IMAGES AND STRUCTURE IN NATHANAEL WEST'S NOVEL SATIRES

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ABSTRACT

Before we can judge a writer, we must tentatively decide upon the appropriate criteria by which to measure his achievement. Various critics have praised Nathanael West for the exact things for which others have damned him. This study is an attempt to clarify the nature of West's work, and thereby to clarify the grounds upon which he must be judged.

The nature of his fictional world is crucial. This study puts West's images, which are largely responsible for the creation of the fictional world and its characters, into five groups, each of which exhibits a separation of qualities. After the results of West's divided images are seen, the study considers the function of plot within West's four works. Essentially, the plot, like the extremely limited characterization, enables us to see the inter-relationships within the fictional world and, at the same time, prevents us from becoming emotionally involved with the fictional world and characters as we normally do in novels.

Thus West is seen as a satirist who, in his best works, Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust, uses
the conventions of the novel with considerable skill to show us the all-pervasiveness of illusion in life. But, unlike most satirists, West provides no alternatives and does not even provide a sense of "what ought to be" in his work. He merely records his vision in such a way that we can see and are compelled to acknowledge the nature of his vision of life and of existence. West uses his plots to order his images into a coherent, logical pattern which sets forth the consequences of man's being divided within and among himself.

When we see that West is primarily a satirist working within the conventions of the novel, we can understand the flatness of his characters, their divided natures, the horrible ironies of the plot, the cryptic treatment of events, and the concentration upon images. We can, in fact, see that West was an excellent satirist who succeeded in his attempt to use the novel as a vehicle for satire.
Every student owes his teachers his sincere gratitude. I am thankful for this opportunity to acknowledge those who, I now realize, taught me most: Dr. Stanley Read, who reminded me many times that the most important thing in the study of literature is to enjoy it and help others to enjoy it, and Dr. Philip Pinkus, who taught me most of what I know about satire. Future readers of this study owe their thanks for what clarity and logic it exhibits to Professors Bill Messenger, David Evans, and Ian Ross, who in different ways and at different times forced me to be more coherent; most of its deficiencies reflect my inability to learn from these men, and the rest arise from my stubbornness to change a word here and a paragraph there.

And, of course, there is the typist . . . .
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Beauty in art reminds one what is worth while. . . . You feel bucked up when you come on a swift moving thought in Plato or on a fine line in a statue.

Even this pother about gods reminds one that something is worth while. Satire reminds one that certain things are not worth while. It draws one to consider time wasted.

. . . . . . .

The serious artist . . . presents the image of his desire, of his hate, or his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference. The more precise his record the more lasting and unassailable his work of art.

Ezra Pound
"The Serious Artist"
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, Nathanael West has been a little-known and seldom-studied American writer. His works, published between 1930 and 1940, fell almost stillborn from the press. Only one review of The Dream Life of Balso Snell greeted its first publication, a printing of 500 copies in 1931. Miss Lonelyhearts, published in 1933, received generally favorable reviews, but the publisher, being nearly bankrupt, was unable to take advantage of the good reviews, and less than 800 copies were sold. With his third book, A Cool Million, West fared even worse: poor reviews and sales were his reward. The Day of the Locust, West's last work, published in 1939, had a mixed reception and only 1500 copies were sold. However, West's reputation has increased steadily since his death in 1940, and he is now considered to be among the major chroniclers of America in the 1930's.

The publication in 1961 of James Light's Nathanael West: An Interpretative Study marked the beginning of
a serious reconsideration of a relatively forgotten author. It includes an extensive biography of West, and since the present study is not about West but about his work, I recommend Light's book as an excellent treatment of West's tragic life. Two other full-length studies have been published: Victor Comerchero's *Nathanael West: The Ironic Prophet* (1964) and Randall Reid's *The Fiction of Nathanael West: No Redeemer, No Promised Land* (1967). All of these works are, of course, valuable. But neither they nor the numerous scholarly articles which have been published attack head-on the basic problem of the nature of West's technique and form. Light, for example, explains the peculiar division in West's works between acceptance and rejection of suffering in terms of West's being a second generation Jew, whereas I believe it is more important to identify the formal features of the works which reflect such a division. Randall Reid's book, on the other hand, deals with stylistic aspects of West's work at considerable length, and yet the word "satire" does not appear in its entire 174 pages. Victor Comerchero, like Reid, analyzes West's themes and techniques, but he deals mainly with West's use of clichéd language.
However, these critics do not attempt to answer the question which I think is basic to an understanding of West: are Nathanael West's works novels or satires? Or, to put it in a slightly different form: what is the relationship between novel and satire in West's work? The question must be answered, at least tentatively, if we are to understand West's work at all. And, if we are to understand contemporary satires and novels, we must understand their relationship in West and other earlier modern works. Before we can judge West as a writer we must know what standards and criteria we should apply to his work, and at the same time how West, as a writer, experimented with prose fiction and set new standards and criteria. If we can decide whether West is a satirist or a novelist, or some combination of the two, we will have both a better insight into his work and a better understanding of the development of satire and the novel.

Satirists have traditionally used other genres, and the novel is no exception. If we judge a satire written in novel form by the standards of a novel we will find the work fails as a novel. The judgement, however, will be fallacious. Thus, before we can judge West's work, which is clearly novelistic, we must decide whether the appropriate criteria are those of the novel or satire.
An examination of the imagery West uses to create his fictional world and its characters is the first step towards an answer to these questions. I think the imagery is central because, following Philip Pinkus' argument, it is through the imagery that we come to see the artist's vision of life, and if the work is a satire it is through its imagery that we comprehend the satirist's perception of "evil". The satiric vision, then, literally presents a vision. To date, West's critics have discussed his images as they relate to his themes, and his fictional world as it relates to his characters. I propose to invert the analysis, and to concentrate on the images. By so doing I hope to show the kind of fictional world West creates and, further, I hope to demonstrate the relationship between satire and novel within his work. Throughout, I will be using "image" to refer to concrete pictures created in West's work. And, because West is so pictorial in his narration, I will also use the phrase "image-event" to refer to image clusters which constitute a complete event.

My basic premise is that a work's imagery both creates and reinforces our impression of the world presented in the work; if we are to understand the fictional world and its characters, we must know how they are created. Beyond a knowledge of the imagery,
we must also understand the use of plot to provide structure within a work. Only after an examination of both these aspects of West's work can we attempt to say whether West is a satirist or a novelist, or clarify the nature of his enigmatic works.

The starting point is the fact that West's fictional world has had a mixed reception. Ignoring the varying degrees of approbation or disapprobation, a very brief look at the critics will demonstrate the division. A. M. Tibbetts has said that West's world is not complete and recognizable: "His world was cut in two--half of it was missing."

Further, "the trouble is . . . that the missing half is the most important part of an artist's invention--real people doing real things. There is simply not enough in West's two best novels about recognizable people and recognizable situations." Henry Popkin concurs with Tibbetts' evaluation of West's fictional world, if not with the criticism: "West's world is weird, unreal, distorted, speeded up." William White also feels that Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust are "fantastic and exaggerated in theme and treatment."

Another group of readers and critics has reacted differently to West's world. Allan Seager is "of the opinion that The Day of the Locust was not fantasy
imagined, but fantasy seen."\(^{15}\) R. B. Gehman straddles the fence when he says that West "constructed scenes that were not only miraculous in their descriptive accuracy but also by their unashamed intensity were so far above realism as to embarrass, or frighten, the reader into acknowledging, almost against his will, the shameful and terrifying reality of reality."\(^{16}\) Although Gehman suggests that West is "above realism", he does admit West's use of accurate description. Finally, Randall Reid argues that West, by the time he wrote *The Day of the Locust*, realized that "clear vision, not imagination, is the artist's fundamental tool."\(^{17}\)

Clearly there are two opposing views of West's world, and consequently of his imagery. For some West is a Surrealist; for others a human camera recording reality.\(^{18}\) The reason for this divergence of views lies in West's imagery itself.

West's images are accurate and yet they seem to be fantastic. West frequently presents two descriptions of an object or an event, or divides an object into two parts and describes each part in terms of conflicting qualities. Because his imagery separates what we normally join, or joins what we normally separate, his world seems fantastic, but is more accurately understood as "fantasy seen."\(^{19}\)
West's images divide people and things, and exhibit, as Victor Comerchero has said, "clinical objectivity". They present not only appearance, but also reality: "As [Tod] walked along, he examined the evening crowd. A great many of the people wore sports clothes . . . . The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping, not boating . . . the girl in slacks and sneakers with a bandanna around her head had just left a switchboard, not a tennis court" (DL, 261). This series of images presents conflicting descriptions of various people; we see one quality, and then an opposing quality. West does not present only one part of the description and rely upon the reader's expectations; that is, state what "is" and let the reader infer what "ought" to be. On the contrary, he explicitly creates a disparity between appearance and reality within his images or through contrasting images. In *A Cool Million* there is a display of "objects whose distinction lay in the great skill with which their materials had been disguised. Paper had been made to look like wood, wood like rubber, rubber like steel, steel like cheese, cheese like glass, and, finally, glass like paper" (CM, 239). Again, West presents two conflicting descriptions of what "is". Although the disparity between appearance and reality is less explicit in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, an implicit disparity
is apparent when we learn that Miss Lonelyhearts "saw a man who appeared to be 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" (ML, 115). Here West describes two events in such a way that we immediately see not only the irony and pathos of the situations, but also the conflict between physical reality and mental illusion. Both characters are ugly and yet they persist in their dreams of beauty and love. In these examples West sets up an opposition which creates a divided fictional world populated by divided characters.

West conjoins or separates qualities of objects or people in ways which challenge the reader's expectations. Before distinguishing the various types of images he creates as a result of his disjunction-conjunction technique, a general example is in order. I have just presented one aspect of West's divided vision--his technique of describing one object in two ways. A variation of this technique is to describe an object in terms of a dissimilar object. When Miss Lonelyhearts looks at the sky, we discover that "the grey sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only
a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine" (ML, 71). It is not unusual to see grey sky, but it is unusual to describe such a natural occurrence in terms of a human product such as a soiled eraser. It is not unusual to see a newspaper caught by the wind and imagine it is a kite, but it is unusual to describe it in animate terms, suggesting that the kite is like a bird with a broken spine. Inserted between these two accurate and fantastic images is a thematic image of opposition. Miss Lonelyhearts is looking for a miracle, an angel, a flaming cross, but sees only a man-made thing which cannot fly because of its broken spine. In three sentences West has mirrored Miss Lonelyhearts' mind, his desire for an answer to suffering and the reality that there are no miracles. The disparity between desire and reality is reflected in and reinforced by the incongruous descriptions which frame the dream: sky and soiled eraser, newspaper and broken, bird-like kite. The sense of fantasy rests on the fusion of two dissimilar, but ordinary and real, concrete objects.

West creates both his fictional world and its characters by means of divided images. Usually, we learn more about a character's appearance than any thing else, and what we see is usually a separation of qualities.
In *The Day of the Locust*, for example, Mrs. Schwartzen has "a pretty, eighteen-year-old face and a thirty-five-year-old neck [which] is veined and sinewy" (*DL*, 272). Similarly, Miss Farkis in *Miss Lonelyhearts* has "long legs, thick ankles, big hands, a powerful body, a slender neck and a childish face made tiny by a man's haircut" (*ML*, 72).

When West does go beyond his character's surface appearance, he usually isolates particular qualities, psychological states, and philosophical attitudes. His technique is similar to Sherwood Anderson's as explained in the opening of *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson's imaginary writer had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me . . . The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

. . . . . . .

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques . . . 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 embraced became a falsehood. 22

In West, too, the sense of distortion and of the grotesque arises from the separation and isolation of truths. 23

Like Anderson, West sets his relatively static characters
in motion within a fictional world. The second part of the present study will examine the nature of West's plotting and its function in his work. But this logically follows an analysis of the images themselves.

The first task is to see how West creates his fictional world and its characters through the use of divided images. We must both note the essentially mundane quality of the components of each part of each separated image, and clarify the dominant kinds of divided images, if we are to comprehend the tension of West's "half-world". An analysis of the imagery will demonstrate that West's fictional world in each work is divided in the same way as the characters which populate that world. And an examination of the plot's function in each work will demonstrate that it is used to support the imagery and to move each work, step by step, towards one devastating image.

Once we understand the basic technique used to create the world and the characters, and the function of the plot, it will be clear that West's technique is unlike that frequently used to create either satires or novels. West's fictional world is not structured solely to form specific and obvious links with the external everyday world and continually comment upon the real world, as is usual in satire; nor is it created to elicit our concern
for the characters within the fictional world, as is usual in novels. But before we can talk about West's use of his fictional world, we must understand the nature of the images which create that world and the characters within it.
CHAPTER II

KINDS OF IMAGES

Many critics have noted West's use of imagery, but few have examined it in detail. Randall Reid, for example, recognizes that the themes of West's work form oppositions (actor, audience; order, disorder; deadness, violence; dreams, misery), but he fails to point out that the imagery is largely responsible for these divisions.\(^1\) Victor Comerchero realizes that "more than anything else, it is the disparity between stimulus and response that creates the intensity of Westian man,"\(^2\) but he does not see that West's entire fictional world, and all of his characters, is divided by opposing, irreconcilable qualities and characteristics.\(^3\)

For the purposes of discussion, it will be useful to put West's images into categories. Although the distinctions set up in this chapter are somewhat arbitrary, they do provide a basis for a detailed analysis. The different kinds of images seem to me to fall into five groups. First, images which show the mental and emotional qualities of a character separated from his physical ones.
Next, images in which the human and organic are seen as inhuman and mechanical. Third, images of the actor either alienated from, or identical with, his role. Fourth, grotesque images seen as natural. Finally, images in which ordinary responses to events are disjointed or inverted. And, of course, there remain simple images, external to these categories, which accentuate the variously divided images.

When we look at each kind of image, it will become clear that, although West's fictional world seems to be exaggerated, distorted, and grotesque, the disturbing quality arises from the separation of conflicting attributes, the juxtaposition of opposing qualities, and the constant disparity between appearance and reality. In fact, it will be seen that the imagistic components of West's fictional world are of an essentially mundane nature. It will also become apparent that the characters mirror the divided world in which they exist, and vice versa. Ironically, we will see that the divided images unify West's work.
Throughout his work, West uses the distinction between mind and body by separating the mental and physical qualities of a person or by reflecting mental states in physical appearances. West's technique works in two ways. He will create an image which either separates what we normally join or joins what we normally separate. Either way, by dissociating the mental from the physical, he surprises and startles the reader. In *The Day of the Locust*, for example, Homer Simpson's hands define his character and present an image which depicts his divided being:

He lay stretched out on the bed, collecting his senses and testing the different parts of his body. Every part was awake but his hands. They still slept. He was not surprised. When he had been a child, he used to stick pins into them and once had even thrust them into a fire. Now he used only cold water.

He got out of bed in sections, like a poorly made automaton, and carried his hands into the bathroom. He turned on the cold water. When the basin was full, he plunged his hands in up to the wrists. They lay quietly on the bottom like a pair of strange aquatic animals. When they were thoroughly chilled and began to crawl about, he lifted them out and hid them in a towel.

He was cold. He ran hot water into the tub and began to undress, fumbling with the buttons of his clothing as though he were undressing a stranger. He was naked before the tub was full enough to get in and he sat down on a stool to wait. He kept his enormous hands folded quietly on his belly. Although absolutely still, they seemed curbed rather than resting. (*DL*, 289)
Homer's hands are separate entities; they betray his emotional impotence and physical drives. His hands live on despite his repression of himself. Sometimes he can control them:

His big hands left his lap, where they had been playing "here's the church and here the steeple", and hid in his armpits. They remained there for a moment, then slid under his thighs. A moment later they were back in his lap. The right hand cracked the joints of the left, one by one, then the left did the same service for the right. They seemed easier for a moment, but not for long. They started "here's the church" again, going through the entire performance and ending with the joint manipulation as before. He started a third time, but catching Tod's eyes, he stopped and trapped his hands between his knees.

