

Disorder and artificiality in The Day of the Locust

by

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Critics have previously observed that man's struggle to create order out of a cosmic disorder is an important theme in Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts. This paper will deal with West's use of this same theme in The Day of the Locust. I will attempt to prove that West makes two basic observations relating to the cosmic disorder: (1) that throughout history man has fought the disordered universe with dreams, (2) that there is a paradoxical relationship between the extreme artificiality of Hollywood and the natural disorder. The sea is the central image of the novel, as West uses it to represent the disorder with which Tod Hackett must cope.

Edmund L. Volpe in "Waste Land of Nathanael West" compares the vision of West's Miss Lonelyhearts to the vision of Eliot's "Wasteland." Volpe feels that the wasteland idea is present in both works, but that a supreme order is present in Eliot's universe, and, therefore, man can achieve order within his soul by merely submitting to this supreme order. In contrast, "To West, the human being appears a misfit in an undirected universe...."<sup>1</sup> At this point, it seems that West's vision bears a greater similarity to Wallace Stevens' than to T. S. Eliot's. Like Wallace Stevens in "The Idea of Order at Key West," West sees the universe as incomprehensible chaos which man can never put into order. In fact, as demonstrated later, West, like Stevens, uses the symbol of the sea to represent the

unorderable chaos which man must constantly face.

The roots of West's concern with disorder can be traced to the men who most influenced the writers of the 20's and 30's. In Axel's Castle, Edmund Wilson sees the creations of Proust and Joyce as outgrowths of the theory of relativity. In reference to Proust, Wilson writes that "He has recreated the world of the novel from the point of view of relativity: he has supplied for the first time in literature an equivalent on the full scale for the new theory of modern physics."<sup>2</sup> In reference to Joyce, Wilson writes that his world, like Einstein's, is always changing.<sup>3</sup> The recognition of relativity was an important step toward the belief in a disordered universe.

In relation to this disordered universe, West's attitudes can be traced more directly to two American writers, James Branch Cabell and Sherwood Anderson, who seem to have had a great influence on West's work. According to S. J. Perelman, West was the first at Brown University to read James Branch Cabell's Jurgen.<sup>4</sup> Cabell enjoys toying with the paradox of the law of lawlessness in the universe. For example, early in the novel, Jurgen comes upon a sign:

"Read me!" was written on the signboard: "read me, and judge if you understand! So you stopped in your journey because I called, scenting something unusual, something droll. Thus, although I am nothing, and even less, there is no one that sees me but lingers here. Stranger, I am a law of the universe. Stranger, render the law what is due the law."

Jurgen felt cheated. "A very foolish signboard, indeed! for how can it be 'a law of the universe,' when

there is no meaning to it!" says Jurgen. "Why, for any law to be meaningless would not be fair."<sup>5</sup>

The original title of The Day of the Locust was The Cheated and, in the deepest sense, the cheat of the masses in Hollywood is the same as Jurgen's. Many parallels have also been drawn between Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and The Day of the Locust; most obvious is the similarity of Homer and Wing Biddlebaum.<sup>6</sup> But West seems to have also been influenced by Anderson's concept of reality, especially man's futile attempts to order his universe, thereby making himself grotesque. In the beginning of Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson writes that

It was the truths that made the people grotesque. ...the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraces became a falsehood.<sup>7</sup>

West's characters also become grotesques. Their truths are illusions--again the characters are cheated. In a disordered universe, a universal law is meaningless and truths quickly become falsehoods.

Nathanael West's attitude toward order and disorder may be clarified by referring to his novel Miss Lonelyhearts. This relationship has been previously discussed in Volpe's essay and in an essay by Robert G. Jacobs entitled "Nathanael West: The Christology of Unbelief." According to Jacobs, Miss Lonelyhearts' "big effort" is to "set things in order, to keep the world and the people in it from falling apart in



disorder." Jacobs believes that the "chaos is best shown in West's treatment of physical nature.... The natural world is rotting away from under the characters, as is the sense of order which directs them."<sup>8</sup> The chapter entitled "Miss Lonelyhearts and the Fat Thumb" begins, "Miss Lonelyhearts found himself developing an almost insane sensitiveness to order" (p. 182).<sup>9</sup> In comparing William James and West, Thomas M. Lorch explains that both men see in religion "a quest for order," but that both men also recognize that the religious quest ends by escaping from reality.<sup>10</sup> This conception of reality becomes clear as Miss Lonelyhearts goes to the street and discovers that "chaos was multiple" (p. 182). West's attitude toward order and disorder is most clearly stated later in the novel as Miss Lonelyhearts sits by a window thinking: "Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another. Mandolins are tuned GDAE. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature ...the battle of the centuries" (p. 209). This theme of West's plays a central role in The Day of the Locust.

Whereas Miss Lonelyhearts is focused on the individual psyche, The Day of the Locust is more a panoramic vision of human civilization. But West's attitude toward order and disorder remains the same. Civilization is seen by West as an ordering of society by dreams. The individual has always lived by dreams which give order and meaning to his life. Civilization, according to West, is nothing more than a history

of human dreams and of the false orders of man's existence. Religion, the central dream of Miss Lonelyhearts, also plays an important role in The Day of the Locust. West uses religion to show how dreams were once strong, whereas now they have become weak. When Miss Lonelyhearts returned to the city after his stay in the country, he saw a

man who appeared on the verge of death stagger into a movie theater that was showing a picture called Blonde Beauty. He saw a ragged woman with an enormous goiter pick a love story magazine out of a garbage can and seem very excited by her find (p. 220).

Miss Lonelyhearts' conclusion is very much the conclusion of West, a conclusion which West expands greatly in The Day of the Locust:

Men have always fought their misery with dreams. Although dreams were once powerful, they have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers. Among many betrayals, this one is the worst (pp. 220-221).

In The Day of the Locust, West uses religion to demonstrate that "dreams were once powerful." Tod's analysis of Bach's "Come Redeemer, Our Saviour" during Harry's funeral demonstrates the downfall of the powerful dream of Christ. Bach "asked Christ to come, in clear and honest tones with just the proper amount of supplication.... It [the music] didn't plead; it urged with infinite grace and delicacy,..." (p. 92). But it is clear to Tod that no one is listening. "Bach politely serenading Christ was not for them" (p. 92). Then Tod notes as the music changes that even Bach becomes impatient. "Even a hint of a threat crept in and a little

impatience" (p. 92). West does not allow his reader to forget that although dreams were once powerful, they were still no more than dreams. The beauty was once present; Tod explains that the music seemed to say, "I love you and my love is enough" (p. 93). But West reveals his skepticism as, in the end, Tod wonders if Christ heard: "If He did, He gave no sign. The attendants heard, for it was their cue to trundle on Harry in his box. ...Bach was silenced in the middle of a phrase" (p. 93). The Christ dream and the powerful order which it established in the past is presented as a lost dream. In the funeral service, Bach's serenade to Christ becomes just a cue for following the proper order of the funeral. All depth of meaning is lost.

