



# The Day of the Locust

*Nathanael West , Alfred Kazin (Introduction by)*

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*The Day of the Locust* is a novel about Hollywood and its corrupting touch, about the American dream turned into a sun-drenched California nightmare. Nathanael West's Hollywood is not the glamorous "home of the stars" but a seedy world of little people, some hopeful, some despairing, all twisted by their by their own desires -- from the ironically romantic artist narrator to a macho movie cowboy, a middle-aged innocent from America's heartland, and the hard-as-nails call girl would-be-star whom they all lust after. An unforgettable portrayal of a world that mocks the real and rewards the sham, turns its back on love to plunge into empty sex, and breeds a savage violence that is its own undoing, this novel stands as a classic indictment of all that is most extravagant and uncontrolled in American life.

## The Day of the Locust Details

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Author : Nathanael West , Alfred Kazin (Introduction by)

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# From Reader Review The Day of the Locust for online ebook

## Realini says

The Day of The Locust has a dead horse in a Hollywood pool, a cock fight, a Mexican, a cowboy and plenty of other strange things, people and happenings. I loved the book.

Why The Day of The Locust I wondered: an explanation found online (where else?) is that the locust refers to Tod, the main character.

I've also read that : "...the fierce critique of Hollywood, and the mentality of the masses, depicts an America that is both sick with vanity, while also harboring a malignant sense of perversity..." I disagree with much of that, since my reading was in a different note. Furthermore, I found that lately I tend to like happier books, less hermetic, accesible, perhaps even lighter (?) In other words, at least form my perspective, this book can't be about a sick America...or there is a contradiction in my sistem..

There's more material I disagree with: "West's characters are Hollywood stereotypes, what Light calls "grotesques".[9] The novel's protagonist, Tod Hackett (whose first name likely derives from the German word for death and whose last name refers to a common epithet for Hollywood screenwriters and artists, who were pejoratively called "hacks"), is a set painter who aspires to artistic greatness. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrative voice announces: "Yes, despite his appearance, Tod was really a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities..."

These last observations may even contradict themselves: is he complicated or is he a stereotype?

I liked Tod, maybe becasue I identify with him, his failed hopes, his unfulfilled dreams...

The description of Faye was excellent: complex, sensuos, in spite of her evil essence.

There are hilarious moments, placed right before or after horror scenes.

If "the Modern Library ranked The Day of the Locust #73 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. Time magazine included the novel in its list of 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005,[1] and noted critic Harold Bloom included it in his list of canonical works in the book The Western Canon"...I can only agree and place The Day of The Locust somewhere nearer the Top of my list of favorite books

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## Steven Godin says

A dark and foreboding look at 1930's Los Angeles where screen writer Tod Hackett falls for aspiring young actress Fay Greener, but this is a long way from being a love story and has an atmosphere filled with dread, sexual tension and desperate lives, where everything felt more like a surreal nightmare than a Hollywood dream, and although on the short side, West captures this era perfectly, where the glitz and glamour of the movie industry becomes an obsession for those with high hopes of hitting the big time, no matter what the cost. With the added bonus of containing one of my favourite ever endings, this was an absorbing read hard to forget.

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## Sara Zovko says

Nešto je trulo u tvornici snova, mašineriji koja guta ljude i tjera ih da izgube sebe.

Sjaj Hollywooda lažan je, a kroz taj sjaj provlaže se razližite nakaze kao stvorene za vjeđnu igru, stvorene da izgube sve.

