by loss, the realization that communal movie-going had become a thing of the past.*

Tornatore's film is a reminder of the scenes in Truffaut's *Day for Night*, where the young boy steals a poster of *Citizen Kane*. One comes to understand how the power of the screen compensates for a deprived life and that young Salvatore is not apprenticing himself to a projectionist, but to the movies (Ebert, 1990).

*Cinema Paradiso* was a critical and box-office success and is regarded as a classic. It won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, Best Foreign Film at BAFTA, and *Grand Prix du Jury* at the Cannes Film Festival. Ebert (1990) claimed that the success of *Cinema Paradiso* was in part responsible for the revival of the Italian cinema.

All three of the film discussed above focus primarily on two elements:

(1) People that create the movies are passionate about their art and not too overtly concerned about the financial aspects of the process. As directors, both Guido and Ferrand are artists dedicated and committed to their craft. For the cast and crew, from the lead players to extras and from directors to drivers - both in *Day for Night* and *8 ½*, the making of the film becomes their *raison d'être*. Their commitment and dedication to their work is infectious. Guido sums his feelings and frustrations about creating a work of art as he agonizes:

*I thought my ideas were so clear. I wanted to make an honest film. No lies whatsoever. I thought I had something so simple to say. Something useful to everybody. A film that could help bury forever all those dead things we carry within ourselves. Instead, I'm the one without the courage to bury anything at all. When did I go wrong? I really have nothing to say, but I want to say it all the same. ... All the confusion of my life ... has been a reflection of myself! Myself as I am, not as I'd like to be.*

Truffaut, in *Day for Night*, poses the question: For the cast and the crew, does the film become more important than their own lives? His answer is summed up first in a statement by the production assistant who says: “I’d drop a guy for a film; I’d never drop a film for a guy,” and Ferrand, the director consoles his actor by saying, “People like us are only happy in our work.” As Ferrand, he is not necessarily



making a great film, however, he is perfectly happy and in his element while he is on the set, or rewriting the scenes, or preparing the sets and costumes for the film. He is fascinated with the idea of cinema and filmmakers of the past. There's a scene in the film where he receives a parcel and opens it impatiently. It contains biographies and books about his favorite film directors. Ferrand admits that directing a film is hard work, physically and emotionally, "Shooting a movie is like a stagecoach trip, at first you hope for a nice ride. Then you just hope to reach your destination."

(2) Films touch the lives of people who make them and those who watch them. *Cinema Paradiso* is an edict to that effect. For all the children and adults in the village, the movie theater is weekly "must". Not unlike a church, the movie theater in *Cinema Paradiso* reminds one of a place of worship, complete with an altar by the screen. The old projectionist, Alfredo reminds Salvatore: "Life isn't like in the movies. Life... is much harder." His advice to young Salvatore, the future film director, is to treat filmmaking as a passion. Alfredo says, "Whatever you end up doing, love it. The way you loved the projection booth when you were a little squirt."

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### ***3. Hollywood films about filmmaking***

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Three films included are *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), and *The Player* (1992).

All three were nominated for multiples awards at various film festivals and have enjoyed box-office and critical successes. All three are made by directors of international acclaim and all three directors were Hollywood "insiders" and familiar with the system. However, in these three films the movie studios and discussions about filmmaking only serve as a backdrop for the stories. Whereas *8 1/2* and *Day for Night* are thinly veiled depictions of Fellini and Truffaut, there are no such attempt by Minnelli, Kazan, or Altman. There are other notable differences as well.

Firstly, the American films included in this discussion are scripted by people other than the directors. Secondly, the main characters in these American films are created as composites of several actual movie personalities. Thirdly, mainstream American movies are a producer's medium while for the European directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Bunuel, Vittorio De Sica, Jean Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, Alfred Hitchcock, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carol Reed, François Truffaut, and Luchino Visconti, films are a director's medium. Fourthly, American movies are structured in the traditional narrative style with equal portions of love, conflict, action and intrigue. These American films also adhere to the three-act format - a beginning, middle, and an end.

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### 3.1 *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). Directed by Vincent Minnelli.

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Nominated for five Academy Awards and winner of two, this film is director Minnelli's (and producer John Houseman's) archetypal movie about film production in Hollywood. According to filmsite.org, the film was promoted in its trailer as "Today's Hollywood, showing the working of both a great motion picture Studio and behind-the-scenes of what makes Hollywood tick". It is regarded as one of the greatest 'movies about movies' to ever come out of Hollywood.

With memorable performances by both Kirk Douglas (*the bad*) and Lana Turner (*the beautiful*), this is a movie with three stories, all told in flashbacks. These stories are about a movie producer (Douglas) and his long-term associations with his director (Barry Sullivan), his star (Turner), and his writer (Dick Powell).

The producer is an ambitious, cruel, driven, amoral, egotistical scoundrel, Jonathan Shields (Douglas) who begins his career as a producer of low-budget westerns and horror films. Shields' character is a blending of Orson Welles and David O. Selznick, whose father was also a film producer. Lana Turner's character (Georgia Lorrison) is a sketched after John Barrymore's tragic daughter, Diana Barrymore, who had a brief career as an actress. Dick Powell as James Lee, a Southern novelist, is a cross between William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Gilbert Roland plays himself as a hot Latin movie idol.