But West makes definite ties between the Christ dream of the past and the cheap dreams of the present. For example, West compares Faye's dream technique in her use of realistic details to the painters' same deceptive technique in religious paintings of the Middle Ages:

Although the events she described were miraculous, her description of them was realistic. The effect was similar to that obtained by the artists of the Middle Ages, who, when doing a subject like the raising of Lazarus from the dead or Christ walking on water, were careful to keep all the details intensely realistic. She, like them, seemed to think that fantasy could be made plausible by a humdrum technique (p. 64).

The parallel is again made when Tod attends the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming." The Tabernacle is seen as the last remains of the once powerful dream. A man stood up to speak:



Although his name most likely was Thompson or Johnson and his home town Sioux City, he had the same counter-sunk eyes, like the heads of burnished spikes, that a monk by Magnasco might have. ...He was very angry. The message he had brought to the city was one that an illiterate anchorite might have given decadent Rome. It was a crazy jumble of dietary rules, economics and Biblical threats (p. 110).

Tod takes this man seriously in spite of the man's rhetoric, because Tod realizes the relationship of the man's visions to the traditional dreams that the man awakens in his listeners. "They sprang to their feet, shaking their fists and shouting. On the altar someone began to beat a bass drum and soon the entire congregation was singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers'" (p. 110). Tod recognizes the cheapness and shallowness of the present-day American masses and their dreams, but he also recognizes that in actuality, very little has changed. With only a few alterations, the scene might have taken place centuries ago, when the Christ dream was still new and strong. The dream is decayed but the dream was always something that managed to merely give some kind of order to a disordered universe. Even in the final mob scene, the broadcaster who arouses the masses is compared to a revival preacher (p. 155).

West's belief that the "powerful" dreams of the past somehow made the orders of the past stronger and more noble is fairly typical for his day. William Faulkner in viewing the order of the old South and John P. Marquand in viewing the old order of Boston seem to demonstrate a similar nostalgia. Both of these writers, like West, seem to see life as simpler



and more majestic in the past when strong beliefs held men to stricter codes of conduct. But all three writers seem to recognize that the old orders were destroyed because of their own weaknesses; the orders were built partly on lies and half-truths and, therefore, had to die. West, even more than Faulkner and Marquand, does not allow himself or his reader to be fooled by the orders of the past. In the past, just as in the present, the orders were built merely on human dreams or illusions.

West presents the social revolution as another dream which has traditionally ordered civilization. Concentrating on social revolution is typical of the 1930's, when sociological views and Communistic idealism were very popular. Although West was active in leftist causes, his social attitudes appear somewhat ambiguous in his literature. Possibly this is because his vision of disorder modified his acceptance of leftist doctrines (primarily, viewing life as a class struggle and believing in an ideal society established by revolution). West's attitude toward sociopolitical orders and dreams is apparent at the filming of "Waterloo," as West satirizes both the dream of glory in battle and the final blow to the French attempt to establish a new order in Europe. "'Vive l'Empereur!' the young man shouted, then clutched his breast and fell forward dead. The assistant director was a hard man to please and made him do it over and over again" (p. 98). "'Nassau! Brunswick! Never retreat!' Nevertheless, the retreat began. Hill, too, fell back. The French killed

General Picton with a ball through the head and he returned to his dressing room" (p. 99). West is satirizing the Hollywood version but also the original version, by demonstrating the similarity of the two. When a director drove his troops blindly into an incompleted, fake hill, Tod observes that it is similar to the mistake Napoleon made when the Emperor ordered the cuirassiers to charge Mont St. Jean, not knowing that a deep ditch was hidden at its foot (p. 99). James F. Light explains,

The final effect is that the actual Waterloo was a joke, just as the Hollywood production is a farce. In the joke, which is wry rather than funny, the true courage of the real Waterloo becomes as comical as that of actors 'carted off by the stretcher-bearer, still clinging bravely to their claymores' (p. 100).<sup>11</sup>

Although West's political activism demonstrates his desire for improvement, he still appears skeptical of the dream. Miguel (meaning "he who is like god"<sup>12</sup>) and Faye reduce a revolutionary song to empty harmony:

His voice was a plaintive tenor and it turned the revolutionary song into a sentimental lament, sweet and cloying. Faye joined in when he began another stanza. She didn't know the words, but she was able to carry the melody and to harmonize (p. 75).

Leslie Fiedler has demonstrated the relationship of West to the proletarian writers of the thirties as West shares with them the preoccupation with Doom. But West took the cry of doom beyond the social visions of proletarian writers. As Fiedler points out: "Apocalyptic was his special province; and for the sake of a vision of the End of Things, he was

willing to sacrifice what his Communist mentors had taught him was a true picture of society."<sup>13</sup> But I would argue that West was not as concerned with the end of things as he was with the base reality of things. The final doom of The Day of the Locust is nothing more than a vision of total disorder; this is the realization which drives Tod mad and which breaks West from the proletarian writers.

A brief look at some criticism by Granville Hicks demonstrates where West broke from the proletarian vision. Hicks criticizes the 1930's works of Dreiser, Lewis, and Anderson because the works lack form since these writers failed to see that what is "termed the American chaos is not really chaos; there is order, but it is not perceived."<sup>14</sup> Hicks proceeds to compliment John Dos Passos in these terms: "Dos Passos' fundamental discovery is that American life is a battleground, and that arrayed on one side are the exploiters and on the other the exploited." To Hicks, this is the "key to the labyrinth." "If there is any other working interpretation of the apparent chaos than that which presents itself in terms of the class struggle, it has not been revealed."<sup>15</sup> To West, in the final interpretation, chaos is at the bottom of existence. Therefore, West, in spite of his sympathy for the proletarian cause, presented social revolution, like the Christ dream, as a dream which gives a false order to man's life. A cold terror is the final product of the social upheavals in both A Cool Million and The Day of the Locust.