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## Jessica says

As some of you know, I came dangerously close to packing it in and moving to Los Angeles this winter. I'm from California originally, but the *other* California, up the Five a ways and then off to the left.... Where I grew up people speak of LA in the same disgusted, dismissive, and morbidly fascinated tones they used to talk about Michael Jackson before he died. The Bay Area is majorly creeped-out by the weirdo plastic-surgery-disaster-of-dubious-morals that is Los Angeles. We hate it for its car culture I guess (though we drive up there too), maybe a little for the vapidly sunny weather (ours isn't bad either), but really what we hate its Entertainment Industry and everything related, everything that represents. We are deeply suspicious and insanely resentful of the mindless, soulless crap produced by Hollywood, of shallow surface beauty, of glitzy superficiality and the tinselled-out dreams and the depressing nightmares we vaguely suspect they must engender. According to Berkeley, LA is full of beautiful idiots who are banally bad people; we, on the other hand, are homely, unkempt, sincere neurotics who drink great coffee and ride our bestickered bikes earnestly to independent bookstores. We are a trustworthy people that judges men, women, or otherwise-gender-identified individuals based on their progressive political views and doctoral dissertations, not on the size of their chests, their last picture's gross, or the sparkle of their smiles! LA is soul-killing. And it's boring and ugly.

Anyway, I'm getting a little off-topic here, but I wanted to give some background about my personal programming regarding Hell-A, and especially my horror of Hollywood and its spawn. People in New York are sometimes freaked out by LA but for sort of different reasons -- or in a different way, in any case -- and it was only when I'd tell old Bay Area friends I was moving that their visceral horror drove home the insanity of what I had planned.

"*Why would you ever move there????!*" they would cry. "*The driving*, ugh, and.... the.... the *people*.... the MOVIE PEOPLE! They're all *MOVIE PEOPLE!!!*"

"I know, I know," I'd say. "But I love the weather." It was February in New York and I wanted to kill myself. "And I really, really, really miss....."

"You miss...?"

"I miss the produce."

This is the truth. I nearly moved to Los Angeles in large part because I haven't eaten a decent fruit or vegetable in six years. This is one of those things you just take for granted growing up in California: that pretty much any produce you buy is grown reasonably close and fairly recently, and that large quantities of it can be easily procured, pretty much anywhere, all year round. This is simply not the case in New York City. The first time I saw lettuce in a supermarket here, I almost started crying. It looked like something that had

been strangled by a serial killer in the Central Valley, stuffed in the trunk of a battered Impala, driven to Brooklyn the long way (via Mexico?), dumped in an alley behind the store, chewed on by some rats, rejected by them, then brought inside and offered for sale at something like \$3 a head. This kind of lettuce is fairly standard here. Of course, if you're willing to shell out serious cash you can get something prettier, but you'll notice that will have been grown in California too, if it's even domestic. I know how shitty I feel after traveling across the country, and I don't want eat something that's undergone that ordeal. My solution to dealing with this situation has been to stop eating vegetables, so I basically just survive on pizza and bagels (which are both way better here), and by smoking a pack of mentholated cigarettes whenever I get an artichoke craving.

Anyway, for reasons too unbearably shocking and sordid to get into here, I did not wind up moving to LA, so I'm still here in New York. This took some adjustment, especially since it's been late March for about five months now: it just rains all the time and is generally shitty. I spend one-to-three hours every day in an underground tunnel, usually with my face pressed into some stranger's reeking armpit. I trudge through the streets like a goddamn mule, with my backpack over one shoulder, gym stuff on the other, feeling incredibly frumpy and oppressed. I stagger miles in my heels with my life on my back, usually in the rain, having graphic fantasies about what it must like to have a *trunk*. A trunk in one's *car*, which one drives to the supermarket and loads up with Trader Joe's junkfood and a bounty of produce.... fresh, inexpensive, delicious produce, full of nutrients and joy.....

Okay, so the other day I got off work, and you know what? It wasn't raining. Finally. And I felt pretty good! I left work and stopped by my friend's bar in Tribeca to shoot the shit a little on the way to my gym, then left him with a little spring in my step, thinking well, this New York City livin' ain't really so bad! It's nice to be able to live one's life on foot, to pay social calls and run errands in a glamorous neighborhood, and who cares it's one so chichi I'd never be able to live there, no matter what unexpected turns my life happens to take? I can stroll from my office, stop and visit a friend, stroll onto the gym and then do a nice long run up alongside the Hudson River. Is this really so bad? It is not. It is not!

