Chapter - V
The Day of the Locust

_The Day of the Locust_ represents a continuation of the theme of dream and disintegration explored in West's earlier novels. The conflict between individual and society, dream and reality, and convention and desire all fluctuate within this novel. West problematizes religion, culture, dehumanized and disintegrated society symbolizing man’s deterioration to a subhuman level. The entire novel is a satiric attempt to use the past to explain the present and future devoid of moral values. He mocks and denounces the false dreams of disillusioned and embattled people evoking reader's disgust. The human impulse to fight misery with dreams born from _Balso Snell_, emerged into _Miss Lonelyhearts’s_ New York setting. In _A Cool Million_ this dream spans America's landscape as Lemuel seeks his fortune. West's characters and writing, however, find their final resting place in _The Day of the Locust_ (1939). The novel travels to Hollywood to more eloquently disintegrating the American Dream, a task West may initially have hoped to accomplish in _A Cool Million_. _A Cool Million_ disintegrates the American Dream bluntly and brutally. West attains _A Cool Million's_ goal in _Locust_, creating a more horrific, apocalyptic vision of the American Dream out of its comparatively subtle deconstruction. The novel deals with man's frustration in a world of puerile illusions.

_**Locust**_, however, constitutes the most severe instance of disassociation of Americans from their own bodily selves. The implications of this broken relationship in _Locust_ far exceed their horror in _Miss Lonelyhearts_ and _A Cool
Million. Death was the penalty for the protagonist's belief in the American Dream in West's two previous novels. Locust's protagonist faces a violent ending, but is not afforded a death, which comparatively speaking seems like an easy escape from the misery that the bungled national dream creates. Tod Hackett, the central character in Locust, is instead trapped in the novel, without hope of regeneration or even an exit.

As a novel on the theme of disintegration, The Day of the Locust is, in fact, the ultimate expression of a number of things. West did not come to write the one American novel which pushes the theme of disintegration to its final stage peremptorily, and the thick line that The Day of the Locust draws under the argument of disintegration is more than a logical conclusion. Just as West's persistent anecdote haunted him for years, so apocalypse—the non plus ultra of his major theme—can be said to have pursued him from the first. West's feel not, like the child's innocently anarchic love for all sorts of disruption, and like the adolescent's wish to create himself by destroying everything which surrounds him—both of which tendencies he had manifested copiously—West took that part of himself which was instinctively drawn to anarchy further than most men by force of imagination. In some respects West's attitude toward these secret fears and longings did not change very much as he developed. Speaking of west in his teens, Martin remarks:

He delighted Particularly in stories about strange Weapons and exotic methods
of torture and would describe both in considerable detail. (32)

While Josephine Herbst, who knew West in California toward the end of his life, comments that:

He had a certain enjoyment in the very details he deplored. I remember one occasion after he had been in Hollywood when he spent an entire evening relating the more sordid aspects of life in Hollywood with both revulsion and pleasure. (72)

This final phrase "with both revulsion and pleasure" seems especially good. In relation to his dominant theme of “disintegration and its attendant visions and prophecies, revulsion was the late-comer in West's thinking” (Davis 29). Perhaps it was also, finally, the weaker of the two elements; it arose only when West began to think of disintegration as a real possibility or even an historical surety, instead of just a dreamt consummation of his rebellion against business-values, his scorn of American vulgarity, and his overall alienation from family and society.

West’s original intention was to name the novel The Day of the Locust as The Cheated, and this epithet is an apt description of his characters. The most obviously cheated character in the novel is not an individual but the mass of people
with wildly staring, hate-filled eyes who have “come to California to die” (West 261). West treats them as an entity, despite their numbers, he places one of them, Homer Simpson, into the mainstream of the novel.

Coming to Hollywood, this mass of retired drudges expect a Big Rock Candy Mountain, a land where escapist dreams can become real:

All their lives they had slaved at some kind of dull, heavy labor, behind desks and counters, in the fields and at tedious machines of all sorts, saving their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs when they had enough. Finally that day came…Where else should they go but California, the land of sunshine and oranges? (411)

But, as West proves in Miss Lonelyhearts, there are no real escapes in fantasy worlds. In California, the dreamers of the Midwest find no golden apples and ripe breasted maidens.

The houses which line the canyons are the shams of an unreal world. "The Mexican ranch houses, Samoan tarts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages" (262) nestle cheek by jowl on the hillsides. They are monstrously phony, and not even their contrived exteriors can hide the
slipshod construction of lathe and plaster. While the "Chamber of American Horrors" is a Dadaist display of the artificiality of modern America, Homer Simpson's distorted Irish shanty is that horror brought to life. It is tasteless, and the juxtaposition of the varied furnishings of its rooms has a particular grotesquity of its own. Most disturbing of all is the conscious artificiality of it all.

The prevailing taste had been followed in the living room. It was "Spanish." The walls were pale orange flecked with pink… A big galleon stood on the mantelpiece. Its hull was plaster, its sails paper and its rigging wire... Some of the plants were made of rubber and cork others were real. (287)

Even the funeral chapels are designed to deceive with "imitation stained-glass windows which hung on the fake oak paneled walls"(348). Everything the dreamers see is fraudulent, including the supermarkets where they buy food bathed in colored lights. As they come to California expecting to find the happiness which they were promised, they find only the deadness which they sought to escape.