Although the film is about movie people and there is talk of sneak previews, shooting on location, going over the budget and script re-writes, it really does not show how movies are (or were) made in Hollywood (Crowther, 1952).

Minnelli took the viewers behind the scenes to show how ruthlessly the film industry operated to create its product. This was a daring step for a Hollywood director; especially during the time when Hollywood studio system was in its twilight.

Historically, Hollywood has not been forgiving to those who have dared to show its ugly side.

According to Phillips (2010), upon the release of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), MGM chief Louis B. Mayer reportedly screamed at the director, Billy Wilder: "You bastard! You have disgraced the industry that made you and fed you! You should be tarred and feathered, horsewhipped and run out of Hollywood!"

Reviewing its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary DVD, one critic commented: This is studio-system product at its juiciest and most sophisticated, full of insights into the mess behind the art (Murray, 2002).

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### *3.2 The Last Tycoon (1976) Directed by Elia Kazan.*

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In the last year of his life, Scott Fitzgerald began to write a novel about Hollywood - *The Last tycoon*. He wrote about 150 pages and some notes about how the book might have ended. He died in December 1940 before completing the novel. Thomson (2005) holds that "those pages, along with the notes he had left on how the book might end, are among the most touching things ever written (about Hollywood)." The unfinished novel was edited by Edmund Wilson, a literary critic and a close friend of Scott Fitzgerald, and published in 1941. The novel was planned as a *roman a clef*, inspired by the life of film producer Irving Thalberg, his rise to power at MGM, and his conflict with the studio head, Louis B. Mayer. The novel did not have an ending; however, the author left a note in capital letters: ACTION IS CHARACTER.

These three words became the beacon for Harold Pinter who adapted the novel into the screenplay, for Elia Kazan who directed the film, and for Robert De Niro who played the leading role. The film was produced by Sam Spiegel who had collaborated with Kazan on *On the Waterfront* (1954).

The protagonist in the story, Monroe Stahr, is a young production chief at one of the biggest studios in Hollywood. At the risk of his own physical health, he is a tireless worker in a time of turmoil in the industry due to the creation of the Writers Guild of America. Monroe moves between film shootings, industry bosses' maneuverings, and conferences with writers and movie stars. He becomes intrigued by a young woman, Kathleen Moore, who is engaged to be married with another man. She reminds him of his late wife. Another young woman, Cecilia Brady, the daughter of a studio board member, tries in vain to convince Monroe of her feelings for him.

Along with producing box-office hits, Monroe Stahr insists on creating low-budget, artistic, films that may not show a profit. The studio bosses, lawyers, and accountants oppose Stahr's plans for production. In the end, he is asked to "go away for a long rest". His health declines.

In real life, Irving Thalberg was fired from MGM and soon after, he died at the age of 37. In the movie, Stahr's life runs to an uncertain but inevitable end that echoes an era long gone. In 1940, Fitzgerald was writing history as it happened (Canby, 1976).

Traditionally, Hollywood producers have paid little attention to their writers. Writers, in turn, often depicted producers as uneducated, uncouth, and lacking in good taste. Scott Fitzgerald's own experiences as a screenwriter were not especially happy ones. This was evident in his *Pat Hobby Stories*. However, Irving Thalberg, who was hailed as "the boy wonder" at MGM, was not a typical producer in the studio system. Thalberg delivered one hit after another and was highly regarded and respected. In creating a character in Thalberg's image, Scott Fitzgerald developed a complex and a three dimensional character in Monroe Stahr.

However, the subject of the novel and its movie adaptation are not movie making but rise and fall of Monroe Stahr who happened to be a producer.

As a producer, Stahr's opinion of writers is summed in his comment: *"I'll tell you three things: All writers are children. Fifty percent are drunks. And up till very recently, writers in Hollywood were gag-men; most of them still are gag-men, but we call them writers."*

On his esteem of writers, Stahr says, *"I don't think I have more brains than a writer, I just think his brains belong to me."*

Another studio executive, Brady (tailored after Louis B. Mayer), comments about writers, *"...they'll never get the writers unionized. You know why? Because they hate each other's guts. They'd sell each other out for a nickel."*

The purpose of making movies or running a movie studio, in the 1930s, was to run a studio like a factory and turn a profit. Thalberg, at MGM, and Monroe Stahr in *The Last Tycoon* challenged that capitalistic ideology; eventually it cost them their jobs.

In a scene where Stahr, Brady, and Fleishacker (a lawyer) are arguing the fate of a movie, the following dialogue manifests Hollywood's view of filmmaking.