I felt some kind of something settle in me then, and at that moment I made a new kind of peace with staying in New York. You *can* have quality of life in this city, I thought, as the summer evening sunshine fell on the cobblestone streets.... and then there, as if to reward me, as I turned the corner, was a huge gorgeous sign for the Tribeca Farmers Market.

My heart actually did swell at this point, like it does when the music goes in some great old movie. I've never quite understood why there isn't a Tribeca Farmers Market, seeing as how it's um, the epicenter for well-heeled baby producers who live for just that sort of thing. And this was really the farmers market to end all farmers markets! Like pretty much everything in Tribeca, it gleamed with a patina of expensive specialness that made you just want to *buy* it. And because it was new, it wasn't crowded at all, even though it was huge, and really seemed to have everything. I don't really go to the Farmers Markets around here too much, mostly because they all seem to close down before I get off work, and then the ones that don't -- like the closest one to me, Saturdays in Park Slope -- always seem to be some big clusterfuck of strollers and pushing, and require a lot more planning and stamina than I feel they're worth.

But this Tribeca one was great. All the produce looked incredible, heaped up in these jewel-toned piles of locally-grown, organic goodness. Apples, carrots, greens, onions.... handmade honey, handmade cheese, handmade yogurt, handmade colorful signs in the stalls, all of it just real beautiful and so picturesque. And I strolled through this slowly, not stopping yet, just taking it in as I blissfully thought: "Oh, *fuck* you, Los Angeles! New York has it *all*. This place is *amazing*. Why would I leave, when everything's here? I can live here no problem.... and I won't starve!"

I was walking behind these two Scandinavian tourists who'd stopped a little ahead of me to talk to one of the farmers. And what a farmer this guy was! The loveliest farmer for the loveliest farmers market, he was straight from Central Casting: eyes twinkling in his kindly weathered face, greying hair peeking out from his slightly battered fruit-selling hat and curling down over his sun-reddened ears. I slowed down to hear what he was telling the women, who now seemed to be looking around in confusion. The farmer had just said something about Jennifer Lopez.

"Wait, *what?*" I interrupted. That's when I noticed the lady with the clipboard who'd just started yelling. "Did you just say this is a *set*?"

The farmer grinned and shrugged apologetically. "We're making a movie."

"Of *course* you are...." I mumbled, shoulders sagging suddenly from the weight of my bags. "Of *course* there's no Tribeca Farmers Market."

"I wish there was," the farmer said. "Try Union Square?"

"PLACES!" the woman with the clipboard shrieked.

The farmer headed back to his stall, and I split. As I stalked down the block, furiously spinning the ball of my Blackberry (the only fruit there's no shortage of in this town, apparently) an LA-looking type clearly crapping his linen pants screamed in my face. "I've got a *camera* coming through here! Who's letting all these goddamn *people* walk on this street?"

"Oh fuck you," I snarled. "I live here. Go back to LA!"

So I was really mad when this happened, but pretty soon afterwards I decided I liked it. I decided something else, too, which is that LA is great because Hollywood's great, and Hollywood's great because it's such a wonderful, durable, flexible metaphor. You know the cliché about how things become clichés? The Hollywood metaphor's a great cliché. It's like a basic formulaic plot that's been used a thousand times, and actually a surprisingly large number of movies and books based on it are pretty fabulous. *The Day of the Locust* isn't the best of them, but it's notable in part because it was written fairly early -- 1939 -- but more because West's own cocktail of sparkling style and abject nihilism is so well-suited to the topic.