Hollywood, as the dream capital, provides West with plentiful material and ideas for the presentation of his vision. Martin notes that West's time in Hollywood enabled the author to explore "a seamy area where dreams, violence, and deception mixed" (Nathanael 7-8). West, like the characters in his book, was fascinated by
Hollywood, as biographical works demonstrate. Hollywood is the place where dreams are packed in “cans and marketed to the world.” Charles Katz, an acquaintance of West's, describes how the writer was entranced "with the back lots of the studios and often wandered through them" (59). Katz notes that West in particular would, "always talk about the business of striking a set. You would smash Paris and wind up in Tuscon, Arizona, at the same spot... He seemed never to be able to talk enough about it" (Martin, Nathanael 306). West's fascination appears in *Locust*'s opening sequence as Tod wanders through just such a Hollywood back lot. *Locust* is a return to the creative womb, as its environment resembles the anachronistic chaos of *Balso Snell*. Remnants of the past are scattered throughout the novel. *Locust*'s opening scene sets the presence of these fragments in motion as Tod Hackett walks through a fantastic terrain much as in Katz's description.

The concept of the film sets in *Locust* work to signify the shady side of American Dream in West’s writing. An even larger signifier comes from the characters themselves as they react to the world around them. W.H. Auden diagnosed West's characters reactions in an essay titled "West's Disease." All of West's characters, says Auden, suffer from this disease "of consciousness, which renders [them] incapable of converting wishes into desire" (149). For Auden, all wishes have "the same and unvarying meaning: I refuse to be what I am." In this sense, a wish "is either an innocent and frivolous, a kind of play or a serious expression of guilt and despair, a hatred of oneself and every being one holds responsible for oneself" (Auden 150). Auden pays particular attention to the
volatility that the disease he has diagnosed instills in West's characters. A character in West "may kiss your feet one moment and kick you in the jaw the next and, if you were to ask him why, he could not tell you" (151). Auden's analysis rings true in all four of West's novels; even in Balso Snell hints of this sporadic behavior is visible. It is in Locust, however, that West's Disease is most poignantly and horribly manifested.

West's “Disease” is a product of modernity and a readymade symbolism for the illusions and lies of American life. Hence Hollywood provides the perfect setting to explore the cause of this disease in modern society. West's Disease complements Bakhtin's notion of the body in West appropriately, as the American Dream in West has always been in a state of demise. The image of disease makes this demise crystal clear. The poet's essay invokes music as an example of the cause of West's Disease, but Auden's theory is easily transferable to motion pictures. In the past, Auden explains, it is "easier to tell a mere wish from a real desire." Auden provides an example: "If, in order to hear some music, a man has to wait for six months and then walk twenty miles, it is easy to tell whether the words, 'I should like to hear some music,' mean what they appears to mean, or merely, 'At this moment I should like to forget myself.'" It becomes more difficult to interpret such a difference when all a person has to do "is press a switch" to hear music. Furthermore, Auden maintains, a person "may come to believe that wishes can come true"—given the facility of such an action (153). Hollywood, the prime disseminator of motion pictures, provides the ultimate evolution of Auden's
example, as it provides an easily accessible, ambivalent escapism on a mass scale. What excited early audiences of moving pictures most was scenes never before seen inside a theater—crashing sea waves, onrushing locomotives, the wonders of nature and machines, far-off places, rare and unusual sights. If, for example, people want to see China, all they need to do is pay their admission fee and sit in front of the silver screen. In the Hollywood setting, the center of delusions, West's Disease creates an American Dream as it approaches its demise and becomes dangerous to his characters and their country. He understood the function of dreams in the special context of the depression era.

Imagery of disintegrated dreams persists in *Locust*. The surrealistically clotted bowel motion that originated in *Balso Snell*, for example, is present through the narrator's descriptions. The opening scene provides an example of this presence as it describes, in great detail, a scene of digested history—a cavalry troop on a set in great detail: "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" (241). The imagery is swiftly interrupted by "a little fat man, wearing a cork sun-helmet, polo shirt and knickers," that is shouting "Stage Nine—you bastards—Stage Nine!... through a small megaphone." The cavalry then disappears "behind half a Mississippi steamboat" (241). The scene shows that the movement of *Locust's* imagery is not fluid in the same sense as the movements in *Balso and Miss Lonelyhearts*. The presence of interjections like the little fat man and the Mississippi steamboat undermine such fluidity. *Locust*
presents a return to the bowel imagery of Miss Lonelyhearts, but it is almost as if all of the organs inside of the body are floating around aimlessly—bumping into one another” (Wyllie 147).

The American Dream narrative that West shredded in A Cool Million seems to land in dispensed fluidity, as the images in Locust bob and float into each other at very unexpected times. West's treatment of the American Dream in Locust is extremely subtle when compared to that in A Cool Million. This subtlety is a result of the way he presents imagery in the novel. One of the best examples occurs at Claude Estee's party, as Tod is shown "what's in the swimming pool" (253). Mrs. Schwartzen (a guest at the party) drags Tod to the pool where she kicks floodlights that illuminate the green water. The illumination reveals:

a dead horse, or, rather a life-size, realistic reproduction of one. Its legs stuck up stiff 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. (254)

The image is quite unexpected, bearing no correlation to anything Tod is experiencing at the party. The horse barkers back to the Trojan horse of West's first novel, but within Locust's context, the horse's appearance is only jarring. The narration disorients the reader even more by placing, right after the description,
Mrs. Schwartz's exclamation, "Isn't it marvelous!" (254). The image is a lot to process, making her question seem almost as randomly irrational as the horse's presence.