It was the most complicated tic Tod had ever seen. What made it particularly horrible was its precision. It wasn't pantomime, as he had first thought, but manual ballet.

When Tod saw the hands start to crawl out again, he exploded.

"For Christ's sake!"

The hands struggled to get free, but Homer clamped his knees shut and held them. (DL, 389)

Most of the time, however, Homer's hands are completely separate from Homer:

One day, while opening a can of salmon for lunch, his thumb received a nasty cut. Although the wound must have hurt, the calm, slightly querulous expression he usually wore did not change. The wounded hand writhed about on the kitchen table until it was carried to the sink by its mate and bathed tenderly in hot water. (DL, 296-297)

Many critics have noticed these hands. Randall Reid, hunting for sources, says

Homer's hands are, of course, taken directly from Wing Biddlebaum, the grotesque whose "slender expressive fingers . . ." become, in *Winesburg, Ohio*, the perfect
symbol of that baffled and wordless urge for expression which forces each character into the "extreme deformity" of his dance.4

It is true, as Reid says, that

The hands . . . embody a theory of the grotesque itself—they reduce a complete psychology to an image. The psychology could be summarized in two prevailing laws: the first is the familiar "I can't express it"; the second is "I can't not express it, either."5

On a technical level, West conveys this psychology by separating Homer's hands from the rest of Homer's body and giving them an animal existence of their own which contrasts with Homer's mental and emotional death. Throughout the work, Homer is both all hands and no hands, due to this separation of attributes.

While many have noticed this essential technique in West, few have seen that it pervades his work. A small but compact illustration of this kind of image is seen in West's treatment of Adore Loomis. Adore, an eight-year-old boy who thinks he is a Frankenstein monster (and is), evidences separation of physical action and mental understanding:

His singing voice was deep and rough and he used the broken groan of the blues singer quite expertly. He moved his body only a little, against rather than in time with the music. The gestures he made with his hands were extremely suggestive.

. . . . . . . .

He seemed to know what the words meant, or at least his body and his voice seemed to know. (DL, 364)
Here West's image depicts the horror of a child acting with sophistication, yet without knowledge. The reader sees at once the disparity between mental awareness and physical action. The image suggests that Adore's body and mind are dissociated.

Similarly, Faye Greener's kisses are empty, and her sensual gestures are thoughtless. The mental and the emotional are separated when she talks to the men at Homer's party:

None of them really heard her. They were all too busy watching her smile, laugh, shiver, whisper, grow indignant, cross and uncross her legs, stick out her tongue, widen and narrow her eyes, toss her head so that her platinum hair splashed against the red plush of the chair back. The strange thing about her gestures and expressions was that they didn't really illustrate what she was saying. They were almost pure. It was as though her body recognized how foolish her words were and tried to excite her hearers into being uncritical. It worked that night . . . . (DL, 387)

Although Faye "uses" these gestures, it is clear she has no others and is therefore limited in her choice of reactions. Thus she too is separate from her body. Her motions are not linked to her emotions and words. Her sexual tongue-caress is an automatic reaction.

Again, West has separated the mental from the physical and created fantasy seen.

Not only Faye and Homer are divided. So are Tod Hackett, Earle Shoop, Harry Greener, Abe Kusich and others.
Tod has a "large, sprawling body . . . and a sloppy grin which makes] him seem completely without talent, almost doltish in fact" (DL, 260). Earle "had a two-dimensional face that a talented child might have drawn with a ruler and compass" (DL, 323), and although West adds detail upon detail, he only reinforces Earle's physical flatness while ignoring completely his mental qualities, thus accentuating his emptiness. Harry Greener

had very little back or top to his head. It was almost all face, like a mask, with deep furrows on either side of the nose and mouth, plowed there by years of broad grinning . . . . Because of them, he could never express anything either subtly or exactly. They wouldn't permit degrees of feeling, only the furthest degree.

Tod began to wonder if it might not be true that actors suffer less than other people . . . . Yet Harry suffered as keenly as anyone, despite the theatricality of his groans and grimaces. (DL, 336-337)

Harry's suffering is separate from his physical expression of suffering. In part, this is West's actor image, but it is also part of his technique of separating the mental from the physical. Abe Kusich, too, demonstrates a kind of disjunction, only in this case it works in reverse. Although he is a dwarf, he is emotionally the most active in the book. He is the one who grabs Earle's testicles and who wants to get some girls. He is the one who pities and loves the dying cock. Thus, although he is physically reduced, he is emotionally expanded.
This could be considered an irony of the plot, but Abe is also an image which contrasts with, for example, Homer’s and Earle’s size and emotional impotence. Even Claude Estee is divided. He greets Tod by doing the impersonation that went with the Southern colonial architecture. He teetered back and forth on his heels like a Civil War colonel and made believe he had a large belly.

He had no belly at all. He was a dried-up little man with the rubbed features and stooped shoulders of a postal clerk. (DL, 271-272)

After we find out that Claude’s impersonation is false and incongruous with his physical nature, his rhetoric also seems out of place.

West’s separation of the mental and physical is all-pervasive in The Day of the Locust where each character is divided in some way. However, The Day of the Locust is an extension of The Dream Life of Balso Snell which is premised on the separation of dreams and reality, and the offsetting fusion of art and excrement—man’s highest spiritual activity and his basest physical function. The Dream Life of Balso Snell is composed of a series of images and episodes which depict man’s reach for something mental and his limitations. The images demonstrate the separation of aspiration (mental) from reality (physical drives). Religion, art and love are debunked. When Maloney the Areopagite has finished his précis of Saint
Puce's life, ecstasy, and death, Balso's shattering comment is "I think you're morbid..." (BS, 13). Like religion, art is essentially physical. John Gilson tells us that he plans to write a play during which "the ceiling of the theatre will be made to open and cover the occupants with tons of loose excrement" (BS, 31). Art is the product of the human mind, digested experience, and, therefore, excrement. Gilson says: "What the hell do I care about art! Do you know why I wrote that ridiculous story--because Miss McGeeney, my English teacher, reads Russian novels and I want to sleep with her. But maybe you run a magazine. Will you buy it? I need the money!"

Art is a means to sexual union or money, not truth or beauty. Love, too, is base and only sexual. It is an act. Balso's "seduction" of Mary McGeeney is a farce without meaning.

Each of man's dreams ends up by being debased. The whole of The Dream Life of Balso Snell is a dream and ends in the sterile ejaculation of a nocturnal emission. The mental actions are either separated from the physical or serve the physical. Either way, West's divided images force the reader to see their disjunction and frustrate any attempt on the reader's part to fuse them.

The separation of the mental and the physical is a part of Miss Lonelyhearts also. Peter Doyle is like Homer Simpson in that he becomes an image of a suffering
man who cannot act, or even understand why he cannot act. Like Homer's, Doyle's hands are separate from his mind and have their own existence. Miss Lonelyhearts watched the play of the cripple's hands. At first they conveyed nothing but excitement, then gradually they became pictorial. They lagged behind to illustrate a matter with which he was already finished, or ran ahead to illustrate something he had not yet begun to talk about. (ML, 124)

This image makes it clear to the reader that the mind is out of joint and dissociated from the body. Like Faye's gestures, the hands are not coordinated with the words.

West uses this technique of dissociating the mental from the physical most powerfully in The Day of the Locust to create Homer and Harry. The images which depict their characters demonstrate the division West sees in man between aspirations and physical limitations. The characters created by these divided images mirror the divided fictional world in which they exist; that is, the hideous houses which the characters take to be beautiful (or normal) reflect their hideous dreams. West's world seems fantastic because he focuses on two conflicting properties of a character or thing. Homer, for example, is a divided character, but the division is the result of something more basic than conflicting desires. The images demonstrate to us that Homer is irreconcilably divided between emotional desires and physical impotence, and
further that Homer is both a single being and a divided being. Each aspect of his being is perfectly normal; the startling quality of West's images arises from the yoking of opposites within one character.
Besides separating the mental from the physical and demonstrating the coexistence of these opposing qualities in each character, West often uses images which make the human seem inhuman. Logically, there are several permutations of this kind of image. The human can be made mechanical, or the mechanical human. Also, the human can be bestial, or the beast human. West uses all of these possibilities.

Striking examples of the human made mechanical are Adore’s and Harry’s performances. Adore greets Homer "like a soldier at the command of a drill sergeant" (DL, 362), sings a song which he does not understand, and when he is finished grabs the string of his sailboat, circles the yard "imitating a tugboat" (DL, 364), and toots himself off Homer’s backyard stage. The entire image depicts a mechanical little boy performing a mechanical action. Harry too is mechanical. After his sales pitch to Homer, he starts through it again but stops to get his breath: "Suddenly, like a mechanical toy that had been overwound, something snapped inside of him and he began to spin through his entire repertoire" (DL, 301). In both of
these images the reader sees the human turned inhuman, in these instances, machine-like.

Faye, too, has mechanical gestures and escapes from reality by mechanical means. When she is bored, she lies down and dreams:

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. After getting herself in the right mood, 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. On some days, she would run through the whole pack . . . . (DL, 316)

Faye is a human juke-box and her dreams are recordings of fantasies that she plays to herself:

While she admitted that her method was too mechanical for the best results and that it was better to slip into a dream naturally, 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. (DL, 317)

The reader, on the other hand, sees that the mechanics reveal an inhuman quality—dreams, by their very nature, are unplanned and uncontrolled, but Faye sorts hers like a deck of cards.

Claude Estee, the master of rhetoric, makes love mechanical:

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. You receive a small sweet, frown at yourself in a dirty mirror, adjust your hat, take a firm grip on your umbrella, and walk away, trying to look as though nothing had happened. (DL, 276)
The metaphor is modified and continued: Mrs. Jennings, who managed a brothel, "wasn't vicious . . . . She ran her business just like other women run lending libraries . . . ." (DL, 277). Love is a commercial product which can be bought and sold. It is mechanical and, therefore, inhuman.

In *The Day of the Locust*, the whole Hollywood setting is mechanical. The houses are ugly and inhuman. Homer's rented house has two identical rooms with identical prints of the same picture. The film industry is similar to Faye's deck of dream cards. It produces the illusion of reality with its sets. Tod, while chasing Faye among the movie-lot sets, finds shade "under an ocean liner made of canvas with real lifeboats hanging from davits" (DL, 351), sees "a great forty-foot papier mâché sphinx" (DL, 351), crosses "a desert that was continually being made larger by a fleet of trucks dumping white sand" (DL, 351), watches actors "eating cardboard food in front of a cellophane waterfall" (DL, 351). When he is out of breath, he sits "down on a rock made of brown plaster . . . (DL, 352).

There is nothing real, and little that is human.

There are many other examples of images which depict the human as machine in *The Day of the Locust*. Mrs. Johnson, for example, makes funerals her hobby. However, "Her preoccupation with them wasn't morbid; it was formal. She was interested in the arrangements of the flowers, the
order of the procession, the clothing and deportment of the mourners" (DL, 341). She is, in fact, interested in the mechanics of funerals, not their meaning or significance. The description of Homer’s body—apart from his hands, that is—makes him into a robot. For example, we are told that "He got out of bed in sections, like a poorly made automaton . . ." (DL, 289). When Homer joins the crowd at the end of the book, he "walked more than ever like a badly made automaton and his features were set in a rigid, mechanical grin" (DL, 412).

While the images in Miss Lonelyhearts are much less compact than in The Day of the Locust and often extend over a full chapter, there are a number of extended images which depict the human as mechanical. Miss Lonelyhearts works for a newspaper—a symbol of modern mass communication—which is produced by machines. Miss Lonelyhearts is physically separated from his readers. He receives only letters, which he "answers" with typed words. There is no communication or warmth, only spaces filled on a printed page.

Shrike, the editor, uses the Miss Lonelyhearts column to gain readers. His rhetoric is mechanical; he dictates answers to letters like a machine gun:
"The same old stuff," Shrike said. "Why don't you give them something new and hopeful. Tell them about art. Here, I'll dictate:

"Art Is A Way Out.
"Do not let life overwhelm you. When the old paths are choked with the debris of failure, look for newer and fresher paths. Art is just such a path." (ML, 69)

Shrike also reports on a new religion, a mechanical one. One of its members is going to conduct a service for a condemned slayer: "'Prayers for the condemned man's soul will be offered on an adding machine. Numbers, he explained, are the only universal language'" (ML, 73). Even Shrike's seduction of Miss Farkis is mechanical. His speech is a set-piece, and "When he had reached the end, he buried his triangular face like the blade of a hatchet in her neck" (ML, 74). Shrike is not a man, but an object which chops away at people. He cuts off escape routes for Miss Lonelyhearts like a woodsman fells trees. Destroyed are the South seas, nature, pleasure, art, suicide and drugs:

"My friend, I know of course that neither the soil, nor the South seas, nor Hedonism, nor art, nor suicide, nor drugs, can mean anything to us ... God alone is our escape. The church is our only hope, the First Church of Christ Dentist, where He is worshipped as Preventer of Decay." (ML, 110)

Shrike turns God and religion into object and science, thus reflecting his own mechanical mind.

In West's dehumanizing imagery, the human is often described as bestial, and the beast sometimes seems human.
In Miss Lonelyhearts, Doyle plays at being a dog—and is one. Shrike is a shrike, a bird which impales its insect-prey upon thorns before devouring it. Miss Lonelyhearts himself is almost the innocent lamb being clumsily sacrificed. In The Day of the Locust, there are two cock fights: the literal cock fight which is controlled by the men and is their entertainment; and the metaphorical cock fight between the men which follows and is their fulfilment. Futile destruction is the end of both. In another scene, Earle and Miguel set some quail traps to get food. While the characters set traps, each character in the book, Earle and Miguel included, is trapped himself.

West tends to use bestiality as an over-riding concept. In The Dream Life of Balso Snell, we enter civilization through the horse's anus, the saint is a flea, and the artist is a rat. These images are not developed, but they do jar the reader into seeing the disparity between appearance and reality. A Cool Million begins with Shagpoker Whipple taking Lemuel Pitkin's mother's cow, literally milking the old woman of everything she has. Immediately following this, Lemuel kills a mad, frothing dog. While Lemuel can kill the literal dog, he cannot match, let alone defeat, the metaphoric mad dog--society. Although West's use of bestial images is subordinated to his thematic concerns, it is one aspect of the dehumanizing imagery and works to achieve the same result as the mechanical imagery.
In each of his works, West makes the human bestial or mechanical. The images reflect his divided vision which saw things as their opposites or as themselves and their opposites. The oppositions collapse and the human is seen to be both mechanical and bestial, but it is not human, because the soul is disregarded or denied. All human aspirations are reduced to mechanical processes and biological functions. We should note again that the division is not between what is and what ought to be, but between what West sees and what we normally see. Usually West gives us both of these views in each image, and this forms the opposition of reality and appearance. The sense of "ought" is almost completely lacking in West's work except in the general sense that life ought not to be as it is. Through his mechanical and bestial imagery, West simply draws our attention to these aspects of human existence and implicitly denies the validity of man's aspirations.
Throughout his work, West plays variations on the theme of appearance versus reality. His images present his vision of man separated from himself. Each work develops, at some point, an actor image, the third kind of image that West uses. This is perfectly natural in *The Day of the Locust*, which is a study of Hollywood. But the actor image occurs in the other works as well: in *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* all of the actions are seen as performances; Miss Lonelyhearts tries to act out Christ's role; Lemuel Pitkin ends up as a side-show freak after his dismantling.

In West's works, the actor becomes his role. Harry and Earle, for example, are no more than they appear to be, poor method actors. Men are victims of their roles; and at the same time life is a stage. Man becomes a clown when no action has any meaning:

"Life is but the span from womb to tomb; a sigh, a smile; a chill, a fever; a throe of pain, a spasm of volupty: then a gasping for breath, and the comedy is over, the song is ended, ring down the curtain, the clown is dead."