This book has aged in a couple jarring ways -- like that one of the characters is named Homer Simpson, which you'd think would be fun but for me was actually a terrible distraction. The story is the basic Hollywood-eats-your-soul plot, I guess, except it's extremely bleak and depraved and hardcore and almost psychedelic.... and really lovely and beautiful in a certain kind of way. I didn't think it was the greatest thing ever, and actually *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* made a much bigger impact on me, though this take on Hollywood in the thirties was way more Literary and more specifically about Hollywood. *The Day of the Locust* is ultimately a weird but sturdy little black comedy that should be mandatory summer reading for anyone with an interest in Hollywood and riffs on its themes.... which should be most people, really.

Why? Because we were totally wrong about LA, growing up in the Bay Area. The entertainment industry isn't a dull, fluffy, fun date movie that's too dumb to think about. Hollywood is ten thousand times more fucked-up and fascinating than anything in Berkeley, and that's why LA's amazing. We didn't get what Hollywood was, looking down at it from the North and thinking there was nothing there beneath all that surface. There's shit crawling around like crazy under the glitter and makeup, which has been pointed out so many times because it truly is a great theme. Hollywood is a fake Farmers Market when you hate your life

and you just need fresh greenbeans. Hollywood is fake sets and fake people and gorgeous canyons full of flowers, and aspiring slutty starlets and cynical desperate men and sleazy Racing Form dwarves and cockfighting cowboys and sexy Mexicans and bizarre out-of-place costumes and studios and tequila and rapes and illegal abortions and frightening stage mothers of psychotic child actors and riots and murders and fifty other kinds of insanity..... I'm flipping through and remembering this is actually a pretty awesome book. David Lynch could do an *amazing* adaptation of this. Why hasn't he? It'd be deadly.

Okay, that's enough procrastination for one night, or maybe even for a lifetime. I'm going to go eat some wilted spinach out of a bag now, and cry myself to sleep.

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### **Tfitoby says**

It's both well written and enjoyable. I'd never heard of this book until it appeared on my recommendations shelf and I've been trying to figure out why, especially as I then found two copies on the shelf at work. Not to mention how very impressive it was.

I guess there's only so much room for American literature from the thirties to have lasting worldwide appeal through to 2012. It was never on any syllabus I ever read that's for sure. Perhaps it should be. Depression era Hollywood certainly seems less horrifying and, well, depressing than other books about the same time in other parts of America.

That's not to say that this wasn't horrifying, because it was. Not least because everything written by Nathanael West in this novel could quite easily be written about the 21st century and especially that awful area of the world known as Hollywood.

The sense of foreboding or dread that you feel from the start of the novel may not be on a similar plane to *The Talented Mr. Ripley* for example but it's there all the same. The climax on the other hand is much more powerful than almost anything else I've read and really quite unexpected in its content. Until this point I was merely enjoying it but the effect it has on the overall reaction to the novel is incredible.

One thing I should point out to people reading a back cover blurb and thinking it sounds like a 1930s version of a Bret Easton Ellis novel, this is not about the industry or about shallow, rich people, it is so much more than that. It is a novel about the effect of Hollywood and fame on the everyday reality of normal working class people. The quality literary equivalent of watching idiots line up to embarrass themselves on tv auditioning for *The X Factor* or *Big Brother* and taken to its logical extreme.

EDIT: I've just had the pleasure of watching John Schlesinger's underseen movie adaptation and a few quibbles aside it is more than a match for West's novel.

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### **Paul Bryant says**

We were watching *42nd Street* from the tough year of 1933 the other night and my daughter was more than somewhat surprised at the risqué nature of some of the zingers in the first 15 minutes, such as:

Abner, who is bankrolling the new show: I'd like to do something for you...if you'd do something for me.

Dorothy Brock, the leading lady: Why, Mr Dillon, I'd be very glad to...

Stage hand : You remember Ann Lowell?

Stage manager: Not Anytime Annie? Who could forget her? She only said no once, when she didn't hear the question.

Stage manager: Okay, those three girls on the left. If I were you I'd keep them.