*FLEISHACKER: You know, I'm fairly new out here. Do I understand you to say you expect to gross a half a million short of your budget?*

*STAHR: It's a quality picture.*

*FLEISHACKER: A quality picture? What the hell are we?*

*STAHR: We've played safe for two years now. It's time we made a picture that isn't meant to make money. Pat Brady is always saying at Academy dinners that we have a certain duty to the public. Okay. It's a good time for the company to slip in a picture that will lose money. Write it to good will.*

The movie making aspect of the film in *The Last Tycoon* was about costs, budgets, and gross revenue potential. Stahr was obsessed with success, power, and Kathleen

Moore. He seemed indifferent to commitments or interpersonal relationships. Art, creativity, or talent were secondary and never in the spotlight. The readers will never know what Scott Fitzgerald has intended with his novel. Adams (1941) suggested that "it would have been Fitzgerald's best novel and a very fine one".

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### *3.3 The Player (1992). Directed by Robert Altman.*

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This is a movie about a script executive, Griffin Mill (Tim Robbins) who listens to pitches by writers and rejects or approves the projects for further consideration. In this role, he hears thousands of story ideas from writers whose names or faces he is unable to recall. He begins receiving life-threatening postcards from an angry writer whose idea was turned down. Mill tries to track down the writer and thinks he has found him. He meets with the writer and accidentally kills him. He then proceeds to have an affair with the girlfriend of the dead writer. It turns out that he had killed the wrong writer. The threatening postcards continue. Mill is trying to derail the murder investigation, trying to find the writer of the threatening notes, and juggling relationships with his girlfriend and the girlfriend of the dead writer. Another studio executive is angling to move into Mill's job. The crisis is resolved when the writer of the postcards pitches a story over the phone. It's a story about a movie producer who gets away with murder. Mill says that if the writer can guarantee that ending, he has a deal.

The movie is based on a novel by Michael Tolkin who also wrote the screenplay. Altman directed the film and was able to cast 25 stars in cameo roles that either won or were nominated for an Academy Award. No other movie to date has come close to accomplishing such a coup. Some of the actors that pop up in the film are Bruce Willis, Cher, Rod Steiger, Julia Roberts, Anjelica Huston, Burt Reynolds, Susan Sarandon, Nick Nolte and Marlee Matlin. Were the entire cast to be paid their normal asking fee (in 1991), the budget would have been close to \$100 Million on salaries alone. The movie was budgeted at around \$8 million and according to [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com), made its money back in its first month of release. *The Daily Variety*, in its review, said that it was "quite possibly the most resonant Hollywood saga since the days of *Sunset Blvd.* and *The Bad and the Beautiful*" (1991).

*The Player* is clearly using Hollywood as a symbol for greed of the 1980s, and its seditious message is not that bad guys can win or that it's possible to get away with murder in Hollywood, but that the worst sin, in Hollywood, is to make a film that fails at the box-office (Canby, 1992). The film hints that although it may not be easy to be creative in Hollywood, it is possible. The thrust of the film is however not towards the creative process but poking fun at extravagant indulgences of the people involved in making the movies.

Hollywood studio system had its beginnings in Inceville - a studio created by Thomas Ince in the days of the silent cinema (Taves, 2012). Ince fashioned his studio after Henry Ford's model of assembly-line and transformed the process of movie making into "production" that approximated manufacturing automobiles or assembling sewing machines; each craftsman worked on his part and added it to the movie.

Inceville was where producers acquired their power and control turning movies into a producer's medium. In Inceville, writers developed scripts under the supervision of producers. Completed scripts were then handed to directors. The scripts were stamped "Shoot as Written". Filmmaking became "production for profit" in the manufacturing sense and moved away from being an artistic endeavor.

In a recent stage play, "Four-Hour Casanova", a Hollywood producer, Ruben Zuckerman, who transparently reminds one of Sam Spiegel, explains the contemporary film business to his ex-wife, India (Broadwick, 2014).

*INDIA: You should have stuck to making low-budget art movies.*

*RUBEN: That's unsound business. It takes two years to make an art movie; it takes two years to make a big-budget picture. Both have an equal chance of success or failure. If your art movie is a hit, you may make \$20 million. With a big movie, you could make \$200 million. What would you rather do? Work for \$10 million a year or \$100 million a year.*

*INDIA: Greed. That's what this business amounts to.*

*RUBEN: That's what all businesses amount to.*

To this day, movie experience remains similar to that of going to a circus, a county fair, or an outdoor picnic. Watching movies in America goes hand in hand with consumption of food. Movie theaters make a larger portion of their profits from selling food and soft drinks than from the sale of the movies tickets. Consequently, for most part, along with fast food, hamburgers and baseball, movies have become a part of the American popular culture landscape.

Whenever American filmmakers have made movies about movie making, they have focused on the intrigue, avarice, power, and luxuriously decadent accesses of the people in the movie industry. Lifestyles and actions of Jonathan Shields in *The Bad and the Beautiful*, Monroe Stahr in *The Last Tycoon*, and Griffin Mill in *The player* are attestation of their greed and hunger for power and control. Sex, glamour, entertainment, wealth, success, and happy endings sell movie tickets. About Hollywood or not, American movies are manufactured with these ingredients.

Going to the cinema in Europe is a more sober activity. European viewers expect and accept films that invite them to think about important issues. Easy-to-follow structures and happy ending are not required. Hence, the European filmmakers, in their films about cinema, have emphasized the creative aspects of filmmaking treating it as an art form, and filmmaking as an artistic process undertaken by serious artists.

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