The clown is dead; the curtain is down. And when I say clown, I mean you. After all, aren't we all . . . clowns? . . . Life is a stage; and we are clowns. What is more tragic than the role of clown? What more filled with
the essentials of great art?—pity and irony . . . . The clowns down front in the theatre are laughing, whistling, belching, crying, sweating and eating peanuts. And you—you are back-stage . . . . Clutching you bursting head . . . you hear nothing but the dull roar of your misfortunes . . . . Your first thought is to rush out there and cut your throat before their faces with a last terrific laugh. But soon you are out front again doing your stuff, the same superb Beagle: dancing, laughing, singing—acting. Finally, the curtain comes down, and, in your dressing room before the mirror, you make the faces that won't come off with the grease paint—the faces you will never make down front. (BS, 50-51)

West, in The Dream Life of Balso Snell, saw that the actor and his role were one and the same thing, but in The Day of the Locust the ironies are compounded because the characters are professional actors without jobs, yet with no time off the set. West's technique of separating qualities and fusing dissimilar qualities is here more complex. West sees life as a performance, but he makes us see, and lament, that there is nothing else. Life is not reality, acting is; and it is a false reality into the bargain. There is no reality. Even Tod and Miss Lonelyhearts, who come close to a true vision of life, cannot escape. Rather than being a reprieve from a life of acting, awareness merely compounds the pain and prohibits escape into illusion. 7

In The Dream Life of Balso Snell, John Gilson and Beagle Darwin see themselves as actors. Beagle, in particular, performs for Saniette, his mistress. "My relations with Saniette", he says, "were exactly those of
performer and audience" (BS, 25). In reaction to her casualness, he becomes more desperate in his performance. Saniette accepted these "feats in somewhat the manner one watches the marvellous stunts of acrobats" (BS, 25).

Finally he says,

I have forgotten the time when I could look back at an affair with a woman and remember anything but a sequence of theatrical poses—poses that I assumed, no matter how aware I was of their ridiculousness, because they were amusing. All my acting has but one purpose, the attraction of the female. (BS, 26)

But when Beagle has got his female, he gets rid of her by writing two imaginary letters, the last of which reads like a scenario. He may be aware of his acting and its ridiculousness, but he continues performing. He continues to perform because there is no other way to impress another person or to communicate. It may be amusing, but it is also indicative of man's isolated state of being. West uses the actor image to demonstrate the disjunction between act and meaning, and ultimately to deny any meaning to any action, or at least any spiritual meaning to religion, art, or love, which in The Dream Life of Balso Snell are merely means of attracting the female.

Whereas The Dream Life of Balso Snell is a work which is basically concerned with the distance between dreams and reality, and which uses the actor image as a means to convey the theme, Miss Lonelyhearts is a work which depicts a man trying to find and fulfil a role.
Miss Lonelyhearts opens with Miss Lonelyhearts' realization that his column is not a joke, that his role is serious (however ridiculous), that "the letters were no longer funny" (ML, 66). He is the actor becoming aware that his life is his role, and that his role is impossible:

Although the deadline was less than a quarter of an hour away, he was still working on his leader. He had gone as far as: "Life is worthwhile, for it is full of dreams and peace, gentleness and ecstasy, and faith that burns like a clear white flame on a grim dark altar." But he found it impossible to continue. The letters were no longer funny. He could not go on finding the same joke funny thirty times a day for months on end. And on most days he received more than thirty letters, all of them alike, stamped from the dough of suffering with a heart-shaped cookie knife. (ML, 66)

He reads the letters searching for "some clue to a sincere answer" (ML, 66), but there is none, not even Christ. Christ is Shrike's joke and his mockery undercuts Miss Lonelyhearts' sincerity. The work dramatizes Miss Lonelyhearts' search for a solution to his readers' and his own problem.

Each character represents a possible role for Miss Lonelyhearts to play, and therefore an avenue of escape: Shrike—cynicism; Betty—simple delusion; Mrs. Shrike—sex; Peter Doyle—open love. Because Miss Lonelyhearts is characterized by his reactions to these various roles, he is the most complex character in the work. But, always, he is the actor trying to find a solution to suffering—to fulfil and act out his earthbound,
Christ-like role. He constantly sees his actions as ridiculous, yet there are no alternatives. Miss Lonelyhearts is defined by his name, his role, and his attempt to play saviour.

West's final image of Miss Lonelyhearts descending to meet Doyle, and Doyle's accidental shooting of Miss Lonelyhearts, presents a picture of the actor who fails to reach his audience. Miss Lonelyhearts' attempt to love leads to destruction. For West, whose vision separates act from meaning, Miss Lonelyhearts' failure is the result of a man being an actor when no actions are exempt from the disjunction between intent and result.

The image of the actor trapped in his role is fully developed in The Day of the Locust. Much of the earlier discussion about West's separation of the mental and physical applies here, as do the examples cited. Both kinds of images are part of the same vision, a vision which denies wholeness or unity to the world.

All of the central characters Tod meets, with the exception of Homer, are actors. The description of Earle Shoop is striking because each detail West adds merely reinforces the two-dimensional stereotype of "a cowboy from a small town in Arizona", who works "in horse-operas" (DL, 322):
Tod found his Western accent amusing. The first time he had heard it, he had replied, "Lo, thar, stranger," and had been surprised to discover that Earle didn't know he was being kidded. Even when Tod talked about "cayuses," "mean hombres" and "rustlers," Earle took him seriously. (DL, 324)

In this exchange, we see that Earle does not know he is acting; he is his role, on stage and off.

Harry Greener is more complex. We first see him when Tod visits him while he is sick in bed. Almost immediately we are told that, "When Harry had first begun his stage career, he had probably restricted his clowning to the boards, but now he clowned continuously" (DL, 282).

The second time we meet Harry we see his continuous acting. Harry uses his clowning to sell polish door to door. It all seems innocent enough until Harry begins to "practice a variety of laughs, all of them theatrical, like a musician tuning up for a concert" (DL, 300). He finds the right one and lets himself go. The results are disastrous:

"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. (DL, 300)

The image continues. Harry stands "with his head thrown back, clutching his throat, as though waiting for the curtain to fall" (DL, 301). Suddenly, he begins his act again:
"Like a mechanical toy . . . . He went through it all in one dizzy spasm, then reeled to the couch and collapsed" (DL, 301). Harry has lost control of his body and his act. West dwells on the image. Finally Harry becomes aware of his sickness. We switch from:

Harry collapsed on the couch and began to breathe heavily. He was acting again. (DL, 302)

to:

"I'm faint," he groaned. Once again he was surprised and frightened. He was faint.

"Get my daughter," he gasped. (DL, 303)

Harry and his role are mixed up. For Harry, his own death is theatrical, but for the reader death is not.

Faye is equally theatrical. She and Harry communicate through acting—he laughs his victim's laugh and she sings. When Harry is dead, Faye acts with cold worldliness. All of her actions are mechanical and like those of an "affected actress". Homer is excited during his first meeting with her when,

Still holding her hair, she turned at the waist without moving her legs, so that her snug dress twisted even tighter and Homer could see her dainty, arched ribs and little, dimpled belly. This elaborate gesture, like all her others, was so completely meaningless, almost formal, that she seemed a dancer rather than an affected actress. (DL, 304)

She seems like a dancer, but is an affected actress—one who does not know the difference between stage and reality. Like Earle, who is pure male, Faye is pure
female body with a mind filled with dreams. All of her
gestures are seductive, trite, and empty:

She repaid him for his compliment by smiling in a peculiar
secret way and running her tongue over her lips. It
was one of her most characteristic gestures and very
effective. It seemed to promise all sorts of undefined
intimacies, yet it was really as simple and automatic
as the word thanks. She used it to reward anyone for
anything, no matter how unimportant. (DL, 385)

Although a minor character in the novel, Adore Loomis
is a part not only of the mechanical imagery, but also
of the actor. He is similar to the other actors in that
he has no awareness of the meaning of his actions, nor
does he have any escape from his role. He is a younger
version of Harry being forced to act. Ultimately his
acting will dominate him.

Along with Earle, Harry, Faye, and Adore, Homer
becomes an actor without a stage or self-awareness.
Homer is the most pitiful and terrifying of all the
actors in the book. Homer acts, in the sense of pretending,
because he cannot act literally. He is incapable of the
sex act. When Faye moves in with him, it is a financial
arrangement and an investment. He tries to act the
father, but his hands reveal his sexual desire for her.
His acting is self-destructive, and his "servility was
like that of a cringing, clumsy dog, who is always
anticipating a blow, welcoming it even, and in a way that
makes overwhelming the desire to strike him" (DL, 367).
Homer is so frustrated that he can do nothing but act. Because his emotions are completely repressed, he cannot combine intention and meaning with his social role. He is not, like Harry, a role without a separate being; rather, he is a being without a satisfactory role. Consequently he becomes the example of the frustrated crowd which seethes with passion and which, because it lacks a means of expression, seems robot-like and mechanical.

West compounds the irony of the actor-act images to such an extent that actors impersonate themselves. Tod, Faye and Homer go to a cabaret where a young man impersonates a woman:

What he was doing was in no sense parody; it was too simple and too restrained . . . . This dark young man . . . was really a woman.

When he had finished singing, there was a great deal of applause. The young man shook himself and became an actor again. He tripped on his train, as though he weren't used to it, lifted his skirt to show he was wearing Paris garters, then strode off swinging his shoulders. His imitation of a man was awkward and obscene. (DL, 370)

With the presentation of a "woman" impersonating a man impersonating a woman, West makes his point: everything is acting.

By drawing our attention to the distinction between actor and acting and then collapsing that distinction, West achieves an effect similar to his disjunction of the mental and the physical. Both kinds of images imply a divided world. West separates qualities which we tend to
fuse or fuses qualities which we separate. His images exhibit opposing human attributes coexisting within a character or the lack of certain human attributes. The result is a dehumanized world made up of human qualities. Because West focuses on ordinary, realistic details, each part of his imagery is perfectly normal. But, because he separates and joins qualities in a way that we do not, his world seems fantastic. It is West's technique of setting up oppositions and collapsing those oppositions which creates his divided world and its characters. As a result of seeing inhuman characters, we look for the human or spiritual qualities in West's characters and find only vague hints. The actor is his acting; the mind is divorced from the body. Together these images establish an irreconcilable division in West's characters between act and meaning. There is no meaning: life is a stage and man is a clown without the clown's escape from his grease-paint and the stage.
All three kinds of images discussed up to this point have been based on a separation of qualities—the mental from the physical, the human from the mechanical or animal, the actor from the role—and various fusions of these qualities. None of these has involved distortion in the normal sense of the word. The fourth kind of image in West is the grotesque distortion of the human body. West develops an "unnatural" character in each novel and contrasts the deformed with the natural. But, in West, the grotesque becomes the normal or natural. In Miss Lonelyhearts, Doyle, the crippled metre-man, is the image of a suffering human. However, in The Day of the Locust, Abe, the pugnacious dwarf, is more healthy than the normal people. In one novel, West implies that we are all cripples; in the other, that dwarfs are giants relative to the rest of the world.

As early as The Dream Life of Balso Snell, West links physical with mental or spiritual deformity. Balso is attracted to the girl-cripples at the theatre:
Spying a beautiful Hunchback, he suddenly became sick with passion. The cripple of his choice looked like some creature from the depths of the sea. She was tall and extraordinarily hunched. She was tall in spite of her enormous hump; but for her dog-leg spine she would have been seven feet high. Moreover, he could be certain that, like all hunchbacks, she was intelligent. (ES, 37-38)

Janey Davenport is the lover of art, and her physical deformity is a reflection of her mental deformity.

While West uses the grotesque in The Dream Life of Balso Snell, it is secondary to a host of other thematic concerns. In Miss Lonelyhearts, A Cool Million and The Day of the Locust, the grotesque becomes a more integral part of the fictional world. A Cool Million is the record of Lemuel Pitkin's physical dismantling. He becomes the grotesque image of society's product. Both Lemuel's and Betty's physical rape reflects their mental rape at society's hands. A Cool Million also progresses towards the "Chamber of American Horrors, Animate and Inanimate Hideosities." The whole work is a series of grotesque images described in dead-pan language.

Unlike The Dream Life of Balso Snell and A Cool Million, which implicitly present the grotesque as an aberration of the normal (although West suggests that the natural consequences of false dreams and evil societies are grotesque and therefore that the dreams and society must be changed), Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust present the grotesque as normal and inevitable.
The letters Miss Lonelyhearts receives are from cripples who are deaf, lacking noses, or spastic. These letters create a picture of a deformed world. This is the image which turns the joke into a serious concern. The mission Miss Lonelyhearts takes upon himself is to cure the deformed world. The logic of the novel and its plotting is that the deformed are a part of life and that their suffering cannot be cured. Miss Lonelyhearts' attempt to help Doyle leads to destruction. Further, while Doyle is the cripple, his wife is equally emotionally crippled and requires Miss Lonelyhearts' help. And Miss Lonelyhearts cannot help. The final image of the book not only shows Miss Lonelyhearts' death, but also the survival of two kinds of deformity—Peter Doyle's paralysis and Betty's mental denial of the suffering of life.

In Miss Lonelyhearts, Doyle is the image of the suffering letter-writers and as such is, as Miss Lonelyhearts comes to realize, a real and normal aspect of life. In fact, Shrike tells Doyle, "you are humanity" (ML, 123). In The Day of the Locust, Abe is not the image of suffering. Rather, he becomes, ironically, the most healthy of the characters. His size is in inverse proportion to his drives and desires. But his desire for Faye, and sex in general, is thwarted. Like the cock with a broken beak, he enters an arena in which he cannot triumph. He is swung
against the wall and is helpless to prevent his own destruction. He is, literally, the little, defeated man.

Each novel develops an image of a deformed character and combines the humorous with the horrible. West varies his use of his grotesque imagery, but it is always present. But again, as with the other kinds of imagery, there is the sense that West is recording fantasy seen. Further, the grotesque images form one part of the vision which separates the deformed from the normal and says that both are distinct and yet identical. Almost all of West's characters are mentally deformed in the sense that they are divided between their bodies and their minds, that they are mechanical and bestial as opposed to human, that they are nothing more than role-players. When we see how grotesque West's divided world and its characters is, the physical grotesques merely support and reflect the mental grotesques. While the cripples and dwarfs remain separate, the reader sees that they are reflections of an entire world.
The final kind of image West uses, apart from ordinary descriptions which provide the contrast for all the other kinds, is inversion. Under this amorphous heading fall images of the disjunction between normal action and reaction, that is, between stimulus and response. Although Victor Comerchero notes that "More than anything else it is the disparity between stimulus and response that creates the intensity of Westian man," he does not develop this insight in terms of West's images, nor does he comment on its implications in terms of West's entire fictional world. Because of the disjunction between normal action and reaction, the fictional world often seems inverted. Laughter, for example, is not a means of expressing joy. Similarly, instead of being a natural function, sleep for Homer is a means of escape from reality. Throughout West's work there are breaks or missing links in the chains of cause and effect. To a normal reader, who is accustomed to normal sequences of cause and effect, West's world often seems inverted in that it upsets normal expectation.
The disjunction between action and reaction is most fully developed in *The Day of the Locust*. The mob scene starts with Homer's attack on Adore. The stimulus which Adore provides is insignificant in relation to Homer's reaction. This spreads throughout the crowd, which changes from a passive crowd, to a furious mob in minutes. In fact, the stimulus merely provides an excuse to release pent-up tensions; it triggers the mob's rage. There is a cause and an effect, but they seem unrelated or, more accurately, insufficiently related.