Director: I suppose if I don't you'll have to.

Stage manager: What's your name?

Chorus girl : Diane Lorrimer, 333 Park Avenue.

Fellow chorine in stage whisper: And is her homework tough!

The whole movie rests on the assumed notion that the real currency of the world of showbiz is not money, it's sexual favours. And the chorus girls are very likely hooking, with some of them daintily trying to pretend they're not. As the great song "Lullaby of Broadway" puts it

*When a Broadway baby says "Good night,"*

*It's early in the morning.*

*Manhattan babies don't sleep tight until the dawn:*

*Good night, baby,*

*Good night, milkman's on his way*

*The Day of the Locust* is set in Hollywood, not Broadway, but the rapacious slobbering over and trading in young female flesh is the exact same. Quite shocking it is, too, for the modern reader – the leading lady in this teensy acidulous bedlam of a novel is all of 17 years old and a wannabe movie actress and like almost everyone else in this book is stony broke and so just naturally contemplates joining a call girl service, and does so too. Which drives the leading gentleman of this story not a little demented. Makes him frantically figure if he could afford her for a couple of nights, but realises he couldn't.

The whole thing reads like the novel Tom Waits would have written if he'da been born way back when and had a deal more patience. In fact it reads like his song/monologue "9th and Hennepin":

*the moon's teeth marks are on the sky*

*And the broken umbrellas are like dead birds*

*And the steam comes out of the grill*

*Like the whole goddam town is ready to blow*

*And the bricks are all scarred with jailhouse tattoos*

*And everyone is behaving like dogs*

*And all the rooms they smell like diesel*

*And you take on the dreams of the ones who have slept there*

*And I'm lost in the window*

*And I hide in the stairway*

*And I hang in the curtain*

*And I sleep in your hat*

*And no one brings anything small into a bar around here*

*And the girl behind the counter has a tattooed tear*

*She has that razor sadness that only gets worse*

*With the clang and the thunder of the Southern Pacific going by*



*And the clock ticks out like a dripping faucet  
Till you're full of rag water and bitters and blue ruin  
And you spill out over the side to anyone who'll listen*

So here are your losers, bores, chumps, no-hopers, hopheads, drunks, the flotsam of the infested scummy shores of outer Hollywood, there's no story here, just some more-or-less connected scenes of a pitchblack nature at which it's hard to smile unless you get your fun from watching autopsies, the only laughter is the staccato near hysteria inappropriate sort you try to suppress at the scene of an accident. It's real nasty stuff then at the end it all goes to hell in a major crowd scene symbolical sort of way.

If you're looking for the milk of human kindness it done got syphoned out the tank, try another book.

3.5 stars

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

I am recommending this book to you because you should read it. It is set in 2012 America, as you can see from this quote:

*Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, war. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing.*

Ha ha, gotcha! This is set in Depression-era Hollywood! And it is pretty fantastic. And, as you can see, still disarmingly relevant. And it ends with a proper Hollywood action finale. And there is a character named Homer Simpson. And he is heavy, slow, sweet, and oh-so-low. And there is another man, an artist named Todd HACKett, who has sold himself out to menial, soulless painters labor for the pitchers. And, and, he and Homer are in love with the same dame, who is what it appears that many an aspiring actress in Hollywood becomes: a prostitute. Also, a manipulative cooze. And Todd has creepy rape fantasies which he associates with love-feelings because he doesn't know how to deal with Homer being a proxy cuckold failure who mirrors his own self-doubts and shattering failures at dry-humping the American Dream. And Homer truly loves the gal, and Todd truly wants to win her like a balloon at the fair, even if he has to steal her like candy from an orphan with TB and a peg leg. And people try real hard to make it in the biiiiig ciiiiity, but just end up trampling one another trying to catch wind of someone else's greatness. Literally. And, and, and...

Stop reading this and go read that. Teeny violins all around.