West worked physical imagery subtly in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, making the perils that surrounded a character obscure to the characters themselves. He breaks this harmony in *Locust*, thus giving higher visibility to the signifiers that his environments provide its characters. The novel's signifiers are blatant, as with the horse's appearance. West's point in employing this imagery shift is that *Locust*'s characters are willing spectators of the deception of the American Dream presented to them. The scene is apocalyptic, yet they stare at it idly.

West's new use of image presentation can also be attributed to cinematography. Reid links a descriptive scene in the first chapter to this cinematic influence: "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 ugly, humpbacked hills and they were almost beautiful" (243). Reid explains, "unlike the alternately static and jerkily animated scenes of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, this picture slowly changes while we watch it. The gradual darkening of color here is characteristic of the novel's methods and it signals basic change in form: *The Day of the Locust* is a motion picture" (117). West's use of cinematic description and theme are a natural device for the author, as motion pictures are very much a part of American life by the time he writes *Locust*. 
The heavy presence of movies and thus Hollywood in American culture creates the perfect vehicle for the danger and the disintegration of American Dream constitutes for its own people. As Martin notes, by 1915 "feature pictures were developed and 'stars' came to be an integral part of movies (36). In the 1930's "[m]oviegoers averaged more than once-a-week attendance" (Martin, Nathanael 163). Martin also cites a Saturday Evening Post advertisement that accents West's critique of the silver screen nicely: "Go to a motion picture... and let yourself go. Before you know it, you are living the story—laughing, loving, hating, struggling, winning! All the adventure, all the romance, all the excitement you lack in your daily life are in Pictures" (163). The point of the movie theater, according to the ad, is to disassociate individuals from their realities. Hollywood has no qualms about disguising such a disassociation. These social tactics empower Locust's absurdity, as the victims of the mass-produced dream willingly walk into the lie and disconnect themselves from their individualities—and thus their bodies.

The image of Hollywood suggests cheap ephemerality of the dream manufactured by it. Its presence, along with the promises of success that its scripts fabricate, transcends the screen on which the images are presented and infests the American landscape. Rita Barnard states, "West's Hollywood is, in short, not simply the city where the fantasies of the silver screen are produced, it is itself such a fantasy: a place to which one of West's critics gave the accurate epithet of the 'Land of Wish" (326). West's use of people, who move to California from the Midwest, notably like the novel's important secondary character, Homer Simpson, provides
for the best example of Barnard's version of Hollywood as dumping ground for dreams. Edmund Wilson cites these Midwesterners as "people who, retiring to sunlit leisure, are trying to leave behind them the meagerness of their working lives; who desire something different from what they have but do now know what they desire, and have no other resources for amusement than gaping at movie stars" (141). The people Wilson describes do not know what they desire, because the dream they are fed is empty. As Herbst asserts, "The people in West's fiction are not so much looking for something they have lost as for something they never had and never will have" (15). Herbst's claim is certainly the case in *Locust*, as the novel's harbingers of West's Disease represent the deep void inside them.

The void that *Locust's* characters carry within makes them comparable to the image of the "dispossessed king" developed by the seventeenth-century philosopher Pascal. Pascal's *Pensee* examines the source of humankind's misery in a fable:

> Who would think himself unhappy if he had only one mouth and who would not if he had only one eye? It has probably never occurred to anyone to be distressed at not having three eyes, but those who have none are inconsolable. (117)

Alger's version of America is like the third eye in Pascal's metaphor. It is an America foreign to West's generation; it is no wonder that West dismantled it with such discomposed rage in *A Cool Million*. Having vented that, however, he places
his rage at the core of his characters in *Locust*. Hollywood subjects the novel's characters to looking at what they have been dispossessed of via motion pictures. He aims to demonstrate the perils of this subjection.

The subjection of the American Dream that Hollywood presents, however, creates a paradox in public's perception. On one hand, the presentation of the public's dispossessio via the silver screen makes the dispossessio highly visible to viewers, but the movie theater's role as entertainment eradicates such consciousness. The viewers are then rendered dormant in the exacerbation of their misery, at least while they are in the theater. Martin's description of the movie-going experience shows this eradication in action: "Screened in a darkened theater, where gorgeous architecture and furnishings helped narcotize the sense of reality, movies not only romanticized life; they transformed its conditions and gave them simplicity and order" (163-164). By rendering its viewers numb in front of the silver screen, Hollywood not only blurs the line between reality and dream—but also disassociates individuals from their own bodies. The movie theater in this respect becomes a waking tomb, assuring the mass's inhibition and impotence in their unhappiness. There is always, however, the threat that these spectators will wake up.

Besides its deceptive role as entertainment, part of what makes motion pictures a perfect disseminator of the American Dream is that they transcend class structure. Robert Sklar notes that moving pictures were initially thought of as
something that would "provide home entertainment for families of wealth" (3). Sklar says this did not happen because "movies developed during critical years of change in the social structure of American life when a new social order was emerging in the modern industrial city" (3). West is very conscious of Hollywood's ability to transcend class, as he does not make such distinctions in Locust. Although he is mainly dealing with the lower middle class in the novel, the party at Claude's house demonstrates how the upper classes are affected by Hollywood the same way.