West's satirizing of the filming of "Waterloo" is one example of how he uses Hollywood to reveal the relationship of dreams and order. As the film capital, Hollywood contains a conglomeration of the dreams of all past cultures. On his way to the "Waterloo" set, Tod's tour through the "dream dump" is actually a satirical journey through the remains of past orders and reveals the dreams of the past. Man's greatest exploits are reduced to the cheap and grotesque. After finding shade under an ocean liner made of painted canvas, Tod walked "toward a great forty-foot papier mâché sphinx that loomed up in the distance" (p. 95). After crossing a Paris street and a Romanesque courtyard, he "came to a small pond with large celluloid swans floating on it" (p. 95). Among other wonders of civilization, Tod comes upon "a Greek temple dedicated to Eros" ("The god himself lay face downward in a pile of old newspapers and bottles"), "the wooden horse of Troy," "a corner of a Mayan temple," "a Buddha thirty feet high" (whose face was being scrubbed by a charwoman on a stepladder) (pp. 95-97). The dreams of the ages are reduced to grotesque rubbish. This, as Tod sees it, is the history of civilization:

This was the final dumping ground. He [Tod] thought of Janvier's 'Sargasso Sea.' Just as that imaginary body of water was a history of civilization in the form of the marine junkyard, the studio lot was one in the form of a dream dump. A Sargasso of the imagination! And the dump grew continually, for there wasn't a dream afloat somewhere which wouldn't sooner or later turn up on it, having first been made photographic by plaster, canvas, lath and paint. Many boats sink and never reach the Sargasso, but no dream ever entirely disappears. Somewhere it troubles some unfortunate person and some day,

when that person has been sufficiently troubled, it will be reproduced on the lot (p. 97).

The importance of Hollywood as the dream dump is one reason why it serves as West's ideal setting in revealing the relationship of dreams and human civilization. Hollywood is a fantasy land which encompasses the dreams of all places and all times.

All cultures are reduced in Hollywood to the empty dreams of past orders. For example, in front of his "exact reproduction of the Dupuy mansion near Biloxi, Mississippi" Claude Estee burlesques the Southern order as "He teetered back and forth on his heels like a Civil War colonel and made believe he had a large belly" (p. 13). Actually, Claude is "a dried-up little man." As Claude demands a mint julep from his "black rascal," a Chinese servant brings a Scotch and soda (p. 13). The end result is not only that Hollywood appears artificial, but also the original Southern society appears artificial. A similar result occurs with Audrey Jennings's "cultured" cathouse, where Mrs. Jennings "insisted on meeting the prospective sportsman before servicing him" and "insisted on discussing Gertrude Stein and Juan Gris" (p. 19). By presenting the shabby imitations in the Hollywood culture, West reveals the artificiality of high society.

The reference to Janvier's "Sargasso Sea" is an example of West's using Tod's knowledge of the history of painting to reveal a constant condition of man, with the emphasis always on dreams and frustration. Tod visits the bizarre

religious gatherings at "Church of Christ, Physical," "Church Invisible," and "Tabernacle of the Third Coming." West suggests a historical parallel by having Tod contemplate how to recreate these people: "As he watched these people writhe on the hard seats of their churches, he thought of how well Alessandro Magnasco would dramatize the contrast between their drained-out, feeble bodies and their wild, disordered minds" (p. 109). At this point, the hysterical congregations become universals, the type of wild dreamers that have existed from century to century--the blind seekers of some type of ideal existence.

It has previously been noted that West uses Hollywood because Hollywood is a dream dump, piling up all the dreams of civilization. As the dream machine, Hollywood also regurgitates the present-day dreams for the masses. West's experience in script writing gave him a clear view of how films give the public the dreams to keep them running. The film at Mrs. Jennings's place symbolizes the mass media's playing on the public's desires, but cheating the public of any authentic satisfaction. The film is a performance of sexual perversion in which all characters seek out the "buxom" Marie, while Marie desires only the young girl. During the film, the sophisticated Hollywood audience "imitated a rowdy audience in the days of the nickelodeon" (p. 21), and in the end when the machine stopped just at the climax, they staged a "mock riot" yelling "Cheat," "Fake," and "the old teaser



routine" (p. 22). Faye's manufactured dreams are another example of the cheap, sentimental dreams that mass media have given the public. The dreams are manufactured both in the sense of Faye's mechanical processing of them and in the sense that they are actually products of the Hollywood dream machine. Faye's dreams, which she would go over in her mind "as though they were a pack of cards" are full of adventure, wealth, and sex. Admitting that her process is too mechanical at times, Faye explains "that any dream was better than no dream..." (p. 60). In the Westian view, all dreams cheat because they offer a false order where there is no order, but with the dreams of Hollywood it is easier to see the cheating; the strings which move the dreams are visible. James Light explains Hollywood's role as the new religion when he writes,

Most often, however, the cheated turn to the dwarfed religion of the silver screen and its dreams. The movie temple is the place of worship for these particular cheated people, and they go to their church primarily to satisfy the spirit's need for a dream, but also to appease a basic sexual demand.<sup>16</sup>

Besides Hollywood's usefulness as the dream dump and the dream machine, it is West's ideal setting for a third reason. Hollywood is closely tied to Western Civilization's most basic Utopia, the lost paradise. In the introduction to his critical collection, American Dreams, American Nightmares, Madden explains the American Dream in these terms:

Compared with other national dreams the American Dream is unique because the settlers, fleeing the nightmare of European history, made, in the name of all Western man, a new beginning in a new Garden of Eden; thus 'Americans

became the heirs of all civilizations.' There has never been a purely American Dream, because in the beginning all Europe lay down in 'the American Dream bed' and dreamed universal dreams. To old bitch Europe, the new continent was a fountain of youth. In Virginia Wilderness, where all things seemed possible the New Adam could recreate his lost paradise by the sweat of his brow.<sup>17</sup>

California is the obvious end of the dream of the lost paradise. And so when Adore's mother is asked what she thinks of California, she quickly responds, "Why, it's a paradise on earth!" (p. 104). But West's vision is what Madden would refer to as that of a modern atheist of the American Dream:

Listening to atheists of the American Dream, we hear that if the American Adam is not pure myth, he has certainly fallen, he has lost his chance to regain paradise, there is no redemption, no resurrection. ...Today, the atheist looks back upon the concept of the Green Beast of the New World, the virgin land, and sees its end in California, continent's end, where bizarre inversions and springs of the worst of the eastern wasteland culture proliferate.<sup>18</sup>

Hollywood, and all of California, becomes a symbol of the rotting of the New Adam--the final congregation of the dream seekers set against the chaos of the sea.

Two of the uses of the Hollywood setting, as the dream machine and the lost paradise, explain why the masses in Hollywood are very special to Nathanael West. West refers to the masses as "sophisticated" because they have nearly run out of dreams; they have seen that life is a cheat and that the culture's order is maintained by false dreams only because while California may be a lost paradise it now brings boredom--"vicious, acrid boredom that trembled on the edge of



violence" (p. 91). If Hollywood is the lost paradise then man is no longer meant for a paradise as, "Once there, they [those who retired in Hollywood] discover that sunshine isn't enough. They get tired of oranges, even of avocado pears and passion fruit" (p. 156). Not only can they see through the paradise, but they are also allowed to see the strings that operate the modern dream machine. Homer becomes a symbol for the masses as Adore, the child Frankenstein, teases him with an old purse at the end of a string.