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### **Kemper says**

A grim little tale of a pack of losers leading sad and desperate lives in L.A. in the 1930's. Tod is an artist with a job at one of the movie studios, and he's in lust with Faye, a wannabe actress with no talent and a sick father, who has made it clear that she has no interest in Tod, but that doesn't stop her from teasing him.

Homer Simpson (Bear in mind that this was written before Matt Groening was even born.) is a yokel in from Iowa who came to California for his health who apparently has some form of OCD that involves his hands having minds of their own. Throw in a Hollywood producer, a handsome cowboy who just leans against a building all day, a guy who runs cock fights, and a very small bookie, and you've got a crowd of misfits who will make almost anyone feel better about their own lives.

This has some incredible writing with short spot-on depictions of hopelessness and quiet despair. Just to make this an even happier read, the introduction tells how the author, West, was friends with F. Scott Fitzgerald and was killed in a car accident while rushing to F. Scott's funeral. This is the book that just keeps on giving. Unfortunately, what it's giving is depression.

The worst thing about the book isn't even the author's fault. Having a character named Homer Simpson makes it hard to read something as serious fiction, especially a book like this. Every time I saw the name, I started grinning, even as the story is describing his sad and shabby little life. All that was missing was an alcoholic named Barney.

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## **Irene says**

I had a hard time deciding to finish the book after the first mention of Tod Hackett's thoughts about the courage to rape a teenager but I forget. You're not supposed to like the characters in this story.

Tod is the protagonist, the straight man in this black comedy. Tod is self-aware and slick but still a naive outsider, in many ways. Like the lost inhabitants in Los Angeles, he is not that different compared to his midwest foil, Homer Simpson.

The highlights of this novel are in the parade of minor characters. Maybelle Loomis and her son Adore are, perhaps, the most startling discoveries to the 21st century reader because raw foodies and stage moms have been around since 1939. I think that actually might have been my favourite part. The first party also has a hilarious scene where Joan the tennis champ tries hard to be scandalous and provocative by interrupting a group of men talking shop to ask if they're conversing about smut.

I do not like Tod. Mainly because I'm subjected to his rape fantasies of a 17 year old. Tod not only tries to kiss Faye, the teenager in question, at her father's funeral but he also asks her point-blank "sleep with me" when they are dancing at a transgender night club. I can't get behind Tod because I wonder why I am supposed to care about his character. It's clear Tod has no feelings towards Faye other than sexual aggression/domination but I'm supposed to feel for him because Faye is a confident flirt.

*Yes, despite his appearance, he was really a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes. And "The Burning of Los Angeles," a picture he was soon the paint, definitely proved he had talent.*

Yet I decided to finish the story because I started to think, what if the narrator dislikes Tod as much as me? Rereading the beginning paragraphs, I started to imagine that the narrator initially fools the reader to sympathize with Tod. "He really is a very complicated man" - so many adverbs doing so much special pleading. I read the rest of the story with this perspective and felt limited omniscient narration worked really well. In many exchanges with other characters, we see Tod's true feelings and they are generally selfish and dark. It's interesting, in this sense.

For me, this book made me think about whether you should finish something you don't enjoy the experience of reading in order to learn something new. The jury's still out on my end.

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## Richard Derus says

Rating: 3\* of five

**The Publisher Says:** *The Day of the Locust* is a novel about Hollywood and its corrupting touch, about the American dream turned into a sun-drenched California nightmare. Nathaniel West's Hollywood is not the glamorous "home of the stars" but a seedy world of little people, some hopeful, some despairing, all twisted by their by their own desires—from the ironically romantic artist narrator to a macho movie cowboy, a middle-aged innocent from America's heartland, and the hard-as-nails call girl would-be-star whom they all lust after. An unforgettable portrayal of a world that mocks the real and rewards the sham, turns its back on love to plunge into empty sex, and breeds a savage violence that is its own undoing, this novel stands as a classic indictment of all that is most extravagant and uncontrolled in American life.