West draws our attention to this kind of image repeatedly, forcing us to see the disjunction between stimulus and response. Calvin and Hink, two horse-opera actors, mock Earle, but fail to get a reaction from him:

Calvin and Hink slapped their thighs and laughed, but Tod could see that they were waiting for something else. Earle, suddenly, without even shifting his weight, shot his foot out and kicked Calvin solidly in the rump. This was the real point of the joke. They were delighted by Earle's fury. Tod also laughed. The way Earle had gone from apathy to action without the usual transition was funny. The seriousness of his violence was even funnier. (DL, 325)

The joke is Earle's irrational response, his inability to react in accordance with stimulus. Faye's and Harry's automatic responses are also examples of this kind of image. Faye's tongue-caress and Harry's sales routine are part of the pattern in that neither character is able to fit his response to the cause.
There are opposite cases in which the stimulus is greater than the reaction. When Homer's hand receives a nasty cut, Homer does not seem to feel any pain. Similarly, the crowd Tod is studying reacts like Homer most of the time. The normal stimuli of sunshine, oranges, and passion fruit have no effect on them. They wait for airplane crashes or sexual perverts to goad them into action. But, once released, their furious reaction, like Homer's, is disproportionate to the causal action.

The book develops several images of this kind, each more serious than the preceding image. Near the beginning, when Tod and Claude's guests go to watch a film at Mrs. Jenning's, we have a mock riot out of all proportion to the cause:

There was a long delay, during which the cameraman fussed desperately with his machine. Mrs. Schwartzen started to whistle and stamp her feet and the others joined in. They imitated a rowdy audience in the days of the nickleodeon. (DL, 279)

After the film is "complete" and the audience realizes it has been duped, people shout

"Fake!"
"Cheat!"
"The old teaser routine!"
They stamped their feet and whistled.
Under cover of the mock riot, Tod sneaked out. (DL, 280-281)

Here, although we are aware that it is a joke, we are introduced to a kind of image which develops throughout the novel.
West uses the disjunction of action and reaction in *A Cool Million* also. Lemuel Pitkin is found guilty of a crime which he did not commit. When he arrives at the prison, the warden begins:

"The first thing to do is to draw all your teeth," he said. "Teeth are often a source of infection and it pays to be on the safe side. At the same time we will begin a series of cold showers. Cold water is an excellent cure for morbidity."

"But I am innocent," cried Lem, when the full significance of what the warden had said dawned on him. "I am not morbid and I never had a toothache in my life."

(CM, 166)

Here there is almost no relation between the reason for Lemuel's imprisonment, the teeth-drawing, the cold showers, and the warden's reaction to the situation. The book is a series of such events in which cause and effect follow as logical consequences in only the most superficial ways. West distorts the natural order and creates a world in which almost any event can follow any other event. The logic of the narrative arises from West's intention to develop images and ironic situations, not from the narrative itself.

West uses this technique to a lesser extent in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, but we do gain insights through images which disconnect cause and effect, or distort the normal relationship between cause and effect. Miss Lonelyhearts' frustration becomes apparent when he lights a poorly made cigarette:
The cigarette was imperfect and refused to draw. Miss Lonelyhearts took it out of his mouth and stared at it furiously. He fought himself quiet, then lit another one. (ML, 68)

Normally, people do not become furious when a cigarette does not draw. A similar image is created when Miss Lonelyhearts tries to show his "love" for the cripple Peter Doyle while reading Doyle's letter:

While Miss Lonelyhearts was puzzling out the crabbed writing, Doyle's damp hand accidentally touched his under the table. He jerked away, but then drove his hand back and forced it to clasp the cripple's. After finishing the letter, he did not let go, but pressed it firmly with all the love he could manage. (ML, 126)

As in The Day of the Locust, where the action and reaction disjunction works two ways, the whole of Miss Lonelyhearts is premised on the thesis that there is no suitable reaction to the stimulus of the letters which Miss Lonelyhearts receives. There is no answer to the pain and suffering of Miss Lonelyhearts' readers. Thus, while the images sometimes show the response exceeding the stimulus, at other times the reaction is deficient. Either way, the reader sees an inverted world.

Another aspect of the inverted world which is linked to the inappropriate response is West's use of laughter. Normally, laughter is a means of expressing joy. But West's world there is no joy. Yet characters laugh. West does not, however, rely solely upon the reader's normal expectation. He accentuates, within his
work, the artificiality of a character's laughter. Harry Greener, for example, laughs his victim's laugh for Homer. West develops the image slowly and carefully. Harry "didn't want to laugh, but a short bark escaped . . . . When it didn't hurt he laughed again" (DL, 306). The only way Faye can stop the laughing is to sing "Jeepers Creepers". We learn that "Their bitterest quarrels often took this form; he laughing, she singing" (DL, 306).

Harry stops and begins again:

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, like burning sticks, then gradually increased in volume until it became a rapid bark, then fell away again to an obscene chuckle. After a slight pause, it climbed until it was the nicker of a horse, then still higher to become a machine-like screech.

Faye listened helplessly with her head cocked on one side. Suddenly, she too laughed, not willingly, but fighting the sound.

"You bastard!" she yelled.
She leaped to the couch, grabbed him by the shoulders and tried to shake him quiet.
He kept laughing. (DL, 307)

This passage combines the various kinds of images which have been analyzed. Harry starts laughing with a bark—a bestial image. Laughing and singing are not expressions of joy or pleasure—an image which disregards normal reactions. Harry's masterpiece progresses from a metallic crackle to a bark to a horse's nicker and finally becomes a machine-like screech—the human is mechanical
as well as bestial. The act is mechanical, separate from Harry's mind, uncontrollable, and lacks meaning:

Harry couldn't stop laughing now. He pressed his belly with his hands, but the noise poured out of him. It had begun to hurt again. (DL, 307)

Laughter is a release, but it expresses despair and causes pain. West distorts the act and shows us the disjunction between stimulus and response.

In The Dream Life of Balso Snell, laughter is not a happy thing either. Beagle Darwin says

I must laugh at myself, and if the laugh is "bitter", I must laugh at the laugh. The ritual of feeling demands burlesque and, whether the burlesque is successful or not, a laugh .... (BS, 27)

Janey Davenport, a character within a letter within a novel written by a character within the dream within Balso's dream, does not want to laugh at herself:

The ridiculous, the ridiculous, all day long he talks of nothing else but how ridiculous this, that, or the other thing is. And he means me, I am absurd. He is never satisfied with calling other people ridiculous, with him everything is ridiculous--himself, me. Of course I can laugh at Mother with him, or at the Hearth; but why must my own mother and home be ridiculous? I can laugh at Hobey, Joan, but I don't want to laugh at myself. I'm tired of laugh, laugh, laugh. I want to retain some portion of myself unlaughed at. There is something in me that I won't laugh at. I won't. I'll laugh at the outside world all he wants me to, but I won't, I don't want to laugh at my inner world. (BS, 241)

Despite the sincerity of the rhetoric, the context makes Janey rather absurd, even in her inner world. Together the sincerity and absurdity show the reader that laughter is not so much an expression of joy as it is an attempt to face the absurdity of life.
Throughout Miss Lonelyhearts, Shrike mocks Miss Lonelyhearts and Christ. His laughter is a weapon, and not without bitterness. When Miss Lonelyhearts accuses Shrike of being a wife-beater, Shrike laughs, "but too long and too loudly . . ." (ML, 92). Shrike begins a "heart-to-heart" talk with Miss Lonelyhearts:

"My good friend, your accusation hurts me to the quick. You spiritual lovers think that you alone suffer. But you are mistaken. Although my love is of the flesh flashy, I too suffer. It's suffering that drives me into the arms of the Miss Farkises of this world. Yes, I suffer."

Here the dead pan broke and pain actually crept into his voice. "She's selfish. She's a damned selfish bitch. She was a virgin when I married her and has been fighting ever since to remain one. Sleeping with her is like sleeping with a knife in one's groin."

It was Miss Lonelyhearts' turn to laugh. He put his face close to Shrike's and laughed as hard as he could. (ML, 92)

The jokes in the bar, Doyle's joke with Miss Lonelyhearts' fly, and Shrike's party game are but a few of the many jokes in the work. They all induce laughter, but none of them are funny. We come to realize that this divided world is populated by people whose sense of the humorous and horrible is inverted.10

In West's fictional world, then, there are causes and effects but the two do not seem to explain what happens. For example, Miss Lonelyhearts "stepped away from the bar and accidentally collided with a man holding a glass of beer. When he turned to beg the man's pardon, he received a punch in the mouth" (ML, 85). This is a normal occurrence,
yet the reasons are not developed. There is an explanation, yet it is unsatisfactory and only implicit in the passage. West's fictional world is logical, but it is riddled with divisions. The separation of stimulus and response is one aspect of West's vision.
Although divided images pervade each of West's works, there are numerous places where "normal" or "ordinary" images accentuate the various kinds which have just been discussed. The relatively plain descriptive opening of Chapter II in *The Day of the Locust*, for example, is not startling:

He had been living this way for almost a month, when, one day, just as he was about to prepare his lunch, the door bell rang. He opened it and found a man standing on the step with a sample case in one hand and a derby hat in the other. Homer hurriedly shut the door again. (DL, 298)

Similarly, ordinary images occur throughout West's work and provide a contrast for the disjointed images. The entire description of Miss Lonelyhearts' trip to the country has a Hemingway-like simplicity which accentuates the horror of the return to the city. Homer's reminiscence of his abortive affair with Romola Martin in room 611 of the hotel is pitiful and accentuates, because of its simplicity, the elaborate image of the hands which Homer cannot control. Needless to say, there are many more ordinary images.

These, together with the reader's normal expectations, provide the norm by which we recognize that much of West's imagery is strange and startling, not because it is fanciful
or distorted, but because the images separate and combine parts of ordinary characters and things in an unusual manner. With our knowledge of the kinds of images that West uses, we must now look at the results of his divided images and try to suggest why he uses images which create a divided world populated by divided characters.
The effect of West's images in each work is complex and cumulative. The five kinds I have discussed ultimately combine to create an all-pervading sense of separation and disjunction. We see a half-world; that is, one world which is irreconcilably divided. We discover that man's mind is separate from his body, his desires separate from his potential; that man is less than human—a machine or a beast; that man is an actor and that the role consumes the actor; that man is grotesque and that his creations reflect his grotesque nature; that the world is inverted and, consequently, that order and meaning are impossible. The world created by these images is finally disturbing and frustrating because it is fantasy seen.

West's technique is to start with small and apparently innocent disjointed images, compound these with more serious and pervasive presentations of internal and external dissociation, fuse his kinds of divided images into a few overpowering complex images, and, ultimately, to demonstrate the fury and destruction which result from the separation of dreams from reality, act from meaning, man
from himself. The total cumulative effect of the images is the creation of an atmosphere of horror and pity, terror and disgust.

The fictional world reflects and parallels the characters within it. The hideous houses of Hollywood, which are intended to startle, reflect the minds of their creators. Homer's house exhibits Homer's sterile existence. Similarly, Miss Lonelyhearts' ordered room reflects Miss Lonelyhearts' desperate attempt to order his own mind.

Besides creating a divided world and filling it with characters divided in themselves, West extends this technique by creating characters and groups of characters which are implicitly or explicitly irreconcilably opposed. In *The Day of the Locust*, for example, the characters form two groups: the cheaters and the cheated. Tod, as a Hollywood costume designer, is one of the cheaters. Faye and Harry also fit into this group. Homer and the Los Angeles crowd are the cheated. But, as in the images, the distinction collapses. In the same way that the actor-act separation fuses into a unified opposition, the cheater-cheated opposition collapses. Faye and Harry are as much victims of their dreams as are Homer and the crowd. While the distinction between cheaters and cheated is maintained by means of the constant reference to Tod's
painting which divides the world into two groups of people, the book as a whole denies the separation. When Claude Estee and his friends go to Mrs. Jenning's game-house, the film they see, like the films which they produce, cheats them. The reader becomes aware that both the cheaters and the cheated are victims of their dreams. West sets up a distinction and both maintains it and collapses it, so that the reader senses both a division or separation and a unification of opposites.

**Miss Lonelyhearts** also exhibits divisions between characters, and it too both maintains and denies that division. The opposition is simpler than in *The Day of the Locust*, because Miss Lonelyhearts is the sole standard against which all the others are measured. Miss Lonelyhearts recognizes the need to help the suffering while the other characters deny or avoid the suffering. The reader, however, sees that both Shrike and Betty suffer or are going to suffer. Also, although Peter Doyle is introduced as the example of suffering man, the reader is aware that Doyle's physical deformity is similar to Miss Lonelyhearts' spiritual deformity. Despite the obvious differences, their problems are similar. Both are thwarted in their attempt to fulfill their desires.

West's technique of opposing characters or groups of characters and demonstrating that the opposing characters are afflicted with similar problems is an extension of
his technique of dividing or separating images within themselves and collapsing those images. The polarization of characters is one aspect of his divided fictional world. Like the images, the characters (which the images in part create) seem fantastic, weird, or distorted. But the fact is that they are strange only in so far as West has concentrated on the essential characteristics of their natures, and has, like Anderson, presented only their particular "truth". The isolation of that truth creates a sense of the grotesque which is not so much a part of the character being presented as it is of the isolation of the particular feature or aspect of the character. West uses this technique to create the fictional world and its characters. He concentrates on separate aspects and makes the reader see the opposition of the aspects through his images.

West's technique essentially denies character in the normal sense of the word. He presents relatively static pictures of people, shows the people in action, and describes their reactions to other people.\textsuperscript{11} Because the divided images of the characters are the most fully developed, they become the characters. Homer is a sexually repressed male; we become aware of this through the image of his hands. We learn that Harry is a mask or an empty actor through the description of his face.
Faye is a sex symbol caught in her own dreams; we learn this through the presentation of her physical movements and the image of her dream-cards.

West's concentration on the physical qualities of his characters does two things. With Earle and Miguel, for example, it denies the mental. With most of the other characters, it demonstrates the separation of the mental from the physical and asserts the physical. The image almost becomes the man. But even with a flat character such as Harry, West hints at the existence of something within the physical shell. He tells us that Harry suffers as much as anyone else, but we do not see this. What we see and what remains with us is the actor image and a vague sense of pity for people like Harry who do have a "need for beauty and romance" (DL, 262). When West does develop the mental, as in Faye or Miss Lonelyhearts, it becomes clear that the mental dreams or aspirations are futile and destructive, and that the physical reality is dominant. In fact, West restricts himself almost solely to one layer of reality—the physical. His work, with the exception of The Dream Life of Balso Snell, is so concrete that we despair of the existence of any non-illusory alternatives.
Because West concentrates on the physical and makes us see that the surface images are the essential features of his characters, we do not become concerned about the characters as human beings in fictional situations. Instead of developing his characters, West makes us see them more clearly through his plotting. We never fully understand the characters, or the world in which they exist, as we do in most novels. What West does show us and what we do come to understand is the divided nature of the characters and their world.

A sense of irreconcilable and inevitable division is the final consequence of West's technique of focusing on separate, isolated, and opposing qualities within and among his characters. Because we see, in the images, the various divisions, we understand the frustration of the characters, although we never understand the causes of the divisions and the resulting frustrations. It is through the divided images that West creates his divided world and characters and, as we will now see, it is the function of the plot to create situations in which we become aware of the results of a divided world.
Most people who have read any of West's work remember his imagery, not his plots or characters. Although they may remember Homer or Abe in *The Day of the Locust*, what they remember is usually a picture of Homer's hands or of Abe's head hitting the wall in Homer's house. They are also likely to retain a clear image of the cock-fight, but the events which surround it, lead up to it, and result from it are usually forgotten. Even West's most sympathetic critics fault *The Day of the Locust* for its narrative weaknesses. In his introduction to the complete works, Alan Ross says that *The Day of the Locust*'s "deficiencies, such as they are, come from a slight slowness in the narrative's momentum, and a series of sub-plots whose inter-relation is never developed quite closely enough. Once the real theme emerges, West's confident astringency of language seems to return and the last two-thirds of the book contain some of his very best writing."¹ Ross implies that, because *Miss Lonelyhearts* is more compact and has a more tightly woven plot structure, it is a
better work than *The Day of the Locust*. What Ross fails to see is that both works exist as a series of images, and that the plot is merely West's method of unifying the sequence.² Or, putting it the other way around, the images unify the plot which is always subservient to the images.