Every once in a while the child would jerk the string, making the purse hop like a sluggish toad. Its torn lining hung from its iron mouth like a furry tongue and a few uncertain flies hovered over it. ...If Homer reached to pick up the purse, thinking there was money in it, he would yank it away and scream with laughter (pp. 159-160).

Homer's refusal to go for the purse demonstrates the stage of disillusionment which the masses had finally reached. Homer's murder of Adore is symbolic of the final regression to the animalistic disorder which the mob reaches at the end of the novel. When the dreams are too shabby, there is nothing left to shield the masses from chaos.

The sea is the key image used to reveal the natural disorder of the universe. Randall Reid says, with reference to Miss Lonelyhearts,

The 'water' is, of course, a symbol of sexual desire and the natural world from which it comes, a world which is represented throughout the novel by the conventional metaphor of the sea. Miss Lonelyhearts tries in fantasy to create order out of all the junk deposited by the sea, and when he goes to bed with Mrs. Doyle the entire seduction is described in sea metaphors.<sup>19</sup>



And later Reid continues, "But in Miss Lonelyhearts, the diversity of life is what destroys. The sea of life spawns nothing but junk--proliferating debris incapable of meaningful unity."<sup>20</sup> At this point West's reference in The Day of the Locust to Janvier's "Sargasso Sea" comes to mind. The sea becomes the central image of the novel and indeed does represent a massive life force which is "incapable of meaningful unity." This is the disorder which West sees at the base of all existence. Early in the novel, Homer is described as being "like one of Picasso's great sterile athletes, who brood hopelessly on pink sand, staring at veined marble waves" (p. 32). Immediately, West has established Homer's relationship to the life force. Later his emotional repressions are again described with the sea image:

His emotions surged up in an enormous wave, curving and rearing, higher and higher, until it seemed as though the wave must carry everything before it. But the crash never came. Something always happened at the crest and the wave collapsed to run back like water down a drain, leaving, at the most, only the refuse of feeling (p. 37).

And later, West describes the same unnatural repression of Homer's as a dam with an increasing pressure (p. 144). The dam is something working against the life force; the dam does not burst until the final scene when Homer lashes out at Adore.

Faye's role is also established by her relationship to the sea image. Faye is first described as having a "moon face" (p. 12) which hints at her role as the dream which drives the waves, but the complexity of her role is established more

clearly in a later portion of the novel when Tod wonders what will become of Faye after she leaves Homer. Tod sees her as being

like a cork. No matter how rough the sea got, she would go dancing over the same waves that sank iron ships and tore away piers of reinforced concrete. He pictured her riding a tremendous sea. Wave after wave reared its ton on ton of solid water and crashed down only to have her spin gaily away. ...It was a very pretty cork, gilt with a glittering fragment of mirror set in its top. The sea in which it danced was beautiful, green in the trough of the waves and silver at their tips. But for all their moondriven power, they could do no more than net the bright cork for a moment in a spume of intricate lace. Finally it was set down on a strange shore where a savage with pork sausage fingers and a pimpled butt picked it up and hugged it to his sagging belly. Tod recognized the fortunate man; he was one of Mrs. Jennings's customers (pp. 151-152).

Although Faye finally sells herself to a grotesque figure on a "strange shore" (the world of wealth), West concentrates primarily on establishing her relationship to the great life force in the masses of humanity. In relation to the masses, she is a sprite who is so weightless (castles in the air) that she cannot be destroyed by a force which can destroy anything of substance ("iron ships" and "piers of reinforced concrete"). But she is totally lacking an individual existence because, like a mirror, she merely reflects the face of the sea and the dreams of the heavens.

The form of the novel is actually circular, beginning and ending with the massive sea image. In the beginning, the mob of retreating actors is described as a "wild sea."

It moved like a mob; its lines broken, as though fleeing from some terrible defeat. The dolmans of the hussars,

the heavy shakos of the guards, Hanoverian light horse, with their flat leather caps and flowing red plumes, were all jumbled together in bobbing disorder. Behind the cavalry came the infantry, a wild sea of waving sabretaches, sloped muskets, crossed shoulder belts and swinging cartridge boxes (p. 1).

The same sea returns with massive force at the end of the novel. The force of the sea is much stronger in the final mob scene partly because Tod is stuck in the middle of the waves; he no longer merely watches from the artistic, Olympian position which he enjoyed in the beginning.

He was jostled about in a hacking cross surf of shoulders and backs, carried rapidly in one direction and then in the opposite. ...he tried to work toward it (a eucalyptus tree) by slipping sideways against the tide, pushing hard when carried away from it and riding the current when it moved toward his objective. He was within a few feet of the tree when a sudden, driving rush carried him far past it. He struggled desperately for a moment, then gave up and let himself be swept along (p. 161).

Throughout the scene, the mob is described as a sea with Tod coming to "dead spots," or being caught in a "wild surge," or being carried by the "churning motion." This is West's ironic vision of the lost paradise, a paradise of motion without form or meaning.

A woman refers to the mob as "a regular free-for-all" (p. 164) which is precisely what the scene is; it is humanity set free to a natural state--a state of chaotic, savage disorder. Sex plays a major role in this natural state. When a woman criticizes "one of them pervert fellers" in St. Louis for "Ripping up a girl with scissors," a man next to her condemns the act only because "That's the wrong tool" (p. 164).



Tod, still attempting to order the chaotic sea, succeeds in freeing a girl from one attacker, only to be carried away while the girl is attacked by another man. Later, Tod kicks away a sobbing woman who was hanging onto him because his hands were slipping from the rail to which he was clinging. Within the sea, there is only survival and the urge to derive sensual release; morality does not exist. The man is the attacker; the woman is the victim. The only order is Darwinian which, to West, is no order at all; it is meaningless. Alice Estee agrees to go to Audrey Jennings's place because there's "Nothing like a bagnio to set a fellow up. Hair of the dog that bit you" (p. 14). Later Claude Estee says to Tod, "Love is like a vending machine, eh? Not bad. You insert a coin and press home the lever. There's some mechanical activity inside the bowels of the device" (pp. 17-18). At the base of reality, which is revealed to Tod with all its horror in the final mob scene, sex is revealed as the only basic interest left to the mob after all the dreams are stripped away.

But sex plays an ambiguous role in The Day of the Locust. As previously noted, sex is a major force (actual life force) in the disordered sea, but sex is also one of the last dreams used to drive the masses. For example, after Claude cynically compares the sexual drive to a small valise and a nickel machine, he concludes, "It's good, but it won't film. ...What about the barber in Purdue? ...What the barber wants

is amour and glamor" (p. 18). Sex is used by mass media to create a dream out of a meaningless drive. Faye becomes the realization of the sexual glamor, which is only a false dream. The film in the cathouse shows the desire for "amour and glamor" being reduced to cheap titillation.