### My Review:

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.

Sad. Yes, that's it, I feel sad. This is a classic of Hollywood literature, I can even sort of see that, but it's as bleak as they come and it's all told, very little shown, at very crucial points. If this is a novel, I'm at a loss to see how; it's some biting character studies glued together by accidents of geography. To me it reads more like a treatment that had to be abandoned, was too dear to West's heart-shaped ice cube, and instead got its B12 shots, 50,000 volts, and *liiiiived*.

So Tod (Death in German, get it?) HACKett (movie hanger-on, usu. a writer, get it?) falls for the vapidness that is bleached-blond Faye Greener, as does poor rube-a-licious Homer Simpson (!!), as does no-bit extra Earle Shoop...I suspect, from some of Faye's father's mannerisms, that he and Faye got up to the badger game a time or two. What in the name of common sense is the appeal?! She's hard as nails, not terribly bright, and unbelievably self-centered. I couldn't abide her from the moment West put this in her mouth:

"I'm going to be a star some day," she announced as though daring him to contradict her.

"I'm sure you..."

"It's my life. It's the only thing in the whole world that I want."

"It's good to know what you want. I used to be a bookkeeper in a hotel, but..."

"If I'm not, I'll commit suicide."

That wasn't fresh and new in 1939, either. I agree that this person exists in her legions at every doorway to

stardom, but Faye doesn't rise above that generic feel at any turn. After each encounter with Faye, particularly the après-cockfight cocktail party and its aftermath, I want to ask West, "...AND?! What is it, why are these men so hot-to-trot for this trollop?" He's dead these 74 years, so he won't answer even if I shout, so I'm left bewildered.

Homer Simpson, apparently the lovable loser who gave cartoonist Matt Groening the name for his quarter-century old cartoon oaf, is the most realistic and fully drawn character in the piece. In creating Homer, West has fully focused our attention on him and relegated narrator Tod to the Nick Carraway position as he focuses on Homer and his back-story, his sad and empty existence (the part about the deck chair and the view is one of the best and most telling character traits West ladles on to Homer), and his doom (in the original Celtic meaning of *Bha so an dàn duit*, this was destined for thee). Homer tries and misses, tries and misses again, tries.... He's never, ever the fun guy or the sweet guy, he's the useful but horrendously annoying guy with the car and the cards.

Only those who still have hope can benefit from tears. When they finish, they feel better. But to those without hope, whose anguish is basic and permanent, no good comes from crying. Nothing changes for them. They usually know this, but still can't help crying.

His passion for the cipher Faye comes to its absolutely clearly telegraphed and inevitable conclusion, Tod twitters and flails ineffectually to interfere with it, and in the end it drives both Tod and Homer into the climactic ending of the book:

Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, war. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing.

And this at last wove the book together for me, made the preceding ~200pp make some sense to me. This is West's cri de coeur and shout to the gods that Prometheus is back to make trouble again.

A year later he was dead. Hm.

There is no smallest question that West can craft some lovely sentences and some incisive character sketches. He can hang all them on a plot of sorts and make your readerly curiosity bump itch so bad you have to scratch it with his tyrannosaurus-armed stories, even at the risk of running afoul of the brute's severing teeth. But here, in this book, the alchemy that elevates *Miss Lonelyhearts* to the cold and glittering glory of Everest's heights settles instead into the weirder, less pristine shape of Kilimanjaro: Feet in the humid heat, midsection arid and weirdly populated with things not seen elsewhere, and then the transcendent snowy glory of the ending.