The subordination of narrative to imagery is obvious in *A Cool Million*. The theme, in terms of narrative, is contained in the subtitle: *The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin*. Like Voltaire's *Candide*, West's picaresque is a series of loosely connected episodes. The sequence of events provides opportunities for implicit and explicit comments on the world outside the fictional world. But, even in *A Cool Million*, the sequence is carefully ordered to create, as the work progresses, more and more horrible images. The purpose of the narrative is in fact solely to present situations which further the dismantling process.

The book begins with Lemuel being duped by Shagpoke Whipple, beaten by Tom Baxter, swindled by a pickpocket who calls himself Wellington Mape, knocked unconscious by Police Sergeant Clancy, put in jail where his teeth are extracted at Warden Ezekiel Purdy's command, and so on. Betty Prail, who has been kidnapped, serves "a severe apprenticeship to the profession" (*CM*, 167) she is to enter. The plot goes on, Lem and Betty remain gullible, and the reader tires. But as is suggested by
the opening events up to the pulling of Lemuel's teeth, the seriousness of the crimes against Lemuel is increasing. West implies that if we are innocent (fools) we are dismantled, and if we are experienced (knaves) we dismantle others. As the work proceeds, Lemuel is deceived and attacked. Towards the middle he is used by a rather petty, if successful, criminal. At the end of *A Cool Million* he is being used by Whipple, a more serious deceiver in that he deceives the mind, whereas the thief only steals. Lem is a "stooge" (*CM*, 252), and while he remains innocent, West implies that he is furthering an evil cause. Even his death is used by Whipple's political machine.

The narrative in *A Cool Million* is weak by novelistic standards, but the structuring it provides for West's satiric images is excellent. Each event leads to a more serious indictment of society's folly, fakery, and destructiveness. While I wish to delay my discussion of satire until the following chapter, it is not possible to deal with the structure of *A Cool Million* without treating it as a satire. Unlike *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* which are, as we shall see, complete in themselves except for the most general kinds of reference to the everyday world, *A Cool Million* constantly refers to the world external to the fictional world so as to form
explicit satiric links of a general and specific nature. Despite the fact that the work is tightly woven in terms of characters and events, the basic unity arises out of the images and ironic situations which rely upon the real world events. Also, *A Cool Million* is a parody of the Horatio Alger books. This, together with the complete lack of character analysis and development and the absence of plot (as opposed to narrative), acts as a signal to the reader that the work is satiric.

Mingled with the sequence of images which form the narrative are a number of incidental images which provide the stage for the narrative, establish additional satiric links with the real world, and fill in the fictional world. West describes Wu Fong's whore house in great detail.

Each one of the female inmates of Wu Fong's establishment had a tiny two-room suite for her own use, furnished and decorated in the style of the country from which she came. Thus, Marie, the French girl, had an apartment that was Directoire. Celeste's rooms (there were two French girls because of their traditional popularity) were Louis the Fourteenth; she being the fatter of the two. (*CM*, 169.)

The image is modified later to comment on the "Buy American" campaign when Wu Fong turns "his establishment into an hundred per centum American place" (*CM*, 202). Mr. Asa Goldstein, who purchased Mrs. Pitkin's house and thus forced Lem out into the world to seek his fortune, is
hired to do the interior decoration. The efforts which Goldstein and Wu Fong devote to authenticity accentuate the horror of America in the thirties. Its tradition is used by a bawd to make money. And Fong, by changing from "A House of All Nations" to American wares, is both being a good American and serving other good, patriotic citizens.

Besides the many images which expand the basic narrative, West constructs his narrative so that Lem is shunted to all parts of the United States. Lem moves from Ottsville, Vermont, to New York, from New York to Chicago and the West, then to the South, and finally back to New York. West's narrative allows an all-encompassing attack on the United States. Lemuel Pitkin, who ends up a side show freak and a political tool, is the All-American Boy. He helps the National Revolutionary Party defeat Marxism and International Capitalism: "Through the National Revolution America's people were purged of alien diseases and America became again American" (CM, 225). We are left with only American diseases. Lem's physical deformity reflects the deformity of the society of which he was a part and a product. Betty, Lem's sweetheart, escapes from the whore-house, but she becomes Shagpoke's and the National Revolution's whore. The implications of the latter are more serious than the former. Despite the fact that Betty is still innocent, that is, a fool, she is now being used
to influence people's minds. West's narrative develops a number of incidental images, and surveys the entire nation. While the narrative links image to image, it is the increasing horror of the images which unifies the work. Even in his death, Lemuel is used by others for destructive ends. The last paragraphs of *A Cool Million* draw together the image of the great Lemuel Pitkin, martyr.

"Jail is his first reward. Poverty his second. Violence is his third. Death is his last. "Simple was his pilgrimage and brief, yet a thousand years hence, no story, no tragedy, no epic poem will be filled with greater wonder, or be followed by mankind with deeper feeling, than that which tells of the life and death of Lemuel Pitkin. "But I have not answered the question. Why is Lemuel Pitkin great? Why does the martyr move in triumph and the nation rise up at every stage of his coming? Why are the cities and states his pallbearers? "Because, although dead, yet he speaks. "Of what is it that he speaks? Of the right of every American boy to go into the world and there receive fair play and a chance to make his fortune by industry and probity without being laughed at or conspired against by sophisticated aliens. "Alas, Lemuel Pitkin himself did not have this chance, but instead was dismantled by the enemy. His teeth were pulled out. His eye was gouged from his head. His thumb was removed. His scalp was torn away. His leg was cut off. And, finally, he was shot through the heart." (CM, 254-255)

Unlike *A Cool Million*, which is clearly ordered to provide implicit and explicit satire and which is made up of a group of images that have clear links to the external world, West's other works have more than a bare narrative. For example, despite the apparent disorder of
The *Dream Life of Balso Snell*, the work seems to be a unit in itself. While there are specific, explicit links to the external world, for instance the comments on theatre-goers (*BS*, 30-31) and the numerous literary allusions, the book does not consist solely of such links. Notwithstanding the episodic structure, there is considerable thematic unity. Further, the unity is reflected in the imagery. *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* both mocks and discusses seriously religion, art, love, and life. And the imagery reflects a similar division between the exposure of pretenders and the denial of the existence of any spiritual reality. When Balso, after listening to the life of St. Puce, tells Maloney the Areopagite that he (Maloney) "is morbid" (*BS*, 13), Balso is not only denying the particular religion, but all religions. Similarly, when the guide recalls George Moore's statement about art, he continues, "Art is not nature, but rather nature digested. Art is a sublime excrement" (*BS*, 8). The effect is to deny the spiritual aspect of art and, ultimately, the spiritual aspect of man—or, more precisely, the value of man's spiritual aspirations. As the book progresses, each image and image-event reveals both illusion and the futility of life that results from man's aspirations being only illusions.
What remains for the reader who finishes the work is a series of images which deny man's spiritual aspirations and demonstrate that they are a function of the body. At the same time, the final image of Balso's emission which climaxes his wet dream demonstrates that, although man is only a body, it, like art, religion, and love, is both futile and sterile.

West's other works, Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust, are much more complex than A Cool Million and The Dream Life of Balso Snell in terms of the relationship between imagery and plot. Whereas the latter are clearly satires, if not particularly successful ones, Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust are usually referred to as novels or satires or both at the same time. In order to understand the relationship between the two genres, as West used them, it is necessary to look at the structuring force the imagery provides and the subordinate nature of the plot.

One of West's most perceptive and appreciative critics, James F. Light, has noted that the events in Miss Lonelyhearts are imagistic:

This static, pictorial quality of the characters is also true of the action, so the actions seem candid camera snap-shots of people caught in mid-air, posed against a background of dull sky and decaying earth. Each action, involving each character, becomes a visualized symbol of an abstract state of mind and heart, so that one remembers
the pictures rather than the developing actions: Miss Lonelyhearts bringing the knife down upon the lamb; Miss Lonelyhearts twisting the arm of the clean old man; Miss Lonelyhearts entwined about Doyle while Betty watches the two roll down the stairs.

Although it is true that we remember the images, within the work the plot structure unites the sequences of images sufficiently that we are not puzzled by the episodic form as we are in *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*. Further, *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* exhibit real plots as opposed to the mere narrative of *A Cool Million*. The concentration on Miss Lonelyhearts' concerns and his perception is a part of the unity, but more important is the unity of the imagery which creates characters in opposition, separates the mental from the physical, describes Shrike as a machine, turns Betty into a party dress, treats the deformed as natural, and ultimately depicts a world full of suffering and frustration.

Light recognizes West's technique of splitting characters and images. For example, he says of Mrs. Shrike: "Not really able to believe in her tiny dreams, she yet needs something on which to dream. So torn, her personality becomes a split one. This split is illustrated by the conflict within her of the head's knowledge and fears and the body's instinctive reactions."
Light also recognizes West's use of an image which splits Miss Lonelyhearts' character. Referring to the image of Miss Lonelyhearts' bony chin which is "shaped and cleft like a hoof" *(ML*, 69), he writes: "The boniness suggests the man of the spirit rather than the flesh. But one should note the cleft in the chin, indicative of the split between the spirit and the flesh, between the devil and the saint." Light sees West's separation of qualities of people and things; the irresolvable conflicts West poses, and the static, pictorial quality of the action.

In an effort to explain the source of West's style, Light claims that West was a Surrealist. Speaking of the total effect of the novel, he says:

Far more important to the eventual impact are the images that one remembers. These images owe a good deal stylistically . . . to the surrealists. For the nihilistic side of surrealism wished to destroy the world of rationalism, replacing it with the sur-real world of individual perceptions. This world, at its most truthful, was rooted in dreams and visions, where the rational relationship of objects was replaced by the subconscious and truer vision: where Dali clocks hung without suspension in vari-colored skies; where an umbrella and a sewing machine copulate on an operating table; where the symbol of the sur-real is the sur-reality of the objects in a drug store, douche bags piled against aspirin bottles and both outlined against a toothpaste ad. In this kind of surreal perception, suggestive of the cosmic chaos, was, felt the sur-realists, a shocking humor, the humor of the Jacobean writer of conceits.

As examples of Surrealistic images in West, he cites Miss Lonelyhearts'
individualized perceptions: where a man's tongue is seen as a fat thumb and a man's cheeks are seen as rolls of toilet paper; where a woman's buttocks are seen as enormous grindstones and a woman's nipples are seen as little red hats; where a woman is seen as a tent, veined and covered with hair, and a man as a skeleton in a closet; where the stone shaft of a war memorial becomes a penis, sexually dilated and ready to spout seeds of violence.10

These examples of West's imagery are shocking and disturbing. But following from the analysis of the imagery in Chapter II, it should be clear that the imagery does not derive from dreams. On the contrary, despite Light's assertion that the imagery of Miss Lonelyhearts is that of a nightmare (as he argues in his article: "Miss Lonelyhearts: The Imagery of Nightmare"), the images are based on ordinary, concrete reality. The twist or shock in each example Light gives comes from West's association of properties, qualities, and aspects which we normally separate. The fact is, a woman's buttocks are like grindstones, and her nipples are like red hats. Further, West's characters exist in a coherent, if imagistically divided, fictional world. West is like the Metaphysicals and unlike the Surrealists in that he associates or dissociates in two dimensions, not three. The Surrealists tended to yoke dissimilar objects on or in front of a totally unrelated background. By doing so they denied the reality of the everyday world and asserted the reality of the mental or dream world. The oddity of a Dali
painting derives to a large extent from the complete incongruity of the objects and their setting. West, on the other hand, relates his fictional world to his characters and images so that the reader can comprehend the divisions and separations within the work. Compared to *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, *Miss Lonelyhearts* is realistic, not surrealistic.

Almost all of his critics associate West with Surrealism, despite the fact that West himself said he was not a Surrealist. Although it cannot be denied that West was influenced by the Surrealists, I think critics have obscured the nature of West's imagery and its purpose by over-emphasizing that influence. Even Alan Donovan, who widens the definition of Surrealism to include "any style which attempts to escape the normal limits of reality by utilizing such methods as the narration of dreams or drug-induced hallucinations, incongruous or haphazard association of images, and the deliberate adoption of a tone inappropriate for the substance of the narrative," is hard pressed to account for West's use of this kind of imagery. Donovan correctly notes the distancing effect of West's imagery when he writes: "Perhaps the most outstanding yet questionable characteristic of West's surrealism, like that of more recent novelists, is the aesthetic distance it affects between the reader
and the characters." Further, he says that "the surreal tone of a novel, for instance, renders unlikely any feeling for its characters as people." Speaking of Earle Shoop, the cowboy in The Day of the Locust, Donovan claims "His function as a caricature is clear; his function as a three-dimensional human being is not."

The argument being presented runs as follows: West's images are Surrealistic, Surrealistic images distance the reader from characters within novels, novels which include this kind of imagery are, therefore, difficult to evaluate, and West's novels demonstrate the problem clearly. Further, Donovan implies that West's novels are not really very good because of the Surrealistic imagery. The basic assumption which underlies the argument is that as a Surrealist, West was trying to use his imagery to enable the reader to understand, or feel for, his characters in the same way as we do in other novels. If, on the other hand, we assume that West's imagery is designed to make us see, as opposed to understand and empathize with, the characters and their world, we have an entirely different criterion by which to judge West. If we judge West as a novelist, the jarring, divided imagery, and the lack of character analysis and development will lead us to conclude that Surrealistic imagery does not work in the novel (or at least West's novels). However,
if we look at the imagery itself, and see how West uses it, we will see that it is not used in the same way as the Surrealists used their disjointed images, nor is it used for a similar purpose. West's imagery is not completely disjointed, that is, unrelated to other images, and does in fact demonstrate considerable coherence, as we have already seen. Further, the imagery is closely related to the structure of each work.

This point is important because the power of Miss Lonelyhearts, for example, comes not only from the imagery, but also from the novelistic structuring of the work. The closely woven logic which leads to Miss Lonelyhearts' final delusion is basic to the work's effectiveness. Contrary to Helen Petrullo's argument that the novelistic characteristics of West's Miss Lonelyhearts disguise the satire and its main target, the novelistic elements provide coherence and reflect the unity of the imagery. Rather than disguise the satire, these elements provide the structure which is used to create a fictional world which, in itself, represents the everyday world as being absurd. Miss Lonelyhearts is not the target, nor is Shrike. The target is life in which the Christ dream is futile, in which suffering is real and all-pervasive, and in which those with sensitivity must forsake any hope of ameliorating the misery of others or of themselves.
Without the creation of a unified fictional world, West's satire would have remained limited and particularized in the sense that he would have had to attack particular evils in the everyday world. By creating a relatively complete, if divided, fictional world, and destroying the world and the main characters within it who come to stand for the best possible aspirations in the created world, West is able to attack life itself.

The fictional world West creates in *Miss Lonelyhearts* does not deny the rational or everyday world and assert a dream world or particularized perception of the everyday world. Rather, the tight plotting and the consistent imagery create a vision which is disturbing because it is based upon reasonable assumptions and mundane, everyday reality. To suggest that *Miss Lonelyhearts* moves away from physical reality to the reality of the mind or dreams is to deny, in my opinion, the purpose of the letters West includes in the work. At the outset, Miss Lonelyhearts realizes that the letters are serious, and that suffering is an aspect of the real world. In fact, as the book progresses he realizes that suffering pervades life. By including the letters, West expands his fictional world so that it seems to represent the entire real or external world. Suffering, pain, and frustration are life's characteristics. These characteristics are not aspects
of the mind or of dreams; they are reality both in the fictional world and the everyday world. Thus, West’s created world is realistic, not Surrealistic.

If we examine the sequence of the images and note its unity, and then examine the plot structure and recognize its unity, we will be able to see that West’s fictional world is rational, despite its divisions. In fact, we will see that West’s entire fictional world implicitly comments on the external everyday world, and that this forms the basis of the satiric attack. The important point is that it is the complete fictional world which West creates and destroys which forms the satire, not a series of implicit and explicit links to the external world throughout the work which provide incidental attacks on particular targets.