The sexual dream is one way in which West demonstrates an ironic relationship between the most artificial and the actual state of nature. Sex is a cheap dream for the masses, but it is also an important part of the natural state of existence, as shown by the role of sex in the final surge of the locusts. The natural drive of sex is used by the social structure to keep the masses dreaming and in turn to keep them running. This is symbolized in the cock fight when Abe Kusich touches the rooster's testicles to keep it fighting to the death.

The dwarf blew away the feathers from under its tail and pressed the lips of its vent together hard. When that didn't seem to help, he inserted his little finger and scratched the bird's testicles. It fluttered and made a gallant effort to straighten its neck (p. 127).

A moment later the bird is pitted and killed ruthlessly by the superior bird. The parallel to the human condition is made clear as all the people go to the house and compete for Faye, especially as the dwarf attacks Earl, digging "upward with both hands...between Earle's legs" (p. 138). When the dreams of Christ and revolution fail, all that is left is to sexually tease the public with dreams of "amour and glamour." Sex is a cheap, artificial dream; it is not a powerful dream, but ironically in its obvious artificiality, sex as a dream

begins to reveal the actual chaos beneath all false dreams.

In the same way, West uses descriptions of Hollywood to demonstrate the paradox of seeing what is most artificial as expressive of the natural, meaningless state. In West's description, the extremes of the very artificial and the natural begin to meet. When Tod arrived in Hollywood and noticed that the buildings

were all of plaster, lath and paper, he was charitable and blamed their shape on the material used. Steel, stone and brick curb a builder's fancy a little, forcing him to distribute his stresses and weights and to keep his corners plumb, but plaster and paper know no law, not even that of gravity (pp. 3-4).

The most obvious comment to make about The Day of the Locust is that West is satirizing the phoniness and artificiality of Hollywood, and, in turn, of the entire American society. But to stop at this point is to miss one of the most basic paradoxes of the novel. This society is more artificial than the rest of civilization only in the sense that the mask is more grotesque and less believable than it was in previous social orders. The order is just more flimsy. The society, like the buildings, is actually closer to the natural disorder of the universe, and finally arrives at total disorder in the mob scene. As shown previously, in West's vision man has always built an artificial order on dreams. But as dreams become more gaudy, they, in a sense, come closer to the disordered universe, much as a thin, cheap mask reveals both the grotesqueness of masks and the actual surface beneath the



mask. Thus, in Hollywood, animal savagery becomes part of the artificial game as West carefully describes the life-like quality of an artificial dead horse at the bottom of a swimming pool:

Its legs stuck up still and straight and it had an enormous, distended belly. Its hammerhead lay twisted to one side and from its mouth, which was set in an agonized grin, hung a heavy, black tongue. 'Isn't it marvelous!' exclaimed Mrs. Schwartz, clapping her hands and jumping up and down excitedly like a little girl (pp. 15-16).

The final effect of the Hollywood description is primarily one of accenting natural colors much as at the SunGold Market the colored spotlight heightened "the natural hues of the different foods. The oranges were bathed in red, the lemons in yellow, the fish in pale green, the steaks in rose and the eggs in ivory" (p. 38). In Tod's painting, the actual and the artificial meet as the city's flames touch the desert sun: "He was going to show the city burning at high noon, so that the flames would have to compete with the desert sun and thereby appear less fearful, more like bright flags flying from roofs and windows than a terrible holocaust" (p. 78).

West shows the relationship between the natural and the artificial also by describing nature as though it were an artificial creation. For example, "The edges of the trees burned with a pale violet light and their centers gradually turned from deep purple to black. The same violet piping, like a Neon tube, outlined the tops of the ugly, hump-backed hills and they were almost beautiful" (p. 3). And again,

"It was one of those blue and lavender nights when the luminous color seems to have been blown over the scene with an air brush" (p. 119). The appearance of nature seems no different than the colors of Hollywood. The use of Hollywood allows the ordering to be seen more easily in its true falseness; for example, the meaninglessness of appearances becomes obvious with Earle's stiff pose and Faye's learned gestures, but the natural disorder can also easily be seen beneath the thin mask of the order. West reveals the base of reality through the artificiality of Hollywood.

Faye Greener reveals a relationship to both the artificial and the natural. She is artificial in her Hollywood role playing and in her existence in romantic dreams. She is very much the affected actress but through her extreme artificiality, Faye expresses a meaninglessness which is actually in harmony with the natural state of existence. She is so affected that Tod becomes obsessed with her: "Had any other girl been so affected, he would have thought her intolerable. Faye's affectations, however, were so completely artificial that he found them charming" (p. 59). Faye says over and over that acting is her life; in reality, her false role is everything. Tod begins to grasp the significance of Faye's affectations at the party after the cock fight. "The strange thing about her gestures and expressions was that they didn't really illustrate what she was saying. They were almost pure" (p. 131). At this point, the line becomes established;

there is something almost pure about Faye Greener. Her goals are simultaneously materialistic and romantic, and thoroughly shallow, yet she is purely physical. She is simultaneously all dream and all reality; she is so human that she is totally lacking in humanity; she exists in dreams, while she is driven by her body. She is, in fact, the extreme paradox. Reid explains this paradox in these terms: "...Faye is a debased Venus, a transient focus of eternal desire. Her appeal is universal. ...She is at once the natural object of sexual desire and the object of a desire hopelessly perverted by fantasies."<sup>21</sup> Although she is corrupted by romantic dreams, West still describes her as looking "just born, everything moist and fresh, volatile and perfumed" (p. 108). Yet twenty pages later she is the singing viper, the archetypal temptress. Her artificiality matches nature's appearance in that both are totally shallow, totally meaningless. Her beauty is described as being "structural like a tree's not a quality of her mind or heart" (p. 89), and "Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love" (p. 12). Faye's actual invitation is to a life and death struggle; in this sense, she is pure, as pure as the natural life forces.

