

LITERARY NOVELS ABOUT HOLLYWOOD

annotated list

I Should Have Stayed Home (1938), Horace McCoy:

A realistic noir novel by a screenwriter, autobiographical. Sordid details of Hollywood in the 1930s. Similar but *far* inferior to *The Day of the Locust*. McCoy is warning young people not to believe in the glittery myth of making it in Hollywood. His novel does a slow fade like his career, as if he ran out of the energy and the will to go on.

The Day of the Locust (1939), Nathanael West:

Best literary novel about Hollywood in the 20th century, by a low-level screenwriter: analysis

The Last Tycoon (incomplete, 1941), F. Scott Fitzgerald:

A fascinating fragment romanticizing Monroe Stahr (star), modeled on the real producer Irving Thalberg, a star at MGM where Fitzgerald worked as a screenwriter. Fans of Fitzgerald have said, had the writer lived to complete it, this would have been as brilliant a novel as *The Great Gatsby*. The evidence is otherwise. Whereas in *Gatsby* Fitzgerald was able to detach himself from his own romanticism by narrating through Nick Carraway, in *Tycoon* he writes like *Gatsby* in love with Daisy recast as an actress. And his style lacks the metaphors, wit, lyricism and mythic resonance of *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald was paid a lot more than Nathanael West as a screenwriter, but West outdid him in writing a literary Hollywood novel, using *Gatsby* as an aesthetic model.

What Makes Sammy Run (1941), Budd Schulberg:

A scandal when it was published, offensive to many because the protagonist Sammy Glick the hustler was generally seen as a stereotypical Hollywood Jew. The Communist Party in Hollywood tried to intimidate Schulberg into making changes in the manuscript but he courageously refused. Later he cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee investigation into Communist influence in Hollywood and won an Oscar by duping the movieheads with his allegorical screenplay dramatizing Communist Party fascism, *On the Waterfront* (1954).

The Deer Park (1955), Norman Mailer:

Set mostly in Desert D'Or (Palm Springs), this is a leftwing retort to investigations of the many Communist propagandists and their union thugs in Hollywood by the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities in the mid-20th century. A prominent director named Eitel (I tell) is condemned by Mailer for cooperating with elected representatives of the American people by identifying enemies of the country. All movie people are depicted as corrupt and ridiculous, so there is no moral tension. Gothic Existentialism. Murky, undramatic and pretentious: At the end, God speaks: "Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits."

Play It As It Lays (1970), Joan Didion:

The former wife of a movie director personifies the decadence of Hollywood as she disintegrates in the tradition of feminist Naturalism. The style is minimalist and the vision is Postmodernist. Didion does not distance herself from her protagonist.

Children of Light (1986), Robert Stone:

Hollywood people filming their version of *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin are more decadent than any characters in the novel, with a parallel ending. Stone's interpretation of the classic novel is

accurate and insightful, but his own novel, *Realism with Expressionistic passages*, suffers from the superficiality of the drugged-out movieland characters, who become more trivial the more they talk and talk and talk. By the end, who cares.

Force Majeure (1991), Bruce Wagner:

The life of a screenwriter, an expose by an insider much touted by the publicity industry but more commercial than literary: “free-falling through a world of hallucinatory absurdity and epic degradation. Hilarious, bleak, mystical, pornographic...”

Hollywood (2004), *Follywood* (2005), *Hollyworld* (2006), Michael Hollister:

Three historical novels depict Hollywood’s global influence from the 1930s to the present age of terrorism, through the life stories of Sarah McCloud, a farm girl from Oregon, and Ryan Eisley, the son of a beer distributor from Ohio. *Hollywood* includes fictional films: a comic biopic of the theologian Jonathan Edwards and adaptations of the American literary classics *Modern Chivalry* by Brackenridge, *Wieland* by Brown and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by Hawthorne. *Follywood* includes fictional adaptations of “The Monster” by Stephen Crane, five stories by Hemingway, *The Blithedale Romance* by Hawthorne, *Pierre* by Melville, “A White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett and “Flowering Judas” by Katherine Anne Porter. William Faulkner appears briefly in *Hollyworld*, which dramatizes filming a fictional adaptation of *As I Lay Dying* and includes discussions of the actual film adaptation *Billy Budd* and of other American classics.

Michael Hollister (2013)