When we look at the sequence of images in Miss Lonelyhearts, we see the process by which West creates his divided world. The work begins with the inversion of a joke: Miss Lonelyhearts no longer finds the letters to be funny. We then read three examples of the letters and realize that Miss Lonelyhearts is right; the letters are not funny. From the outset then, we are introduced to un-funny jokes and ironies. While we are introduced to Miss Lonelyhearts and the suffering of the letter writers, West does not elicit our concern for Miss Lonelyhearts
or the letter-writers as characters. The focus is on the letters and what they stand for, and on Miss Lonelyhearts' job. The slightly humorous spelling of certain words and the poor grammatical structure combined with the startling simplicity of the letters moves us away from the characters towards the fact of suffering. Also, the preciseness of detail and the concentration on suffering, as opposed to characterization, moves us to consider the reality of the suffering. Thus, at the very beginning of the work we are introduced to Miss Lonelyhearts trying to answer the impossible and to solve the insoluble. We also see Miss Lonelyhearts as a man divided between the flesh and the spirit. Finally, the first chapter ends with the introduction of Shrike and his false, joking answers to the letters. With Shrike's entry, the extreme response to the letters becomes apparent. Shrike, the cynic, laughs at what we and Miss Lonelyhearts take seriously. Already, the shape of West's divided world is becoming evident.

The first paragraphs of the second chapter, "Miss Lonelyhearts and the dead pan," expand the world from letters and characters to a physical description of the fictional setting. As Victor Comerchero has pointed out, it is like T.S. Eliot's Waste Land. Miss Lonelyhearts leaves work, enters a park, and we learn that
As far as he could discover, there were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of the mottled ground was not the kind in which life generates. Last year, he remembered, May had failed to quicken these soiled fields. It had taken all the brutality of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt. What the little park needed, even more than he did, was a drink. (ML, 70)

The atmosphere of decay reflects Miss Lonelyhearts' mind. It also describes the state of the fictional world. The world is still ordered in that it has months and seasons, but spring does not result in flowers. West then presents images reflecting Miss Lonelyhearts' divided character: he wants to laugh at himself, and cannot; he wants to be spiritually helpful to others, and has only a stone in his gut; he wants a miracle, and sees only a grey sky and newspaper struggling in the air "like a kite with a broken spine" (ML, 71). We proceed to images of Shrike as an actor, Miss Farkis as a body without a mind, religion as a mechanical exercise, and, finally, Shrike as a seduction machine. From the sustained image of Shrike the machine, we move to Miss Lonelyhearts the seeker of spiritual meaning. He tries to love, and fails. He also tries various other dreams, but is always forced back to the reality of the letters. The rest of the book is the imagistic record of his attempt to cope with and answer the suffering his letter-writers press upon him.
Without a dream to explain life, Miss Lonelyhearts becomes aware of the chaos of life.

For a little while, he seemed to hold his own but one day he found himself with his back to the wall. On that day all the inanimate things over which he had tried to obtain control took the field against him. When he touched something, it spilled or rolled to the floor. The collar buttons disappeared under the bed, the point of the pencil broke, the handle of the razor fell off, the window shade refused to stay down. He fought, but with too much violence, and was decisively defeated by the spring of the alarm clock. (ML, 78)

After demonstrating his failure in his own narrow world, West moves Miss Lonelyhearts into the larger fictional world, that is, the complete fictional world, to show that it too is chaotic.

He fled to the street, but there chaos was multiple. Broken groups of people hurried past, forming neither stars nor squares. The lamp-posts were badly spaced and the flagging was of different sizes. Nor could he do anything with the harsh clanging sound of street cars and the raw shouts of hucksters. No repeated group of words would fit their rhythm and no scale could give them meaning. (ML, 78-79)

Seeking order and meaning, Miss Lonelyhearts remembers his fiancée Betty, but "his confusion was significant, while her order was not" (ML, 79). Again with Betty, West sets up images which reflect mental or philosophical positions. Whereas Shrike mocked suffering, Betty denies its existence. For Miss Lonelyhearts, she provides no solution. "Betty the Buddha" (ML, 80) ignores Miss Lonelyhearts frustration and spiritual sickness, and asks if he is physically sick. In reply he shouts
Well, I'm not sick. I don't need any of your damned aspirin. I've got a Christ complex. Humanity... I'm a humanity lover. All the broken bastards...

(ML, 81)

From here the plot continues to develop situations which present the various avenues of escape open to Miss Lonelyhearts: laughing at suffering, memories, violence, sex, the country. Each is tried and found wanting. Because of its reliance upon images, Miss Lonelyhearts is like a comic strip,¹⁸ and because of its brevity, the violence which results from Miss Lonelyhearts' frustration infuses the entire work. The suppressed rage he feels against an imperfect cigarette is followed by his inability to order the physical world, by his killing the lamb and, finally, by his beating the clean old man. When violence does not ease this frustration, Miss Lonelyhearts tries physical love with Mary Shrike and Fay Doyle, compassion for Peter Doyle, romantic love in the country with Betty. None of these alleviate suffering. Ultimately Miss Lonelyhearts tries spiritual love, but it leads him out of the world in that he becomes a stone, and as such he merely accepts suffering, which continues to exist. The final image presents Miss Lonelyhearts secure in his faith and separate from reality.¹⁹ Miss Lonelyhearts, the deluded character, is destroyed, leaving the physical and spiritual cripples in the fictional world, and by implication, in the external world.
While Miss Lonelyhearts is a sequence of image-events which deny the possibility of escaping from the reality of suffering, the work, as it progresses, increases the intensity of the images used to portray the reality of suffering. The work moves from examples of the letters to images of the letter-writers—the Doyles. As with the other letter-writers whom we do not see, we are not concerned with them as characters. Although we learn why they married in the first place, this psychological realism merely accentuates the horror of their situation. In West, the explanations do not explain the problem away. We may know that Fay married Peter out of desperation when she found that she was pregnant, but this does not explain Peter's deformed body, nor Fay's animal nature. West focuses our attention on their problem rather than on its causes. In The Dream Life of Balso Snell, Balso lists the possible causes of unhappiness and dissatisfaction:

Having no alternative, Balso blamed the war, the invention of printing, nineteenth-century science, communism, the wearing of soft hats, the use of contraceptives, the large number of delicatessen stores, the movies, the tabloids, the lack of adequate ventilation in large cities, the passing of the saloon, the soft collar fad, the spread of foreign art, the decline of the western world, commercialism, and, finally, for throwing the artist back on his personality, the renaissance. (BS, 31)

Of course, these explain nothing. Knowledge does not provide an explanation for pain and deformity in the world; it merely labels causes. Similarly, the knowledge of certain
failure does not alleviate Miss Lonelyhearts' need to dream that he can help people by loving them.

West uses his divided imagery to show us that his characters' needs and desires conflict with reality. For example, we see that Fay Doyle desires sex, but she is married to a cripple. Similarly, Peter Doyle needs love, yet he is married to a woman who equates sex and love, and he is incapable of satisfying her. Not only do we see the separation of dreams from reality, we also see the irony of these two being married to one another. Fay, the fertility image in the work (ML, 101), gives birth to the cripples of this world; therefore it is ironically "fitting" that she should be coupled to the crippled Peter. The irony draws us away from the characters as such to the abstract consideration of how to live in an ironic or absurd world. The Shrikes' marriage is also fitting in so far as Shrike is the cold, machine-like cynic and his wife Mary is the frigid woman. While Mary drives Shrike to the Miss Farkises of the world, Shrike is unable to love Mary and enable her to overcome her frigidity. They suit each other, destroy each other, and create the need for their futile dreams. Shrike believes that other women will solve his problem, and Mary in turn believes that "virginity" will enable her to survive. Both are deluded.
The plotting as well as the imagery allows us to see the divisions, ironies and culminating frustration in Miss Lonelyhearts. Because each chapter concentrates on one event to which Miss Lonelyhearts reacts, Miss Lonelyhearts becomes the reference point for the whole work. But, from the beginning, his character is divided, and his perceptions are imagistic. The book moves, with minimal plot links, to images of various escape routes open to Miss Lonelyhearts. Each is a logical consequence of the preceding event, and each is a more desperate attempt to find a satisfactory illusion. West carefully graduates his incidents so that Miss Lonelyhearts' apparent need increases while the apparent escape becomes more obviously impossible. For example, the book moves from attempts at sexual escapes with Mary Shrike and Fay Doyle to an escape into the natural surroundings of the country. But the country is obviously unsatisfactory because Miss Lonelyhearts is aware of and deeply involved in the suffering of society and he must go back to the city. When he does, he knows that Betty's simplicity, which is represented by the country, is not the answer. He then tries to help the Doyles by preaching love, but even before he begins he knows that he is going to make a fool of himself. It becomes apparent that withdrawal from the world is the only solution. A solution has been found for Miss Lonelyhearts,
but the reader knows that his is no solution for the real world. Miss Lonelyhearts has failed to help the letter-writers and their suffering has survived him. He has even created more misery; Betty is going to bear his child.

The plotting provides the framework for the images. The logic of the plot merely makes the images more horrifying, and what psychological depth there is to the characters merely accentuates the reality of the division between aspirations and reality. In the end, the fictional world of Miss Lonelyhearts collapses. Miss Lonelyhearts, the spiritual dreamer, is killed; Peter Doyle, the physical cripple, remains. Suffering dominates an irreconcilably divided world, and we see that, despite man's need for dreams and hope and love and poetry, there is no escape from frustration and violence.

When West came to write his last work, The Day of the Locust, he again used his technique of subordinating plot to images. As in A Cool Million, the images increase in intensity from minor mock riots (in Mrs. Jenning's house) to limited riots (Faye, Earle, Miguel and Tod) to more general riots (the second "cock-fight" inside Homer's house includes all of the main characters) to total riot (the final image of the book). But unlike A Cool Million and Miss Lonelyhearts, The Day of the Locust is not centred solely on the protagonist. It is much more diffuse
and develops a number of different image-characters around which the work is concentrated. The work is like a well-made motion picture. It starts with separate images of Tod, Hollywood, and the performers who are the cheaters. It then moves to an image of the cheated, Homer. West then introduces his example of a cheated performer, Harry.

With the introduction of these three characters, we have the two basic images of the work before us. Tod is hardly characterized at all except to the extent that we will accept his perception of Hollywood's sham, ugliness, and division between aspiration and reality, or needs and capabilities. Tod then becomes, essentially, the eyes through which we see the events. Harry and Homer, on the other hand, establish the fundamental division within the fictional world. Homer, through the events in the plot, becomes the living example of the suppressed rage of the mob. The long introduction of his character-image which I have discussed earlier establishes the separation between mind and body. His hands are not controlled by his mind. He needs sex, beauty, love, contact, purpose.

When he meets Faye, he gains a dream. The Bay of the Locust records his disillusionment, his being cheated. Harry is the cheater, and Harry's daughter is a parallel image of his inability to separate life from acting. His mechanical actions are different from Homer's bestial desires,
but the results are similar. Both men are unable to control the body’s actions and repressions. For Harry, the act is separate from the meaning, as it is with Faye, Adore, and Earle. Although Harry’s mind and body, like Homer’s, are in opposition. Harry is not aware that his dream of acting has made him its victim. He is not aware that he has been cheated. But the reader is, and the resultant irony collapses the distinction between the cheaters and the cheated set up in the world. Thus, the images remain divided, but the work is unified because the reader sees that both groups of individuals, despite their varying degrees of awareness, are cheated, frustrated, and trapped in a world without beauty and romance, but left with the need for both.

The Day of the Locust opens with a complex series of short images which set up a divided world. Each time Tod sees a particular thing, he also sees that it is something else. For example, he sees an army, and it is an army of actors; he sees a group of people in sports clothes who are coming home from work; he sees Mexican, Samoan, Egyptian, and Japanese styled houses and knows that they are plaster, lath and paper. The dual nature of the things reflects the dual nature of West’s characters.
Although the breadth of vision of *The Day of the Locust* is far more extensive than in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, the plot is similar in so far as it provides the structure for the images which bind the work together. Through Tod, the narrator, West graduates our introduction to the characters carefully. We first meet Abe Kusich, the dwarf. His race-track tips are illusions, but he is a petty cheater. Next we go to Claude Estée's party and from there to Mrs. Jenning's genteel whorehouse. Claude's guests are a kind of whore to their audience's dreams, and at the same time the creators of the dreams which cheat their audience. Mrs. Jenning cheats the cheaters with her film *Le Predicament de Marie*. The cheating is becoming more serious. It has moved from money (Abe) to sex (Mrs. Jenning).

West then gradually develops his first major image-event of the cheaters and the cheated. After briefly introducing Harry Greener, he concentrates on Homer and Homer's hands. They are even described in the passive voice. When Homer cuts himself "while opening a can of salmon for lunch," we are told that "his thumb received a nasty cut ... it was carried to the sink by its mate ..." (*DL*, 296-297). As a result of this image, we see the nature of Homer's divided character. At the same time West expands the image of Homer in two ways. By including Homer's memories of the one sexual experience in his life, we see something
of the seriousness of Homer's problem, although we do not
learn anything about the causes of his extreme sexual
frustration. Also, West's description of Homer's house and
Homer's attitude to Hollywood expands the fictional world
of the work and adds to the vision of a divided world.
The recounting of Harry's attack in Homer's house links
the two characters and develops the images of the cheaters.
Homer's hands and Harry's acting are equally revolting,
and both work on the same principle. By concentrating
on certain aspects of their characters, West creates a
natural grotesque, a grotesque image which is based neither
on deformity nor on the surreal, but on mundane, ordinary
facts.

With the introduction of Faye into Homer's life,
his dream or futile aspiration is created. He is now
ready to become one of the cheated. But it is necessary
to show the nature of the dream he has, and West proceeds
to develop Faye's character. She like her father, is
mechanical. She too, like Homer, has dreams. But, unlike
Homer (who is not yet disillusioned and therefore not one
of the inhuman crowd), her dreams destroy her sensitivity,
humanity, and values. Love for her must be accompanied
by money and looks. Tod fails completely on this account,
but Homer has money, and his rival, Earle Shoop, has
looks.
The book develops image-events which demonstrate that each man is taken in by Faye's superficial charms.\textsuperscript{22} The frustration and resultant violence increases as the desire for the dream increases and the frustration of failure to obtain or realize the dream becomes stronger. The growing generality of the riots, up to the final riot, revolves around the sexual frustration which Faye, the Hollywood star dream, creates. Even Tod, and to a lesser extent Claude, are drawn in by her body. His awareness is no solution because he is not just a mind, but also a body. With the minor riot or cock-fight in Homer's house, Homer too is disillusioned, but he still needs a dream. With his disillusionment, his frustration is no longer controlled and even his dead body acts as a unified force when he jumps on Adore and thereby provides a release for the mob's rage. Tod, during the riot, remains divided between his body, which is pulled by the mob, and his mind, which is pulled by his vision and painting. Ultimately, he too succumbs to the body.

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. (DL, 421)

His mental vision is no answer, and his warning must be a physical action—a scream. Yet the warning is ambiguous because at this point he cannot control his body or his mind.
He is laughing for no reason or only because laughter is the only possible reaction to irrational violence, and he is screaming like a madman. With the final image, the reader must reject Tod, as he did Miss Lonelyheart, and yet Tod's qualities of vision and awareness have been the most admirable in the book. The reader is left with nothing except Tod's painting and the image of a fictional world destroying itself. The function of West's plotting is to build to the final image and at the same time to destroy the characters and world created by the plot and images.