A characteristic West technique is using the cheap mask to reveal the shallow reality of man's existence. In much the same way as he uses Faye, West uses vaudeville characters to reveal the vision of a grotesque reality. The vision, of



course, is not new, going back to Macbeth's conclusion that:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing. (V,v, 24-28)<sup>22</sup>

A great many modern writers have set out to prove that life is "a poor player." West uses a technique similar to that used by Beckett with his clownish characters in Waiting for Godot and by Hart Crane in "Chaplinesque." Dadaism, the forerunner of surrealism, was based on the belief that humor is the "theatric uselessness of everything."<sup>23</sup> With many surrealists, such as Appollinaire, the clown became "the most sensitive of the modern heroes, the living receptacle for all dreams,..."<sup>24</sup>

Jay Martin in his biography describes the life-long interest that Nathanael West had in the stage. "West's interest in the theater, on all levels, began early and was lifelong.... By the twenties he had a wide acquaintance with the conventions of burlesque comedy."<sup>25</sup> West "frequently spoke of burlesque comedy as classical in form."<sup>26</sup> According to Robert Coates "Slapstick weighed upon him [West] heavily. The goofy guy (versus the fast-talking gagster who punctuated his jokes by hitting the innocent over the head) was a symbolic figure to him."<sup>27</sup>

That West saw the slapstick victim as symbolic is apparent in all of his work. For example, Martin makes the following statement in reference to a particular burlesque act in which

Lemuel Pitkin is dismantled in A Cool Million:

The comic act they develop, emphasizing each 'punch line by beating Lem violently until he is completely dismantled, suggests that life for Lem-as-Everyman is merely a violent but comic routine, a ludicrous stage affair or tent show, the bad joke of a clichéd vaudeville act.<sup>28</sup>

West uses slapstick the same way in The Day of the Locust in the newspaper review of Harry Greener's performance with "The Flying Lings." Harry enters while the Lings are spinning plates, doing cartwheels, juggling fans, and hanging from the proscenium arch. He "tries to hide his confusion under some much too obvious worldliness. He ventures to tickle Sister and receives a powerful kick in the belly in return for this innocent attention." Then Harry Greener is tossed about the stage by the Lings while he attempts to tell some dull jokes, but the orchestra blares during his punch lines (p. 25). Like Lem in A Cool Million, Harry Greener becomes the symbol for the human condition. But West's primary use of the "poor player" concept is when that grotesque characters are not actually on the stage but yet are always performing. In this sense, their whole life becomes a performance.

One of the finest scenes in The Day of the Locust occurs when Harry arrives at Homer's house as a door-to-door salesman. Throughout this scene, Harry is unable to separate his performance from his actual existence. When Homer politely laughed at some of Harry's slapstick, "Harry thanked him by bowing again, but something went wrong. The exertion had been too much for him. His face blanched and he fumbled with

his collar. 'A momentary indisposition,' he murmured, wondering himself whether he was acting or sick" (p. 42). Shortly after, Harry went into his laugh routine:

He began to practice a variety of laughs, all of them theatrical, like a musician tuning up before a concert. He finally found the right one and let himself go. It was a victim's laugh.

'Please stop,' Homer said.

But Harry couldn't stop. He was really sick. The last block that held him poised over the runway of self-pity had been knocked away and he was sliding down the chute, gaining momentum all the time. He jumped to his feet and began doing Harry Greener, poor Harry, honest Harry, well-meaning, humble, deserving, a good husband, a model father, a faithful Christian, a loyal friend (p. 43).

The pretentious act becomes reality. Harry Greener is the victim and so the victim's laugh becomes authentic; Harry is the "poor player" in all of his roles as his reality becomes nothing more than playing roles--husband, father, Christian, friend. Shortly after, West clearly establishes the relationship between Harry Greener's naturalness and the naturalness of his daughter, Faye. "Suddenly, like a mechanical toy that had been overwound, something snapped inside of him and he began to spin through his entire repertoire. The effort was purely muscular, like the dance of a paralytic" (p. 44). There is something pure about Harry, just as there is something pure about Faye. Their lives are so much performances that they become "purely muscular." Even in his coffin, Harry "looked like the interlocutor in a minstrel show" (p. 88). Life and even death become the same as bad performances.



The relationship between the extremely artificial and the natural is again established with the dwarf, Abe Kusich. Abe Kusich is described as both the artificial and the natural man. At first Abe is the comical performer tripping on the long, woman's bathrobe that he wears. But Abe also has a pagan naturalness in his Tyrolean hat that "was the proper magic green color and had a high, conical crown" (p. 7). But the uniform is properly mixed as "Instead of shoes with long points and a leather apron, he wore a blue, double-breasted suit and a black shirt with a yellow tie. Instead of a crooked thorn stick, he carried a rolled copy of the Daily Running Horse" (p. 7). Because of Abe's contemptuous behavior, his friends "played with him like one does with a growling puppy, staving off his mad rushes and then baiting him to rush again" (p. 10). His sexual drive is savage, exemplified by the attack on Earle previously described. Like Harry and Faye, through his whole performance, Abe reveals a pure naturalness.

In commenting on the strange masses in Hollywood, West states that "It was their stare that drove Abe and others to spin crazily and leap into the air with twisted backs like hooked trout" (p. 5). The act becomes representative of a natural struggle. Randall Reid summarizes the paradox of artificiality and naturalness by examining the use of ritual behavior in The Day of the Locust.

Both song and dance are ritual performances, and both suggest at once theatrical artificiality and instinctive animality. In The Day of the Locust, human behavior

is controlled by a double set of ceremonial patterns: the stereotypes of bad art, and the rituals of nature. Its human beings therefore seem alternately--often simultaneously--artificial and subhuman, more like birds and ballerinas than like people. The strangeness in the songs of The Day of the Locust derives in part from the fusion of artificial and natural ceremonies.<sup>29</sup>

In a disordered universe, the poor performance reveals the chaotic sea beneath all existence.

In attempting to come to the basis of this chaotic sea, the reader needs a point of reference; that is, the reader needs a character who actually struggles with the insanity around him. Tod Hackett is the only realistic character in The Day of the Locust; the other characters represent life forces nearly stripped of their human facades. If there is to be dramatic conflict, there must be a degree of rational awareness. Tod Hackett is like K in Kafka's The Trial or Yossarian in Heller's Catch 22; he is a focal point around which the chaos spins. Within a dramatic plot, there must be an island struggling against the forces of the sea. It is not until the very end of The Day of the Locust that West allows his sea to destroy the island and leaves us with his ultimate vision of a splashing, surging chaos and of the futility of islands. The island is only a human illusion; in the end, Tod's insanity equals the insanity of the forces around him.

