

VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

I. VERSION

Though I haven't ever been on the screen I was brought up in pictures. Rudolph Valentino came to my fifth birthday party – or so I was told. I put this down only to indicate that even before the age of reason I was in a position to watch the wheels go round.

I was going to write my memoirs once, *The Producer's Daughter*, but at eighteen you never quite get around to anything like that. It's just as well – it would have been as flat as an old column of Lolly Parsons'. My father was in the picture business as another man might be in cotton or steel, and I took it tranquilly. At the worst I accepted Hollywood with the resignation of a ghost assigned to a haunted house. I knew what you were supposed to think about it but I was obstinately unhorrorified.

This is easy to say, but harder to make people understand. When I was at Bennington some of the English teachers who pretended an indifference to Hollywood or its products, really *hated* it. Hated it way down deep as a threat to their existence. Even before that, when I was in a convent, a sweet little nun asked me to get her a script of a screen play so she could 'teach her class about movie writing' as she had taught them about the essay and the short story. I got the script for her, and I suppose she puzzled over it and puzzled over it, but it was never mentioned in class, and she gave it back to me with an air of offended surprise and not a single comment. That's what I half expect to happen to this story.

You can take Hollywood for granted like I did, or you can dismiss it with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand. It can be understood too, but only dimly and in flashes. Not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads. And perhaps the closest a woman can come to the set-up is to try and understand one of those men.

The world from an aeroplane I knew. Father always had us travel back and forth that way from school and college. After my sister died when I was a junior, I travelled to and fro alone, and the journey always made me think of her, made me somewhat solemn and subdued. Sometimes there were picture people I knew on board the plane, and occasionally there was an attractive college boy – but not often during the depression. I seldom really fell asleep during the trip, what with thoughts of Eleanor and the sense of that sharp rip between coast and coast – at least not till we had left those lonely little airports in Tennessee.

This trip was so rough that the passengers divided early into those who turned in right away and those who didn't want to turn in at all. There were two of these latter right across from me, and I was pretty sure from their fragmentary conversation that they were from Hollywood – one of them because he looked like it : a middle-aged Jew, who alternately talked with nervous excitement or else crouched as if ready to spring, in a harrowing silence ; the other a pale, plain, stocky man of thirty, whom I was sure I had seen before. He had been to the house or something. But it might have been when I was a little girl, and so I wasn't offended that he didn't recognize me.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon* (1941)

II. THÈME

Hélène, d'abord, s'intéressa aux larges étendues déroulées sous ses fenêtres, à la pente du Trocadéro et au développement des quais. Il fallait qu'elle se penchât, pour apercevoir le carré nu du Champ-de-Mars, fermé au fond par la barre sombre de l'École militaire. En bas, sur la vaste place et sur les trottoirs, aux deux côtés de la Seine, elle distinguait les passants, une foule active de points noirs emportés dans un mouvement de fourmilière ; la caisse jaune d'un omnibus jetait une étincelle ; des camions et des fiacres traversaient le pont, gros comme des jouets d'enfant, avec des chevaux délicats qui ressemblaient à des pièces mécaniques ; et, le long des talus gazonnés, parmi d'autres promeneurs, une bonne en tablier blanc tachait l'herbe d'une clarté. Puis, Hélène leva les yeux ; mais la foule s'émiettait et se perdait, les voitures elles-mêmes devenaient des grains de sable ; il n'y avait plus que la carcasse gigantesque de la ville comme vide et déserte, vivant seulement par la sourde trépidation qui l'agitait.

Émile Zola, *Une page d'amour* (1878)