In West's two works which have a plot, as opposed to a mere narrative, it is clear that the plot functions in two ways. It creates situations which enable West to develop his divided images, and it also demonstrates the interaction of the various divisions contained within the divided images. The reader, through the plot, sees that Homer's physical and emotional incapacity is closely related to Faye's empty charms and that Faye in turn is a victim of her own desires. Similarly, in Miss Lonelyhearts, the plot enables the reader to see Miss Lonelyhearts' growing frustration and the disparity between his dream and reality. However, in neither work does the plot explain the causes of the conflicts and oppositions or develop the characters in depth. Plot for West is a means of linking images and of demonstrating the fate of his divided
characters. As such it does not draw us into the fictional world; rather, it enables us to see the inter-relations of the presented divisions within it.
CHAPTER IV

NOVELS AS SATIRE

We have, to this point, examined the imagery within West's work and seen that West creates his characters and his fictional world through divided images. He does this either by concentrating on specific opposing qualities within each character or thing or by focusing upon one particular quality, thereby implicitly commenting on the absence of its opposite, and contrasting the particular thing or character with another thing or character. As we have seen, the imagery deals with surfaces. Although the surfaces often reflect or exemplify internal states of mind, the emphasis is on appearances and on explicit or implicit reality. When West does move inside his characters and present psychological details, the purpose is to reinforce the basic image, not to explain the cause of the result we see. The effect of West's imagery is to distance the reader from the characters, yet the imagery is sufficiently startling to maintain our interest in the fictional world. Further, while we are not very concerned about the characters themselves, we do become concerned
about the world in which they exist, and their suffering, or perhaps more accurately, the suffering which they represent.

The plotting in both *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* supports the treatment of the characters. Because of the multiple ironies which develop, we cannot take any character completely seriously. For example, despite the fact that West sets Tod Hackett up as an honest observer in *The Day of the Locust*, Tod's desire for Faye and inability to help Homer indicate his weaknesses and limitations. There are no heroes in West's books. And none of the types he represents resolve the conflict between need and ability satisfactorily. West's plotting both supports the developing sequence of images and demonstrates the consequences of a divided world populated by divided people.

When the reader becomes aware of the consequences of the divisions, he starts to look for flaws in the construction of the fictional world, to examine the plot structure for ways to say it is unrealistic, to study the imagery to see if it is fantastic. The horror of West's world in *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust*, and to a lesser extent in *A Cool Million*, is that there is no way out. The simple beginning entails the horrific ending.
It is the sense that the reader has that West's world is logical and complete and yet that it is fantastic and unrealistic which lies at the heart of the question: is West a novelist or a satirist? To answer this question, it will be useful to adopt Sheldon Sacks' definitions of satire, apologue, and action or novel. As will be seen, his definitions are useful and generally applicable despite the fact that they do not enable us to classify West as either a satirist or a novelist. Sacks defines the different kinds of literature by their "organizing principles":

A satire is a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it.
An apologue is a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or a series of such statements.
An action (novel) is a work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability.¹

Leaving aside the notion of apologue for a moment, it is true that "Satires are works which ridicule particular men, the institutions of men, traits presumed to be in all men, or any combination of the three,"² and further that in "a coherent satire . . . all the elements of the fiction it contains--the traits ascribed to the created characters, the actions portrayed, the point of view from which the tale is told--will be selected . . . to maximize the ridicule of some combination of the three objects of satire."³
It is also true that in novels we are introduced to characters about which we come to care, and to a structure which ultimately removes the causes of instability or resolves the instability.

Ronald Paulson suggests a similar distinction in The Fiction of Satire when he says that satires are concerned with middles, not beginnings or endings. Paulson expands on this in Satire and the Novel when he says that "In literature satire is the genre most preoccupied with the moment of action rather than with the developing personality of the agent; it is legalistic to a fault . . . and almost wholly unconcerned with the culprit's past." Both Sacks and Paulson recognize that satire does not explain, only judges. Therefore, it does not develop its characters; rather, it uses them to comment on everyday life. The novel deals with causes and motives, whereas the satire presents only pictures of acts themselves.

While I feel that Sacks' distinction between novels and satires is basically sound, his notion of apologue is less satisfactory. An apologue is a fictional example of some truth, according to Sacks. Surely all satires and novels, for that matter all literature, can be described in the same terms. (In fact, Sacks argues strongly against studying all works in terms of themes.) But the concept
becomes more complex when we discover that "There is no reason why the writer of an apologue may not fully share with the satirist an intention to ridicule . . . ." The difference, Sacks implies, is that "Unlike the writer of satire, the writer of an apologue is called upon to reveal by fictional example his positive beliefs—which may explain why many writers of prose fiction whose primary intention is to ridicule nevertheless choose to embody their intention in apologue rather than satire." Satire, on the other hand, is limited to "the negative pattern implicit in the selection of external objects." The difficulty of understanding just what an apologue is arises when we look at Sacks' examples: Rasselas, Jonathan Wild and Candide. In the latter two the positive values are only implicit at best; further, Johnson's Rasselas is, in other ways, as well, completely; different from them. The only similarity amongst this group of works is that they do not fit into the definitions of satire and novel easily. Jonathan Wild and Candide are clearly satires, although of different kinds, while Rasselas is clearly some kind of novel.

While I suspect Sacks might consider at least Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust as apologues, because they neither interest us in the characters and resolve their conflicts, nor ridicule directly the world external to the fictional world, I cannot accept the
suggestion that they are either organized to present an example of a truth (any more than a good novel or satire, that is) or that West presents any positive beliefs in his work. The most notable feature of his work is the absence of anything more positive than his writing good and valuable records of his vision of the horrible and futile struggle man faces in life. In fact, using Sacks' definitions, West's work is neither apologue, novel, nor satire, but some combination of the three. But because I consider the notion of apologue extremely suspect, I will consider West only in terms of satire and novel. And, despite the fact that West does not fit Sacks' definitions of novel and satire, I will continue to refer to his definitions because they are basically sound and reflect a considerable consensus of critical opinion.

We have already examined West's imagery and plot structure. The imagery creates both the fictional world and the characters and shows the reader that both are completely divided. West's grotesque quality arises from his isolation of ordinary details or the fusion of dissimilar qualities. The plot supports the imagery and structures the events so that the reader can see the relationships within, and the consequences of, the divided world.
The test I propose, in order to decide whether West is a satirist or not, is to determine how West uses his created world and why he creates a divided one. Traditionally, satires have been written "to expose, or deride, or condemn." A frequent method has been to create some kind of fantasy world and show that the fantastic closely mirrors everyday reality (for example, *Gulliver's Travels*). Often the fictional world is exaggerated so much that at least a part of it becomes grotesque in that the distorted fantasy is both humorous and horrible. Also, most satires are structured so as to attack specific targets in the external world throughout their progress. No matter how a particular satire may be constructed, it exposes pretence, folly, and vice. And the best satires tend to use the particular targets as examples of larger or more significant concerns which demonstrate that the fictional world is completely deranged and, due to the close links with the external world, that the real world is also, by implication, deranged.

In West's work, the incidental ridicule is minimal. Although he comments on such things as mechanical religions, Hollywood illusions, artistic pretensions, these targets are not ends in themselves. Superficially, at least, we can say that where Swift, for example, might consider
mechanical writing evil in itself, and indicative of the whole of Grub Street and, ultimately, of modern society, West does not ridicule particulars for their own sake. His mockery of religions, for example, is subordinated to a larger purpose—a comment on the nature of life itself. Also, his compassion for and understanding of the need for dreams and illusions is always evident. Yet, while he understands the needs, he is basically concerned to demonstrate that his characters and his readers are deluded. The Day of the Locust, for example, is one long expose’ of Hollywood, the dream factory. It is exposed to our view, but West’s handling of Hollywood, through the use of his divided images, shows us that the performers and cheaters in Hollywood are themselves deluded and trapped by their own dreams. Therefore, we do not blame Hollywood for its creation of false dreams, nor do we blame the star-worshippers. Instead, we lament life or perhaps modern life. In terms of satire, life is too general a target to be meaningful. Yet life is West’s target.

Not only does West’s work evidence little incidental satire, it also lacks topicality except in the most general sense. West, unlike Pope or Swift, does not appear to be ridiculing particular men or particular events. With the exception of A Cool Million, we can understand West’s
comments on life solely in terms of the created fictional world. That is, we do not need to know, nor does it help us to know, West's biography, dates, political beliefs, or to be aware of the actual events of the 1930's in America in detail. It is enough to be aware that the fictional events in West are possible, not that they exaggerate or exactly record real events. The fact is that the characters and events in West's work become integral parts of the fictional world, and are not included so as to provide incidental and specific topical satiric links with the external, real world.

In *The Day of the Locust*, West creates a unified fictional world, in the sense that it is logical and coherent in itself, and destroys it at the end of the book. In *Miss Lonelyhearts*, he creates a unified character and destroys that character. Although he destroys fictional creations, the real world continues and so do the real problems posed inside the fictional world. By creating a realistic fictional world different from the everyday world only in its multiplicity of explicit divisions, he does not expose to ridicule particular evils in the external world. By destroying the fictional world he implicitly attempts to destroy the illusions of the everyday world. This is his satire. He does not attack authors, priests, cynics, screen writers, actors, actresses, politicians, whore-mongers,
and fools as such. For West, his characters are only symptoms of the sickness of life itself. To attack the dreamers or the dream-makers would be pointless, unjust, and callous. West's compassion for man and his needs makes it impossible for him to ridicule the results of those needs. At the very beginning of *The Day of the Locust*, we are told that "It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance 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" (DL, 262). However, despite West's compassion which limits his ridicule, West does expose illusions and force us to see the "truly monstrous".

West's fictional world is "truly monstrous". Its monstrousness derives not from fantasy, but from isolating qualities of people and things from their natural associations, from examining the part in detail separate from its normal relationships, from focusing on the need for illusion and dreams and recognizing the horrible consequences of that need. In fact, if West's images were not divided, it might be sufficient to say that West's fictional world is monstrous because he has consciously created in literary form an exact imitation of the real world as he perceived it. That is to say, that he placed inside his work people as sterile, living lives as futile, as those whom he saw in real life, thus forcing us to see the monstrousness of life. However, West goes further and exposes the nature
of life by creating an imagistically divided, absurd, yet coherent, fictional world in which man must act, dream, seek order and meaning, attempt to alleviate suffering and, at the same time, be doomed to failure:

Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another, Mandolins are tuned G D A E. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature . . . the battle of the centuries. Keys yearn to mix with change. Mandolins strive to get out of tune. Every order has within it the germ of destruction. All order is doomed, yet the battle is worth while. (ML, 104)

West's characters are not tragic, however, because there is nothing noble in mere survival. The continual ironies of the plots, the succession of frustrations, and the surface quality of the images moves us away from the characters so that we see their limitations clearly. Because the imagery constantly reminds us of the dissociation of mind and body, and implicitly asserts the dominance of the body over the spirit, the characters are seen to be basically animal-like, not god-like. For West, man is an animal, but this is a fact of life and thus man is not culpable, although his fate is lamentable. This position is developed explicitly in The Dream Life of Balso Snell when one of the characters writes:

Terrible indeed was the competition in which his hearers spent their lives; a competition that demanded their being more than animals.

He raised his hand as though to bless them, . . . "Yet, ah yet, are you expected to compete with Christ whose father is God, with Dionysius whose father is God; you who were Janey Davenport, or one conceived in an offhand manner on a rainy afternoon." (BS, 55-56)
True to form, however, West undercuts the speech: "After building up his tear-jerker routine for a repeat, he blacked out and went into his juggling for the curtain" (BS, 56). Here, as in Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust, West limits his expression of compassion by expressing his compassion through an ironic character or situation.

Like all satirists, West's intention is to expose pretence and illusion. Unlike most satirists, however, West does not contrast his "unillusioned perception of man as he is, and his ideal perception, or vision, of man as he ought to be." West restricts himself to his perception of what is and our perception of what is. There is no "ought". The satire comes from the reader's awareness that the destruction of the created fictional world is necessary and just. The reader must reject the fictional world because it denies man's spiritual aspirations. And, to the extent that the reader sees the qualities of the fictional world in the real world, he must reject the real world, or at least have a new, clearer perception of it.

In terms of the usual definitions of satire and novel, West is neither a novelist nor a satirist. However, when we examine West's images, his fictional world and its structure, his use of plotting, and his intention, it is clear that West is a satirist working within the conventions of the novel. His peculiarity does not lie merely in the
fact that his fictional world is novelistic, nor that it develops as a comment on itself, but in the fact that he creates a divided world and demonstrates that the divisions within it lead to its self-destruction. Further, the peculiarity of the reader's response to this self-destruction is a result of his realization that the collapse of the fictional world does not resolve the problems posed within that world, and because West provides no satisfactory alternatives, the reader, by implication, is forced to realize that because the divisions within the fictional world exist in the real world, there is no hope.17 West's entire fictional world forms a judgement of itself and of the real world. The novelistic elements of Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust are sufficient to hold each work together and demonstrate the inter-relationship of its characters; and the characterization is sufficient to maintain our interest in the problems faced by the characters. Ultimately, however, the works exist to present an image of the monstrous consequences of man's need for dreams, beauty and romance. Because West saw life as absurd and had compassion for his reader, there is no blame in his satire, only an anguished sigh.
CHAPTER V

THE MEASURE OF WEST'S ACHIEVEMENT

What I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis is the nature of West's satire. It should be noted, however, that West is not alone in his use of a coherent novelistic fictional world to comment satirically upon the everyday world. Huxley (Antic Hay, Brave New World), Waugh (Vile Bodies), Vonnegut (Cat's Cradle), Orwell (Animal Farm), Heller (Catch-22), and Golding (Lord of the Flies), among others, have written satires in novel form. That is, they too, like West, create more or less coherent fictional worlds and place those worlds beside the everyday world in order to comment implicitly or explicitly upon the everyday world.

The novel seems to have been a natural vehicle for these writers. Perhaps this is a consequence of the novel's claim to present a "true" picture of life and its historical use of other non-fiction forms such as the letter, diary, essay, history, and biography. Or perhaps it is a result of the common concern of both novels and
satires with social situations and problems. Whatever the reason, I believe that satirists have taken the novel form, used some of its conventions, and created a new kind of satire which must be judged by the criteria applicable to satire rather than to the novel. I think that this adaptation is similar to the eighteenth-century satirists' use of the epic and heroic forms. They, like modern satirists, adopted an entire form and used it for another purpose. While Pope and Dryden, for example, make the different purpose more than obvious, modern satirists have been much more subtle. We sometimes fail to recognize the dominant satiric purpose in *Brave New World* and *Vile Bodies* because the satire is not so clearly personal and particular as it often is in the earlier works and, because of this, we sometimes evaluate these works using criteria applicable to novels.

Since the eighteenth century, the tone of satire has changed. In the novelistic satires of the twentieth century personal attack is reduced to a minimum and a reader need not be aware of the real-world examples which are used within the fictional world to understand and enjoy the satire. Although Heller in *Catch-22* uses humor to accentuate the horror of his created world, other writers such as Huxley and Waugh use a subtler humor based on ironies of the plot and the serious treatment
of the absurd. West, in my opinion, is the furthest extreme of humorless satire. While there are jokes in Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust, they are developed in an unfunny context. The reader is not amused by the jokes and is, in fact, often profoundly disturbed by the ironies.

The result of this kind of subtle humor is two fold. Because we do not laugh at the jokes, we do not enter into the satire. And, because there are unfunny jokes throughout each novelistic satire, we do not become involved in the fictional world or with the characters as we would in an ordinary novel. Although the fictional world itself is mundane, ordinary, and relatively similar to the everyday world and is created by means of realistic images, the reader is not drawn into the world because the plot, which unites the images and demonstrates the interrelationships between characters and events, undercuts the significance of the events within the fictional world, thereby separating or distancing the reader from the fictional world and forcing him to examine the values represented in that world by the various characters.