The mass acceptance of motion pictures is not limited to West's writing in the 1930s. It is not difficult to see why the dreams and self-delusion perpetrated by motion pictures are embraced the way they are. Sklar describes work hours as "half of every twenty-four hours... spent on the job, eleven hours in the best of circumstances, punching in at six or sometimes seven, checking out again at six, in winter never seeing sunlight off times seven, checking out again at six, in winter never seeing sunlight off the job" (4). The amount of time consumed by the commuting and working day still holds today in the corporate world and often service jobs. Moreover, the working day exhausts the individual, making entertainment very secondary. As Sklar asserts, in this situation people will always prefer "ready-made, prepackaged recreation that provide instant gratification for every nickel and dime" (4). This mindset, however, is not now limited to the middle and lower classes, as the convenience of "prepackaged recreation" is appealing to everyone. West witnessed Sklar's observations first-hand and incorporated the
material into *Locust*. What he added was the effect of motion pictures on the American body, as their version of the American Dream infects all of his disenchanted and disintegrated characters, making the signs of "West's Disease" highly visible.

It is ironic that Homer Simpson, described as "an exact model for the kind of person who comes to California to die" (285) should be the victim of mob violence. His act of violence, which comes as a prelude to the riot, is similarly motivated to theirs. But although Homer is a "symbolic abstraction of the crowd" (Comerchero 137) at first he seems different from it in his shyness. In Homer the violence and sexuality which West suggests underlies aggressiveness is mollified by a neurotic terror of sex. Homer suffers from psychic impotence. West explains his malady:

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 very top of the crest and the wave collapsed. (294)

His thoughts of Homola Martin, a prostitute who nearly seduced him in Waynesville, Iowa, create a sexual urge which is never satisfied, but that is his only barrier to madness. To Homer, lust is "like dropping a spark into a bam full of hay"
(313) and he knows "that his only defense" is "chastity (313). Although Homer can control his mind by shutting it off with sleep, his body betrays him. His autonomous hands have an obvious literary relationship to Wing Biddlebaum's equally uncontrollable appendages in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, and Homer is what Anderson’s grotesque would become in Hollywood, released from the need to work. As Randall Reid implies, Homer's malady is divorced from his ability to express it, and, as a consequence, his inexpressible interior needs are articulated by the grotesque movements of his hands, just as Wing Biddlebaum’s need to communicate is satisfied by his wandering hands (14).

What Homer's hands wish to articulate is "a deeply repressed compulsion to masturbate" (Comerochero 145) in order to satisfy the frustrated orgasm Implied by the emotional surge he feels. West underscores the symbolism of Homer's hands with descriptions of his treatments of their unruliness and his guilt in their desires:

> When he had been a child, he used to stick pins in them and once had even thrust them into a fire. Now he used only cold water. He turned on the cold water… They lay quietly on the bottom like a pair of strange aquatic animals. (289)

These uncontrollable hands connect Homer with the sexualism of the world he lives in, and ironically, he uses cold water to awaken the sea animals attached to
his body. But the quickening water also acts as a control. When Faye Greener's presence threatens his chastity, the hands acknowledge her desirability, and Homer stills them with cold water:

His hands began to bother him. He rubbed them against the edge of the table to relieve their itch, but it only stimulated them. When he clasped them behind his back, the strain became intolerable. They were hot and swollen...he held them tinder the cold water tap of the sink. (310)

West's joke is rather crude, but the hands serve powerfully as a symbol of Homer's sickness. Like a penis, they signal his repressed desires, or, out of his control, they act out his sexual fantasies before him.

His hands kept his thoughts busy. They trembled and Jerked, as though troubled by dreams. To hold them still, he clasped them together. Their fingers twined like a tangle of thighs in miniature. (313)

Homer is most comfortable when he is vegetative and static, sitting in a chair behind his house watching a lizard catching flies. Since he identifies with the flies, Homer rejoices when they escape the Freudian legged snake, but he eventually
succumbs to his repressed urges and the power of sex. It is not surprising that he is attracted to Faye Greener since she is a symbol of desire. As Homer interacts with Faye and becomes her willing slave, he accepts her as a business partner, sharing her dream of stardom. Washing dishes so that her hands will not wrinkle, buying her clothes and an automobile to promote his investment, and believing in her girlish purity to protect his chastity, he is brutalized when he discovers her fornicating. His Midwestern naiveté is intense, arid and he believes that Faye's moans of passion are the cries of illness. For him, they are. His escape is a deeper sleep than he has dared before, a catatonic return to the womb. Through Tod, West comments on Homer's "Uterine Flight:"

What a perfect escape the return to the womb was.
Better by far than Religion or Art or the South Sea Islands. It was so snug and warm there, and the feeding was automatic. Everything perfect in that hotel... The grave wasn't in it. No wonder one fought so desperately against being evicted when the nine month's lease was up. (403-404)

But such an escape is impossible in West's world, and Homer reenters the world, as Miss Lonelyhearts did, in order to satisfy its claims on him as a modern man. Stalking the earth in catatonic madness "like a badly made automaton..., his features..., set in rigid, mechanical grin" (412). Homer walks into the sphere of the
premiere crowd but unlike Miss Lonelyhearts, Homer has no message from God nor does he have any hope of physical comfort. In realizing Faye's character, he has lost Faye and his dream, and the loss of his glittering household god leaves him no escape from pain or sexual suffering except the violence which, in West's milieu, must be the articulation of frustration.

When Homer confronts Adore Loomis, both he and the child are doomed. Homer is a zombie, a grotesquely broken man who is more dead than alive. Adore's mother, "one of that army of women who drag their children from casting office to casting office and sit…waiting to show what Junior can do" (361). She has denied him a childhood, and he is Hollywood's own grotesque, a child who imitates and is "the Frankenstein monster" (Hyman 41). Adore has been transformed into a sexual entity which his years preclude, and to Homer, he is a reminder of Faye. The boy's sexual precocity, which Homer witnessed in the child's imitation of a blues singer, recalls the emptiness of Faye's continual performances.