Tod Hackett's conflict exists on several levels. His dilemma is a result of his awareness; the dilemma exists between both the recognition of the self and of the masses,

and, of course, the question of what should or can be done. One level of the conflict is between the artist and the man. This conflict exists in two ways. First, the artist's conflict is between the introvertive quality of the critical observer and the desire to participate. Tod has a tendency to be detached. With a group, he stays on the outer perimeter. For example, at the party after the cock fight, "Tod stood on the edge, watching her [Faye] through the opening between Earle and the Mexican" (p. 132). The artist is always split between the observer and the participant. But there is a second, more complex type of conflict for the modern artist, a conflict between his romantic desire for the ideal and his realistic skepticism, that is, the desire to pursue ultimate beauty, but the realization that no ultimate beauty exists. Tod's pursuit of Faye is partially the artist's pursuit of beauty. For example, Faye is portrayed in Tod's painting much as is the pursued girl in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." It is ironic that Tod Hackett, like Keats, believes that Faye's beauty cannot be destroyed, but Hackett also realizes that there is no satisfaction, only meaningless pursuit. In Tod's painting, Faye appears like a Greek goddess running naked "with her eyes closed and a strange half-smile on her lips" (p. 65). But West immediately destroys the mystic illusion by explaining "that she is enjoying the release that wild flight gives in much the same way that a game bird must when, after hiding for several tense minutes, it bursts from cover



in complete, unthinking panic" (p. 65). Again, Faye's only charm is that of an "unthinking" creature with a "dreamy repose." Tod is split between his desire to find the ideal and his recognition that the ideal is only a dream.

Another conflict is Tod Hackett's desire to be prophet and redeemer, but his realization that no redeemer exists and the prophet's role is futile.<sup>30</sup> Tod recognizes his own role as the prophet in his painting. In trying to decide the accuracy of his apocalyptic vision, "He told himself that it didn't make any difference because he was an artist, not a prophet. His work would not be judged by the accuracy with which it foretold a future event but by its merit as painting. Nevertheless, he refused to give up the role of Jeremiah" (p. 78). In concluding that the country was headed for a civil war, "He was amused by the strong feeling of satisfaction this dire conclusion gave him. Were all prophets of doom and destruction such happy men?" (p. 79). But as Tod watches the man with the "sunk eyes" at the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming" and compares him to an illiterate anchorite of decadent Rome, he sees the futility of the prophet role. The final madness of Tod reflects back to his prophetic role. In the police car, "The siren began to scream and at first he thought he was making the noise himself. 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" (p. 167). Tod all

along has been playing the siren in the night. The final madness is a result of the recognition of the absurdity of his own role.

Tod goes beyond the role of prophet, in also desiring to play the redeemer. In attempting to explain his occasional contempt for Homer, Tod reasons that "He [Tod] had never set himself up as a healer" (p. 133). Yet Tod is the only moral force working within the novel. Tod does try to protect Homer and even attempts to stop Faye from prostitution. In the very beginning of the novel Tod attempts to help the dwarf who has been thrown from a woman's apartment. But Tod also recognizes that he is no redeemer and can never be; he is again split between his desire and his awareness. He has a choice either to watch from a distance or to struggle and fail. In his painting Tod sees himself as the man who picks up "a small stone to throw before continuing his flight" (p. 166). The final mob scene is an accurate symbol of man when he attempts to change existing conditions. First Tod attempts to stop Homer from killing Adore.

He shoved Tod and went on using his heels. Tod hit him as hard as he could, first in the belly, then in the face. He ignored the blows and continued to stamp on the boy. Tod hit him again and again, then threw both arms around him and tried to pull him off. He couldn't budge him. He was like a stone column (pp. 160-161).

Once Homer's repressed force is unleashed, no man can stop him, only the massive power of the surging sea which proceeds to destroy Homer as ruthlessly as Homer destroyed the

Frankenstein child.

Within the sea, Tod is helpless.

He struggled desperately for a moment, then gave up and let himself be swept along. He was the spearhead of a flying wedge when it collided with a mass going in the opposite direction. The impact turned him around. As the two forces ground against each other, he turned again and again, like a grain between millstones. This didn't stop until he became part of the opposing force (p. 161).

To stand alone and attempt to control even one's own fate is disastrous; Tod is only safe or at least partially protected when he aligns himself with a massive force and moves with that force. He is merely a grain, not an island, definitely not a redeemer. As noted earlier, Tod succeeds in saving a girl from one attacker, only to helplessly watch her being attacked by another. Finally he kicks away another woman for his own survival. But at this point, Tod refuses to use the escape of rising above the tide; he insists upon keeping his feet on the ground. "Although relief for his cracking ribs could be gotten by continuing to rise, he fought to keep his feet on the ground. Not being able to touch was an even more dreadful sensation than being carried backwards" (pp. 161-162). Tod does finally grab a rail and stands on only his good leg while he contemplates his painting, but the experience destroys him in the end as he sees the futility of playing prophet or redeemer.

Tod also recognizes his inability to deal with his own humanness. Tod recognizes his similarity to the masses and



he is unable to escape from the forces that drive all men. These forces are, first, his desire to exist in dreams and, second, his own animal drives. In his inactive desire for Faye, Tod at one point wonders "if he himself didn't suffer from the ingrained, morbid apathy he liked to draw in others. Maybe he could only be galvanized into sensibility and that was why he was chasing Faye" (p. 109). As Tod studies the grotesque Hollywood crowd, he is always aware that the same dreams and drives are working within himself. His desire for Faye is partially the desire of the artist for the ideal, but it is also partially a display of his animal drive. In the woods, "He shouted to her, a deep, agonized bellow, like that a hound makes when it strikes a fresh line after hours of cold trailing. Already he could feel how it would be when he pulled her to the ground" (p. 77). After Faye recreates her dreams for Tod, he thinks, "If he only had the courage to throw himself on her. Nothing less violent than rape would do" (p. 63). After Faye leaves Homer, Tod again thinks, "If only he had the courage to wait for her some night and hit her with a bottle and rape her" (p. 152). But Tod envisions no pleasure; he merely desired to be rid of the urge. He tells Claude Estee, "I've been chasing a girl and it's like carrying something a little too large to conceal in your pocket, like a briefcase or a small valise. It's uncomfortable" (p. 18). Tod seems to feel that by once possessing the purely physical Faye, he can be cured of his sexual drive and can turn

back to his art. He tells Faye that if she would sleep with him once, he would never bother her again and would "go east right after" (p. 113). But, of course, West never allows Tod to be set free from either his dreams or his drives. Tod must constantly be reminded that he is human; he is no island against the sea, but merely a grain in the surging waves. He is a victim of the same forces from both within and without; only his awareness makes him slightly different. David S. Galloway points out that Tod's problem is that he is trapped between being "masquerader and observer."<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, Tod is as much the "poor player" as Faye, Harry, and Abe.