One of the pitfalls for critics of modern satires which use the novel form is that the writers have created characters which exhibit, superficially, psychological realism. On the surface at least, it seems reasonable to
talk about the characters in *Brave New World*, for example, as characters or people rather than as devices. We would not, however, try to analyze Gulliver's motives in any depth. (I trust that avenue of criticism has come to its proper dead-end.) The fact is, though, that the characters in Huxley, Waugh, and West are devices, despite their particularization and motivation, created to form an integral part of the fictional world within which they exist and that that world is created to comment upon the external, everyday world. Because the function of the fictional world is to comment upon the external world, the characters within the created world cannot be taken seriously, although the problems which they face in it and the values which they represent must be taken seriously.

When we recognize that the tone of modern novelistic satires is different from earlier satires, we can see that this change is reflected in the use of the novel form. Because satire does not have to be linked to the external world continuously throughout its progress, thereby maximizing ridicule of particular evils, it can make use of the novel's seemingly impervious fictional world. Satire can be ordered in itself and comment, in its entirety, on the external world. This is not to imply that satirists must choose between aesthetically coherent works and topicality; rather, that satirists can now choose to create either a novelistic fictional world or any other
kind of less coherent world.

Along with the change in tone and form, satire is now often not concerned with blame. The fact that fingers are seldom pointed and particular evils seldom singled out for attack does not mean that satire is dead, or that writers like West are not satirists. On the contrary, I feel that the absence of blame enables satire to fulfill itself. Satire is, after all, an art form. Its distinguishing feature is its intent to reveal as illusory the values and appearances which we take to be good and worthy of praise. The satirist's function is not to assign blame or to provide corrective programs. As an artist, the satirist creates a fictional image which expresses his perception of society's illusions and which enables his readers to see the faults of their own moral values. Regardless of the satirist's technique, he always creates a picture and says "This is the way things really are." While other art forms do this as well, the satirist leaves us with no resolution or sign of hope within his created world. His vision is truly pessimistic.

Novelists like Hemingway, Conrad, and Hardy are also pessimistic. The difference lies in the absence, within novelistic satires, of worthy characters with whom we can sympathize as human beings. In pessimistic novels we may sense the futility of a character's struggle
against his fate, but we also see the value of that struggle and sense the tragedy of each character's defeat. The individual, although doomed, is noble. In novelistic satires, however, the characters are not noble, nor is their defeat tragic. The characters are seldom less ignoble than the forces against which they struggle. Further, the emphasis is not on individual characters as such; rather, the characters are devices used to reveal the nature of the fictional world, and by implication, the illusions we value and accept as real and noble in life itself.

The novel form has enabled modern satirists to express their perception of reality in a complex and subtle manner. By using the conventions of the novel and creating a coherent fictional world, they have been able to show the inter-relation of different illusory values and to widen their comment from particular to more general targets. In West, for example, the created world is only slightly distorted or exaggerated as a result of the divided imagery, and it seems to present a relatively complete range of values. We watch the fictional world in action and recognize its similarity to the real world. But we do not become concerned for the characters. Instead, we are distanced from them and we examine their values and the problems which they face. We see that the
entire created world is absurd because it lacks satisfactory values, possible meaningful alternatives, and goodness. And, when we finish reading the satire, we compare the fictional world to the real world and see our own existence for what it is.

In *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust*, West created an image which is complete in itself to comment implicitly upon the values of the real world and the realism of that image enables us to see, and prohibits us from avoiding, his vision of life. This is the nature of his satire and the measure of his achievement.3

When we measure West's work against other novelistic satires, we can recognize his brilliance. The attempt to use the novel for satiric purposes is by no means a recent phenomenon. There are many novelistic elements in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, for example. Fielding, too, is often satiric. Smollett, in his "Preface" to *Roderick Random*, suggests something of the value of combining the novel with satire:

Of all kinds of satire, there is none so entertaining and universally improving as that which is introduced, as it were, occasionally, in the course of an interesting story, which brings every incident home to life, and, by representing familiar scenes in an uncommon and amusing point of view, invests them with all the graces of novelty, while nature is appealed to in every particular. 4
Smollett also claims that he made Roderick likeable so that the reader would be more indignant about the wrongs done to him. Further, Smollett says that "Every diligent reader will, at first sight, perceive I have not deviated from nature in the facts, which are all true in the main, although the circumstances are altered and disguised, to avoid personal satire." The central problem of Roderick Random lies in this split between Roderick as character and device. West, on the other hand, always uses his characters as devices, and through his imagery and plotting makes it impossible for us to become concerned about their well-being. At the same time, however, I think West tried to create a fictional world composed of reasonable, realistic facts. And, because West's world is so realistic, and the images which create the characters distil so well the essence of their being, we are at times fooled into taking them as characters. When we finish reading Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust, however, and see the total images West has created, we forget the characters as such and retain the horrific images.

I think West, without a doubt, is among the most successful novelistic satirists. His subordination of characterization and plot to imagery forces the reader to see the "reality of reality." And, at the same time that
the limited characterization and continual ironies of the plot force us away from the fictional world, these novelistic elements enable us to see the inter-relations of the illusions and divisions within the fictional world. Thus, while I consider West's powers as a novelist to be great, it is his imagery which forms the basis of his artistic achievement, and marks him as a first-rate satirist.

Philip Pinkus has noted the amazing similarity of satiric imagery throughout the ages. He suggests there are three main kinds: "man becomes a machine . . . he is rigid, mechanical . . . he is a robot"; "man becomes an animal . . . a creature of bowels and disease"; "man becomes mad." As we have seen, West's images could be fitted into these categories. In West, however, man is not just mechanical, or bestial, or mad, but all three; the conflict between mechanical deadness and bestial desires leads, inescapably, to madness.

In Miss Lonelyhearts and The Day of the Locust West succeeded in creating unforgettable images which expose our illusions. A Cool Million, however, suffers from a more noticeable lack of characterization and plot complexity than the other novels. The absence of these novelistic features forces the burden of the book solely upon the images, but in A Cool Million they are insufficiently varied to sustain
our interest in the humorless, although crushingly ironic, dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin. *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* also lacks characterization and plot, but here the images are too varied and the ironies too complex for the reader to understand the work as a whole. West's brilliant imagery is not controlled, and his characterization shifts from that necessary in novels to that required for satire without explanation. We are left with a brilliant sequence of images which never do fuse into one image, and a number of excellent ironies which never form a plot. But out of *Balso Snell* comes the superb imagery of *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust*.

In his imagery, West distilled his vision of life. But for the divided imagery which creates the divided characters and fictional world and portrays its capacity for self-destruction, West's work would be similar to that of writers who treat life as absurd. I think West saw life as absurd, but he also saw that people were unable to live without some beauty, romance, and dream of purpose—cheated of that dream they seethe with rage and seek revenge. And, within West's fictional world, those who understand the needs of men, Miss Lonelyhearts and Tod, are helpless and forced out of the world by death or madness.

Josephine Herbst, a personal friend of West's, has said of him:
This sad moralist was by intention a satirist, but he offers no positive idea; if his novels signal "beware," they present no prospect either within the self or in the world beyond an engulfing moment .... He shared a Dostoevskian compassion which prevented him from creating any actual villains in his vision of a world ruled by the villainy of the little. 10

Out of this mixture of compassion and ruthless satiric judgement West created images which cannot be forgotten. Indeed, there is, as West wrote,

a place for the fellow who yells fire and indicates where some of the smoke is coming from without actually dragging the hose to the spot .... 11
Chapter I

1. See T.C. Wilson, "American Humor," Saturday Review of Literature, IX (May 1933), 589, for a perceptive and appreciative review which treats Miss Lonelyhearts as a "robust satire".


3. This information is drawn from Stanley Edgar Hyman, Nathanael West, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 21 (Minneapolis, 1962); James F. Light, Nathanael West: An Interpretative Study (Evanston, Illinois, 1961); and William White, "How Forgotten Was Nathanael West," American Book Collector, VIII, 4 (1957), 13-17.

4. Light. See footnote 3 above.


Thomas Gilmore, along with W.H. Auden and A.M. Tibbetts, argues that The Day of the Locust is not a satire. I hope this study will counter his argument by clarifying just how West's satire works. Thomas Gilmore, "The Dark Night of the Cave: A Rejoinder to Kernan on The Day of the Locust," Satire Newsletter (Spring 1965), 95-100.

Philip Pinkus, "Satire and St. George," Queen's Quarterly, LXX (Spring 1963), 30-49.

Pinkus, 35. His article provides the basis of my thesis.


Tibbetts, 8.


Reid, p. 118.

19
See footnote 13 above.

20
Comerchero, p. 7.

21
All further quotations from West in my text are from The Complete Works of Nathanael West (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1957). Page references will be given in the text preceded by each work's abbreviated title.

22

23
Randall Reid has also noted this similarity. (See below p. 13.)

24

Chapter II

1
Reid, p. 161.

2
Comerchero, p. 161.

3
Light, p. 54. "Wherever one looks in the world of West, there is some kind of conflict, irreconcilable, insoluble, horrible."

4
Reid, p. 140.

5
Reid, pp. 140-141.
See Marc L. Ratner, "'Anywhere Out of This World': Baudelaire and Nathanael West," American Literature, XXXI (January 1960), 456-463 for possible similarities between these two writers, especially their rejection of dreams.

Randall Reid notes that within West's world "To discover the falseness of an illusion is not, however, to be delivered from it. Insight may only intensify frustration." Reid, p. 135.

"The world remains discordant, peopled by natural grotesques . . . ." Reid, p. 118.

Comerchero, p. 161. See also Reid, p. 119.

For an excellent treatment of West's humor see Norman Podhoretz, "A Particular Kind of Joking," New Yorker, XXXIII (May 1957), 144-153. I must admit I do not think West was "first and last a writer of comedy" (144), but Podhoretz does go a long way towards illustrating his contention that West's novels demonstrate that human beings can be no more than human. What Podhoretz fails to note is the destruction in each work which suggests that being human is not enough, even in West's world.

Comerchero, p. 3. West is not interested in analyzing character; he is interested in crystallizing it by using Freudian images as symbols or objective correlative of a psychological state." Further, "his unique gift was his ability to create a semblance of character out of transfigured mental states," p. 9.

Light. See footnote 3 above.

Chapter III

2 Victor Comerchero also feels that West forsook "tension and intensity," and wrote "a novel which lacks focus, brevity, and unity." Comerchero, p. 130.

3 In a discussion of West's relationship to his contemporaries and the Communist movement of the 1930's, Daniel Aaron considers West to be a "universal satirist" as opposed to a "satiric propagandist" (Kenneth Burke's distinctions) and even in A Cool Million "the real culprit is not Capitalism but humanity." Daniel Aaron, "Late Thoughts on Nathanael West," Massachusetts Review, VI (1965), 316.


5 Light, "Miss Lonelyhearts: The Imagery of Nightmare," 326.

6 Light, 318.

7 Light, 321.

8 See also Robert I. Edenbaum, "Dada and Surrealism in the United States: A Literary Instance," Arts in Society, V (1968), 114-125. (I have not seen this article.)

9 Light, 325.

10 Light, 325.


13 Donovan, 92.
14 Donovan, 93.
15 Donovan, 94.
18 See Light, Nathanael West: An Interpretative Study, p. 95 for a more thorough discussion. Also Nancy W. Hand, "A Novel in the Form of a Comic Strip: Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts," Serif, V, ii (1968), 14-21. (I have not seen this article.)
19 Thomas Lorch argues that Miss Lonelyhearts demonstrates a positive religious development, although he, at the same time, notes the simultaneous withdrawal of Miss Lonelyhearts. Rather than being affirmative, I would suggest that any positive elements merely accentuate the futility of the Christ dream. Thomas Lorch, "Religion and Art in Miss Lonelyhearts," Renascence, XX (1967), 11-17.
20 I cannot agree with Alvin Kernan who argues that "In The Day of the Locust, as in most satires, there is no consistent story and, therefore, by the usual standards, no plot." Kernan is correct in his contention that the images are of primary importance, but there is also a relatively complex plot (as compared to A Cool Million, for example). Alvin Kernan, The Plot of Satire. (New Haven, 1965), p. 77.
21

For a complete mis-reading of, or denial of, the relationship between Homer and Faye see Daniel Aaron, "Writing for Apocalypse," Hudson Review, III (1951), 636. I think Aaron has judged the work solely on the criteria of the novel, and thus missed the basic function of the plot to unify the images which create an apocalypse. (See footnote 20, above.)

22


23

In "Nathanael West's Holy Fool," Commonweal, LXIV (June 1956), 276-278, Arthur Cohen suggests that West tried to make a saint (Miss Lonelyhearts) and two fools (Lemuel Pitkin and Homer Simpson) convincing heroes. Aside from the fact that Tod is at least as central to The Day of the Locust as Homer, I think it is a mistake to take West's characters as heroes, although it is true that all of West's central characters misapprehend the world in which they exist. (In his "Introduction" to The Day of the Locust, Gehman also contends that Homer Simpson is the central character.)

Chapter IV

1


2

Sacks, p. 7.

3

Sacks, p. 7.

4


Sacks, pp. 2-3.

Sacks, p. 49.

Sacks, p. 60

Sacks, p. 49.

Arnold Kettle makes a similar distinction of which Sacks may have been aware. Kettle creates a class of works which he calls "The Moral Fable." However, as with Sacks, the notion is not particularly clear and seems to be, in fact, composed of left-overs. The basic feature of a moral fable seems to be its avoidance of complex characters and character analysis, and its lack of exploration, as opposed to statement or exemplum, of themes within the work. Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, vol. I (London, 1951), pp. 42-54.

For a very brief but interesting discussion of West see W.H. Auden's "Interlude: West's Disease," *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York, 1962), pp. 236-245. Auden says that "West is not, strictly speaking, a novelist; that is to say, he does not attempt an accurate description either of the social scene or of the subjective life of the mind" (p. 236). "But West is not a satirist. Satire presupposes conscience and reason as the judges between the true and the false, the moral and the immoral, to which it appeals, but for West these faculties are themselves the creators of unreality" (pp. 240-241). Auden thinks that West wrote Cautionary Tales.


James Nichols, "Nathanael West, Sinclair Lewis, Alexander Pope, and Satiric Contrasts," *Satire Newsletter*, V (1968), 119-122, notes a similar characteristic in *A Cool Million* which parodies forms and speech, but is not basically an attack on the original (121).
14  Kernan, The plot of Satire, p. 173, notes that "... West and Waugh ... will only finally condemn the dunces for their self-defeating movements, for following courses of action that do no more than intensify their already desperate situations."

15  A.M. Tibbetts sees The Dream Life of Balso Snell as "a 'satire' without an object of attack except itself" (112). I would agree that Balso Snell collapses upon itself, but I would argue that this forms West's satire. A.M. Tibbetts, "Nathanael West's The Dream Life of Balso Snell," Studies in Short Fiction, II (Winter 1965), 105-112.


17  Thomas Gilmore argues that West's attitude is not typical of satirists, that West is interested in analyzing his characters, and that there is no alternative to his bleak world. By now I hope it is clear that West's attitude is compatible with satire, that West does analyze characters but we cannot become interested in them, and that the lack of alternatives is no reason to exclude West from the ranks of satirists. Gilmore, "The Dark Night of the Cave," Satire Newsletter, 95.

Chapter V


3  William Bittner recognizes something of West's peculiarity when he says "West's symbols are grotesques, perhaps more disturbing even than Kafka's, because they more strongly resemble the real. His satire never loses its sting because it is always more real than satirical." Bittner, "Catching Up With Nathanael West," The Nation, CLXXXIV (May 1957), 324.


8. Pinkus, 36.


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Because a complete and exhaustive bibliographical study has been done by William White and published in Studies in Bibliography, XI (1958), 207-224, and supplemented by White with "Nathanael West: Bibliographical Addenda (1957-1964)," Serif, II, i (March 1965), 5-18, and "Further Bibliographical Notes," Serif, II, iii (Sept. 1965), 28-31, the following bibliography is selective and includes only those items directly relevant to this thesis. Some of the more important works on novels and satires used directly in the thesis are also listed, although I have not tried to acknowledge every writer I have read.


___, "Writing for Apocalypse," Hudson Review, III (Winter 1951), 634-636.


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