Adore's game with the string and wallet is the only "normal" action he performs in the novel, and it is ironic that he is killed when he acts as a simple child. Adore has been cheated of his mother's affection, and when he attempts to gain a familiar adult's attention, he reacts as a frustrated brat might and hits Homer with a stone. Perhaps violence is allowable to a spoiled child, but the crowd and Homer show the same lack of constraint. Homer tramples Adore to death and is dismembered by the mob.
The scene is both tragic and comic. It is, in a sense, a Hollywood battle of monsters, the mainstay of the gothic movie of the thirties. But the monsters are Hollywood's own creations as the product of dreams which are impossible. The basis of these dreams is sexual, but it is a distorted and unnatural sexuality which West deals in. To West, sex becomes the ultimate destructive force, and he “seizes upon sexual derangement as the most dramatic symptom of the failure, of society to provide spiritual and emotional outlets” (Comercher 142). Man's sexual desires and dreams are most easily thwarted with resultant violent acts, and Homer, victimized by his own dreams, is finally betrayed by the false vestal he chooses to serve, the maiden of that same Hollywood God of Sex that Mrs. Loomis has dedicated her son to.

Homer serves Faye Greener and literally acts as a handmaiden to her dreams. Faye is the basis of the Hollywood dream, a hopeful sexual goddess of the silver screen. Leslie Fielder quite properly calls her the central figure of the novel. She is Hollywood's special symbol, "the blond bitch in all of her archetypal purity," (Fielder 326) and as West presents her, she is the ultimate cheat of the Western world. Faye is unattainable, eternally virgin, and destructive. Her relationship to Fay Doyle of Miss Lonelyhearts is obvious: she, too, is the fate of all men. But Mrs. Doyle's lust is animal: she belongs to the moon-driven, lunatic sea of life, and much of Faye's appeal is in her position above the welter of the mass of men. From false dreams, she has created a shield which gives her an "egglike self-sufficiency" (320).
She has a perverted and disintegrated mind set and is conscious that this power to hold men under her thumb,

comes in part from her beauty, which as Tod notes

is that of a tree, structural…riot a quality of mind or heart. Perhaps even whoring couldn't damage it for that reason, only age or accident or disease, (346)

but Faye' s sexuality, unlike her beauty, is not a product of nature: It is the product of a cultural obsession. Not surprisingly, West has a similar desecration of natural beauty in mind when he describes Faye in terms of trees. There are parallels in the Old Testament, particularly in Jeremiah's sermons to the straying Israelites who transform the grace of trees into tinseled idols:

For the customs of the people are vain, for one
cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.
They deck it with silver, and with gold: they fasten It with nails and with hammers, that it move not. (Jeremiah 963)

Faye has been turned into an idol, doomed to be worshipped as something unnatural. She is not part of the sea of life nor can she be affected by it. As Tod explains:
Nothing could hurt her. She was 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.

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 moon driven power, they could no more than net the bright cork for a moment. (406)

Faye Greener, unlike her prototype, is a goddess of lust in a world where Eros, the God of Love, lies "face downward in a pile of old newspapers and bottles" (352), and her fate is to be purchased by all men.

As Stanley Hyman suggests, Faye is America's sexual Frankenstein monster (36), the final product of the science of dreams. In Leslie Fledler's words:

She is the dream dreamed by all of America, the dream of love which is death and in a strange sense she remains virginal as death is virginals the immaculate, degraded anima of a nation her realest existence is on a screen. (326)
It is through Tod Hackett that West describes the threatening aspect of Faye's swordlike legs and platinum blond hair. While gazing at a publicity photograph of her, he decides that

Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle,
hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love.
If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do it with a scream. You couldn't expect to rise again. Your teeth would be driven into your skull like nails into a pine board and your back would be broken. You wouldn't even have time to sweat. (271)

West further defines Faye through elaborate metaphors based on bird imagery, and she is also related to Homer's lizard which is "self-conscious and irritable" (297). As Homer's houseguest, Faye is narcissistic and irritable, and she brings him the reptilian terror of sex. But Faye equally terrifying when identified with the black hen, "all over scabs and almost naked" (373) which Miguel uses to stimulate his fighting cocks. Faye parallels the hen in her relationship to Earle and Miguel and acts as a catalyst to their violence. Her ritualistic dancing causes to fight over her at their desert camp, and later, at the party following the cook fight, they are joined by Abe Kusich in a struggle for her body which results in her clothes being torn from her back and a symbolic near castration of Earle Shoop. After the
party, there is a final battle when Earle finds Faye and the Mexican making love. In the scene of the cook fight, only the birds are heroic, and Faye is more disgusting than the hen in the party which follows. Her sexuality brings the violence of lust, but the artificiality of her life and that of her would-be lovers undercuts the naturalness of their relationship.

Although West sees Faye as a destructive and disintegrated figure, he often suggests that she is more victim than deceiver. When Tod visualized her in flight from the mob of his painting, she is like a game bird, bursting "from cover in complete unthinking panic" (321), and that is precisely what she does following the two fights between Earle and Miguel. Faye is further identified with the trapped quail in the desert camp, whose calls are "full of melancholy and weariness, yet marvelously sweet" (330). There is a semi-private joke behind West's association of Faye and the quail. Faye, who is seventeen and dresses "like a child of twelve (304), is a child in terms of the laws concerning statutory rape in the state of California, and a California would call her a "San Quentin Quail." This legal relationship underlines both Faye’s victimization by her own dreams and the genuine prevented disintegration of a society which lusts after seeming innocence and virginity.