As Victor Comerchero explains, Tod is important in the novel, as he is the observer and interpreter.<sup>32</sup> But it is a mistake to see Tod's interpretation as being always the same as West's. Tod is driven through an awakening process, culminating in his final ironic condition, which consists of total awareness and total unawareness. The final mob scene is not identical with the message of Tod's painting. Tod's vision, within his painting, still involves dream chasing and an extreme attempt to order the universe, much like the mob scene in A Cool Million. The following is the description that Tod thinks of while hanging onto the rail:

Through the center, winding from left to right, was a long hill street and down it, spilling into the middle foreground, came the mob carrying baseball bats and torches. For the faces of its members, he was using the innumerable sketches he had made of the people who come to California to die; the cultists of all sorts, economic as well as religious, the wave, airplane, funeral and

preview watchers--all those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence. A super 'Dr. Know-All Pierce-All' had made the necessary promise and they were marching behind his banner in a great united front of screwballs and screw-boxes to purify the land. No longer bored, they sang and danced joyously in the red light of the flames (p. 165).

The crowd is "stirred by the promise of miracles" so the dream is worn very thin but the dream is still present. The final mob scene in The Day of the Locust seems to go one step beyond Tod's vision as it reveals a totally amoral chaos. The extreme attempt for order in Tod's painting is much like the extreme artificiality of Hollywood in that it reveals the chaos beneath the facade. But the final mob scene becomes pure disorder. There is no "promise of miracles," no "super 'Dr. Know-All Pierce-All'", no marching "in a great united front," and no desire to "purify the land." West does show with his ironic vision the only kind of purity that he believes in--pure disorder, pure animal drive--man reduced to the level of an invasion of locusts. James Light describes the nature of the mob when he writes that "in their fury they become for a moment something more than the cheated; they become ravaging locusts."<sup>33</sup> Light adds that, "Like an irrational animal, ultimately sexual in its motivations, the mob 'roars' furiously when it is so directed, but the fury has no focus, and so the mob, like a 'bull elephant,' goes churning back and forth, each 'spasm; undirected, but still powerful, irresistible."<sup>34</sup>



Tod's insanity may be a result of his recognizing the chaos of existence and the ultimate futility of attempting to order the world either directly in the society, spiritually within the individual (as in Miss Lonelyhearts), or symbolically through art. In The Fabulators, Robert Scholes attempts to explain why the vision of many twentieth century writers, like Barth and Joyce, holds myth and comedy in a precarious balance:

Once so much is known about myths and archetypes, they can no longer be used innocently. Even their connection to the unconscious finally becomes attenuated as the mythic materials are used more consciously. All symbols become allegorical to the extent that we understand them. Thus the really perceptive writer is not merely conscious that he is using mythic material: He is conscious that he is using them consciously. He knows, finally, that he is allegorizing. Such a writer, aware of the nature of categories, is not likely to believe that his own mythic lenses really capture the truth. Thus his use of myth will inevitably partake of the comic.<sup>35</sup>

This is West's realization and this is the conclusion to which Tod Hunter is finally led. Scholes reveals the relationship of West to the post-World War II fabulators when he writes, "For the post-World War II fabulators, any order they impose on the world amounts not to a symbol of the divine order that God imposed on the cosmos, but to an allegory of the mind of man with its rage for an order superior to that of nature."<sup>36</sup> An imitation of Jeremiah does not suit this vision of a futile rage for order. Scholes further clarifies what seems to be West's point of view when he writes,

...all our lives have archetypal significance; Myth tells us that we are all part of a great story. But the

fabulators, so clearly aware of the difference between fact and fiction, are unwilling to accept the mythic view of life as completely valid. Against this view they balance one which I am calling the philosophical, which tells us that every man is unique, alone, poised over chaos.<sup>37</sup>

West uses the myth extensively and with his emphasis on sea, fire, viper, and locust, West shows that he is clearly aware of Jung's theories on archetypes. Even the final siren brings to mind the classical image of man being beckoned to his final destruction at sea. But the final revelation is that man is set against an unorderable chaos. Like the contemporary allegorists that Scholes discusses, West's world is "idealized but unsystematic, full of meanings but devoid of meaning."<sup>38</sup> Tod's final message is no message at all, merely the hysterical laughter and scream of a man who finally realizes that he is, indeed, "poised over chaos."

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Edmond L. Volpe, "The Waste Land of Nathanael West," Renascence, XII (1961), 69-70.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 189.

<sup>3</sup>Wilson, pp. 221-222.

<sup>4</sup>Randall Reid, The Fiction of Nathanael West: No Redeemer, No Promised Land (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>James Branch Cabell, Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1919), p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>Reid, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup>Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (New York: Modern Library, 1919), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Robert G. Jacobs, "Nathanael West: The Christology of Unbelief," Iowa English Yearbook, IX (Fall, 1964), 69.

<sup>9</sup>Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust (New York: New Direction Books, 1962). This edition will be used in all references to Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust with page numbers listed in the text.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas M. Lorch, "West's Miss Lonelyhearts: Skepticism Mitigated?" Renascence, XVIII (1966), 100.

<sup>11</sup>James F. Light, Nathanael West: An Interpretative Study (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1961), p. 175.

<sup>12</sup>C. Carroll Hollis, "Nathanael West and the 'Lonely Crowd'," Thought, XXXIII (1958), 415.

<sup>13</sup>Leslie Fiedler, "The Two Memories: Reflections on Writers and Writing in the Thirties," Proletarian Writers of the Thirties, ed. David Madden (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), pp. 8-9.



<sup>14</sup>Granville Hicks, "American Fiction: The Major Trend," Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology, eds. Granville Hicks, Michael Gold, Isidor Schneider, Joseph North, Paul Peters, and Alan Calmer (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 358.

<sup>15</sup>Hicks, p. 359.

<sup>16</sup>Light, p. 165.

<sup>17</sup>David Madden, "Introduction: True Believers, Atheists, and Agnostics," American Dreams, American Nightmares, ed. David Madden (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. xviii.

<sup>18</sup>Madden, p. xxvi.

<sup>19</sup>Reid, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>Reid, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Reid, p. 135.

<sup>22</sup>William Allan Neilson, ed., The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1942).

<sup>23</sup>Wallace Fowlie, Age of Surrealism (New York: Swallow Press, 1950), p. 23.

<sup>24</sup>Fowlie, p. 100.

<sup>25</sup>Jay Martin, Nathanael West: The Art of His Life (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970), p. 36.

<sup>26</sup>Martin, p. 238.

<sup>27</sup>Martin, p. 263.

<sup>28</sup>Martin, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup>Reid, p. 129.

<sup>30</sup>C. Carroll Hollis, on p. 414 of his essay, associates the name Tod Hackett with God Hunter.

<sup>31</sup>David D. Galloway, "Nathanael West's Dream Dump." Critique, VI, iii (1963), p. 55.

<sup>32</sup>Victor Comerchero, Nathanael West: The Ironic Prophet (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1964), p. 126.

<sup>33</sup>Light, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup>Light, p. 170.

<sup>35</sup>Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 171.

<sup>36</sup>Scholes, pp. 106-107.

<sup>37</sup>Scholes, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup>Scholes, p. 107.

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