And if Faye is the victim of the crowd’s lusts, she is even more the gull of those cultural dreams which they believe in. Unlike Miss Lonelyhearts’s Betty, Faye does not desire a husband and security; she spends her days dreaming of
instant wealth and stardom. She does not believe in love, and what she describes as love is perhaps not even properly lustful. Her two "lovers," Earle Shoop and Miguel, are flat stereotypes. Earle, who is described as a cartoon drawing, is a typical Hollywood cowboy who loiters outside a saddle shop, talking to his cronies. Miguel, "an image of pure sensuality," (Hyman 36) raises fighting cocks. West's description of him recalls the Tarzan poster which hangs in Faye's bedroom with its "beautiful young man with magnificent muscles" (318). Wearing "a long-haired sweater, called a 'gorilla' in and around Los Angeles, with nothing under it," Miguel is apelike with his oily hair "a mass of tight ordered curls" (328). And despite the attraction of Earle's boyish handsomeness and the appeal of his Western purity, It is Miguel's Latin sensuality which excites Faye. Her lust, like her dreams, has the shape of Hollywood's frauds. She lives completely in the world of movie magazines and the delusions of motion pictures. When Faye spins out her soiled packet of dreams so that Tod can write them up into movie scripts and make them wealthy, each of her stories takes on the form of a trite and perverted myth of Cinderella or the romantic unreality of Hollywood. Even the method of Faye's dreaming is pathetic:

She would get some music on the radio, then lie down on her bed and shut her eyes. She had a large assortment of stories to choose from... she would go over them in her mind, as though they were a pack of cards, discarding one after another until she found the one that suited...
While she admitted that her method was too mechanical for the best results... she said that any dream was better than no dream and beggars couldn't be choosers...

However, her critical powers ended there. She only smiled at the mechanics, (316-317)

because she cannot recognize the sham of her delusions, Faye is destined to attempt to live them, and in doing so, she becomes the destructive figure she wishes to represent.

Although realizing the falseness of Faye, wary of the sexual entity she represents, Tod Hakett is drawn to her. In fact, her artificiality is attractive to him. As West explains:

Had any other girl been so affected, he would have thought her intolerable. Faye's affectations...were so completely artificial that he found them charming (316)

Through Tod, West presents the constant performance of Faye’s life as it deceives her and cheats others. Her most "charming" habit is "smiling in a peculiar, secret way and running her tongue over her lips, promising all sorts of intimacies” (385). This smile is "really as simple and automatic as the word thanks," and Faye uses it "to reward anyone for anything, no matter how important" (385). Her
gestures and expressions are separate from her words and almost pure. Faye is too mechanical, too much of a hoax to be taken seriously, but all men, even those whose intelligence and sensitivity should prevent seduction, are vulnerable to her wiles.

Working as a hack artist, designing the sets and costumes for motion pictures, Tod is acutely aware of the artificiality of Hollywood, and West constantly filters his own views through his protagonist. But although Tod despises the mob as one who creates it, he also identifies with it in his feelings for Faye (Light 183). Tod's “paradoxical commitment to what repulses him creates a dramatic tension in the novel” (Comerchero 29) which is only relieved by the insane laugh in the final scene. Because the reader identifies with Tod's sensitivity and the awareness that "few things are sadder than the truly monstrous" (262), Tod's reactions to Faye are distressing.

As he observes her "struggling in the soft grasp" of daydreams "as though she were trying to run in a swamp" (326). Tod is taken with a desire to violently rape her. Later, with that in mind, he attempts to catch her as she flees from the desert camp, and he afterward fantasizes hitting her on the head with a bottle and violating her unconscious body. Tod's dreams of raping Faye are nearly comic as they are presented, but the horror of what he intends is striking. Using the language of pulp literature, Tod seems to dedicate himself as a sacrifice to the very idolatry which he sees about him.
Perhaps, as Victor Comerchero suggests, Tod's escape to dreams of Faye is his defense against the "great cheat" of reality (Ibid 136), but it is also a manifestation of his inability to communicate his frustration at being rejected by "an actress who had learned from bad models in a bad school" (316) and at the artistic tragedy of his own life. As a contributor to Hollywood, the "Sargasso of the Imagination" (353), Tod, like his friend Claude Estee, is cheated as an artist (Light 181). In his dream of ravishing Faye and dying in her arms, Tod shares the death wish of the crowd. But until the riot begins and he witnesses the true terror of senseless mob violence as they murder Homer, Tod does not comprehend his relationship to them. In a sense, as he predicts, Tod is "galvanized into sensibility" (365) by pursuing Faye. In the end, he fully recognizes the potential violence within all men as he interacts with the rioting mass.

Posing as a prophet, Tod predicts and dreams of the destruction of Hollywood, and he mentally creates a fantasy of defiling its unholy idol. This violence of his, a seemingly personal emotion, is the same insanity which drives his torchbearers, and although Tod scoffs at their makeshift religions, he shares their one true faith. Desiring to destroy Babylon or to be destroyed by it, Tod may be guided by a legitimate hatred, but in reality he differs from the mob only in knowing what he hates. Finally recognizing the sources of the mob's malady, Tod becomes cognizant of his own motivations, and he violently rejects the mob, viciously kicking at a woman who attempts to drag him into its vortex so he may escape to his painting. The refutation of the crowd's violence, and his own guilt in
sharing and creating their dreams is reflected in his vision of himself throwing a stone at the torchbearers as they sing and dance joyously in the red light of the flames (420). His final, cathartic laugh, as he imitates the police oar's siren, is a personal escape from the betrayal of dreams and an alarm at the monstrous violence they produce.

With its apocalyptic mob and flickering flames, Tod's painting is reminiscent of the conclusion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "My Kinsman, Major Mollneux," but the meaning of the heroes laugh has changed. Hawthorne's naive youth, Robin Mollneux, needs to enter the raging chaos of American democracy so that he might make a living, and Hawthorne suggests that he joins the forces of the devil in doing so. On the other hand, Tod must escape the tyrannical mob to save his artistic soul. Before the pandemonium, Tod, too laughs with the crowd in self-defense when someone knocks off his hat, but he does not subjugate himself to the mob. His final purgative laugh, unlike Robin's, is not compliant. Tod has no desire to melt into the diabolic mass of man. For him, the passage is not into society but out of it, and in his laugh he discovers a unique escape from its maw.

Laughing is the only viable method of dealing with West's world of dream and disintegration, and it involves not only recognizing the vacuity of perverted dreams but also, reacting against them with whatever artistic media is available. Tod's development as a character essentially consists of his finally being able to laugh at the falseness of men's dreams. If one can laugh at the fantasies of
Hollywood of America, he can begin to cope with its violence and endure its fraudulent and disintegrated facades.

As Tod moves through the actions of the novel, he is continually incapable of laughing. In fact, he strives to avoid that act. When he contemplates the hideous edifices which line the canyons of Los Angeles, he is struck by the contrived tawdriness of their architecture; but, resisting his natural impulse, he does not laugh since he believes,

it is hard to laugh at the need for beauty no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are.

But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous. (262)

Nor can he destroy his accurate description of Faye's invitation to destruction, and when he laughs at his rhetoric, as West explains, "nothing was destroyed by it" (271). Tod partially accepts Faye's dreams, and he succumbs to his own fantasies of what she represents. Without the power to laugh at her, he is vulnerable to sexual violence, the threat of believing in her. Indeed, without laughter, he must accept Hollywood and all of its varied monsters. As he sits in the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming," he is forced to acknowledge a religious fanatic's "messianic rage and the emotional response of his hearers" (366) to look upon the crowd's "fury with respect, appreciating its awful, anarchic power..., aware that they
had it in them to destroy civilization" (366). Only by laughing can Tod nullify the threats he perceives.

With the exception of Homer Simpson and the people of the crowd, all of the characters in *The Day of the Locust* are able to laugh, to free themselves of the terrifying violence which is the sole substitute for thwarted dreams. Abe, Claude, Faye, and Harry Greener all provide Tod with models, but Claude and Abe are the figures who Tod must emulate in order to escape the crowd.

His recognition of the value of Abe Kusich comes first. As James F. Light notes, Abe is a consummate symbol of the suffering outsider. He is a Jew in a Christian world, and he is also a dwarf who "attempts to experience a satisfactory sexual experience with a normal woman" (Ibid 147). But Abe is also a symbol of warped and frustrated virility with his manly grip and his stronger sexual appetites. And although the dwarf is both comic and pathetic, his form contains a hint of heroism for West. Like the red cook with the broken beak, Abe is game; he is willing to fight beyond his physical potential. West continually contrasts the dwarf with Homer who is likened to "one of Picasso's great sterile athletes" (290), and he further accentuates their dissimilarities by comparing them both to dogs. Homer is "like a cringing clumsy dog, who is always anticipating a blow" (367), and whose crying sounds "like... a dog lapping gruel" (290). On the other hand, Abe is feisty, and his friends play with him "like one does with a growling puppy, staving off his mad rushes and then baiting him to rush again" (269). The dwarf is incapable of
crying and Homer can do nothing else. In a sense West has created two half men, but the dwarf’s reactions to the sufferings of life have a meaning. "Honest” Abe can laugh at Faye Greener:

The four short sounds, ha-ha and again ha-ha,
distinct musical notes, were made by the dwarf.
"You could learn from him," Tod said.
"What?" Homer asked, turning to look at him. (388)

Homer cannot learn from Abe, but Tod can appreciate his lesson in living. But despite his intellectual esteem for Abe's means of engaging life, Tod must finally learn to follow Claude Estee's lead because Claude's escape is an intellectual one and Abe's is instinctive.

Claude, a successful screen writer, is cheated by his profession as Tod is. They are both artists whose talents have been diverted to hack work. Claude has cultivated escapes from the unreal reality of Hollywood. As Tod notes, he has the ability to take on guises, to make his world absurd and still use it to advantages:

He was master of an involved comic rhetoric that permitted him to express his moral indignation and still keep his reputation for worldliness and wit. (276)
The screenwriter can make a joke of the contrived architecture of his bogus house, "an exact reproduction of the old Dopey mansion near Biloxi, Mississippi" (271). By imitating a Civil War colonel, pretending he has a large belly although he is “a dried-up little man with the rubbed features and stopped shoulders of a postal clerk" (271-272), Claude converts his fraudulent world into a joke. When he calls "Here, you black rascal! A mint julep" (272) to his Chinese butler, who responds by delivering a Scotch and soda, the scene is absurdly comic. Claude can imitate the absurdity of his sham house without falling prey to it, and he can laugh away Tod's professions of love while sympathizing with them.

West conceives of an elite of laughers, and Claude is one of its forerunners. He differs from the other characters, as Tod does, in the acuity of his perceptions of the ridiculous. But mere recognition of the absurd, as Tod proves, is not enough to escape dreams and violence; Claude has coupled his observations with laughter, and he can endure both his own life and that he is faced with. Laughter must follow recognition, and in West's nightmare world, that is the only way for a sensitive man to survive.

Still, Tod does learn something of laughter’s power from Faye and Harry. Faye can laugh as she goes to work as a prostitute for Mrs. Jennings, but her scatter-brained laughter is not a genuine solution. Like her flights from violence into the world of dreams, her laughter is not aware enough of the cruelty of the world to be meaningful to West. It is only a manifestation of her rather pathetic dream of
superiority to humanity, and like Miss Lonelyhearts’s Betty, her lack of sensitivity negates her significance. Faye who can only laugh at the mechanics of dreams, is merely frivolous and, much worse, stupid.

It is perhaps ironic that Faye can be defeated by a laugh, and both Homer and Tod have such a simple weapon at their disposal. Harry Greener uses his laugh as a means to control his daughter, it comes in several forms. His ultimate weapon is in great demand in Hollywood:

This new laugh was not critical; it was horrible. When she was a child, he used to punish her with it. It was his masterpiece. There was a director who always called on him to give it when he was shooting a scene in an Insane asylum or a haunted castle.

It began with a sharp, metallic crackle, …increased in volume until it became a rapid bark,…fell away again to an obscene chuckle… It climbed until it was the nicker of a horse, then still higher to become a machinelike screech.(307)

This "machinelike screech" is not a real laugh. Harry, like Shrike, is little more than a shrieking puppet. The laugh, West's two-edged sword, can become an end in itself, and its wielders, transformed into grotesques, can be wind-up dolls who lacerate themselves along with the illusions they detest.
Pathetic Harry Greener is an affirmed failure characterized by illusions and a laugh, but except as a symptom of his illness, the laugh is meaningless. As a perpetual vaudeville clown, Harry laughs as a defense against the harsh realities of the world, but he no longer recognizes them. While discovering that "most people...won't go out of their way to punish a clown" (282), he has sacrificed all happiness and destructiveness of clownship. His masklike face will not "permit degrees of feeling, only the furthest degree" (336), and once he has begun his act or to dream of the past, Harry must "run down like a clock" (335). Lacking even the humanity of violence, he is more of a "machine for making jokes" than Shrike. Harry illustrates the destiny of those who become constant performers for the crowd. His life is hopeless, and even in death he looks like "the interlocutor in a minstrel show" (344). Although Tod learns something of the value of laughter from him, the completeness of his defense is self-destructive since Harry's laughter, even more than Faye’s, lacks a sense of the ridiculous.

What distinguishes *Locust* from West's earlier American counterparts is Tod's physical survival. This aspect of the novel is what gives West's message a more horrific ring. With the death of Miss Lonelyhearts and Lemuel Pitkin, there is a sense of closure and finality. Both Miss Lonelyhearts and Lemuel are digested by the novel and spit out once the dreams are done with them. They are destroyed and disintegrated and the reader can move on. Tod's mimicking of the police siren sound, however, lingers painfully in the imagination. It shows how Tod is reduced to mechanism like his novelistic counterparts. In the end, however, he is left in the
body to endure its horrors. Martin states that West's novels should "be classified as Cautionary Tales, parables about a Kingdom of Hell whose ruler is not so much the Father of Lies as the Father of Wishes" (146). His statement applies best to *Locust*. In *Miss Lonelyhearts*, the victims of the Christ Dream indicated that it had failed them. Lemuel was oblivious to the fact that the dream had ever hurt him. In this final novel, however, the victims interact with the American Dream. The dream infects and disintegration, and yet somehow lays dormant waiting for a trigger that will unleash its lethal effects and bring them face to face with the "Father of Wishes." West warns his reader of this confrontation, but again, in typical modernist fashion, the novel says no more.

Part of what makes *Locust* such an intriguing novel is that West was present at the "Golden Age" of Hollywood, and prophesied truths about it that still resonate today. Although the literary world was prematurely robbed of such a great author in 1940, he left the world at a very significant turning point. In the writing of *Locust* it is almost as if he, the author, had sounded the alarm before leaving this world.

In a world where people still gawk at stars in the same way they do in *Locust*, West's message has inexhaustible resonance. Today's dreamer gawks more intently, in a multimedia world. He or she can be more preoccupied with a star having a baby than perhaps anything occurring in the actual, personal existence. Modern dreamers are also more focused on the bodies projected—not just by Hollywood but media in general—than with their own bodies.
Today's American Dreamer is fed dreams at a horrifically faster pace than in the world West depicted, even while remaining as passive and dormant as his characters. West's Disease is America's disease; the broken carnival marches on. Jonathan Veitch's citation of the O.J. Simpson murder scandal of the 1990s is an excellent example of the disease's contemporary manifestation. Veitch states, "It is possible that we may come to forgive O.J. Simpson for murder—those of us who believe he did it… But we will never forgive Simpson for letting us peek behind the mask, for revealing the emptiness of our own aspirations as a culture" (136). Most people, continues Veitch "already suspect the truth. But we must not, cannot, confront that truth directly" (136). As long as there are celebrities dangling babies from balconies and Robert Blake-like trials to supplant O.J. Simpson, avoiding the truth will not be a problem—and the broken carnival of the American Dream will continue to disintegrate self identities of people who relentlessly pursue their futile dreams.