Some years back, my real-life book circle read *What Makes Sammy Run?* by Budd Schulberg. Sammy Glick, he of the title, is a character I can't forget and find myself thinking about. Sammy's is a story of hustle and flow, make and do and create...Tod never does one damned thing in this book except chase Faye and wander around. Yet which of these two books has been made into a movie? Not the solid, excellent *What Makes Sammy Run?*, no sirree, but this collection of grotesques gets made. In a weird sort of way, *The Day of the*

*Locust* feels to me like a precursor to the viciously cuttingly unfunny humor of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Both are utterly of a place, can't be told against the backdrop of any other place, and are pitilessly clear of vision. Both are the best-remembered works by their early-dead authors. And each is, taken on its own merits, marvelous parts in search of a gestalt to animate into more than some wonderful, memorable set-pieces embedded in perfunctory plotlike matrices.

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## **Glenn Russell says**

My vote for the Great American Novel - *The Day of the Locust* by Nathaniel West. Why? West's short novel speaks to what every single American has to deal with - the falsehood of Hollywood, the ultimate con, the complete fake, the billion dollar illusion, shoved in everybody's face, like it or not.

As Nathaniel West captured so brilliantly, once anything or anyone is in Hollywood, there is no escape from being converted into artificiality - even a wooden chest of drawers is painted to look like unfinished wood.

Adults beating the spontaneity out of children so their kid can be the next Shirley Temple. How twisted. Adults dressing, speaking, moving, expressing themselves in imitation of what they see on the screen. How sick. How appalling. How American.

How Nathaniel West captured it all perfectly in this Great American Novel: *The Day of the Locust*.

I love this photo capturing how the five-pointed stars in the Hollywood sidewalk mirror the five-pointed stars in the American flag.

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## **Bettie? says**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06p56zj>

Description: *Tod is a young scene designer in 1930s Hollywood trying to earn an honest buck and still maintain his artistic integrity. He falls in love with Faye, an aspiring actress and gets sucked into the toxic periphery of Hollywood. A caustic satire on the flipside of the 1930s dream factory.*

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## **Laura Leaney says**

I re-read this for a recent book club and found myself appreciating it much more than I did back in college.

Since the book didn't change, I'd have to say that perhaps the wisdom of more years has deepened my understanding of the complexity and nuance regarding absurdity in the human character. I once thought the book was dry and overly cynical. No longer. In a city full of strangeness, the people inhabiting West's Hollywood novel seem sharp and current.

On the back cover of my ancient copy, the blurb says that the novel is about "the American dream turned into a sun-drenched California nightmare [. . .]. An unforgettable world portrayal of a world that mocks the real and rewards the sham, turns its back on love to plunge into empty sex, and breeds a savage violence that is its own undoing. . ." It's like a mash-up between Bukowski and Fitzgerald and I bet a new reader might have to check the publication date to make sure that the book isn't a retro-version of 2016, a year where (apparently) audiences everywhere only want the illusion and not the truth.

Nearly all the characters are caricatures, grotesques whose souls are nakedly grasping. Dwarves, raw-foodists, actresses. The book's protagonist, Tod Hackett is the lens through which the reader encounters the show and his dry wit made me laugh (albeit bitterly). His perception of the B-list actress Faye Greener is so fabulous that I have to share it. As he looks at her photograph he thinks that *Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do it with a scream. You couldn't expect to rise again. Your teeth would be driven into your skull like nails into a pine board and your back would be broken. You wouldn't even have time to sweat or close your eyes.* This kind of writing is like an inside joke, isn't it? Mocking..... and yet somehow recognizable as the truth about a certain kind of woman. A Hollywood archetype.

Most of the book is like this and I'm sure not everyone would get pleasure out of reading it. I emerged from the reading shaking my head to clear it a little of the image of Tod Hackett trying to gain traction in the movement of a massed crowd in front of a theater. He kept trying to pull himself upright, hitting and pushing people so that he would not be carried backwards, but "as the two forces ground against each other, he was turned again and again, like a grain between millstones."

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## **Vit Babenco says**

*The Day of the Locust* is a very good book about a very bad taste...

"She posed, quivering and balanced, on the doorstep and looked down at the two men in the patio. She was smiling, a subtle half-smile uncontaminated by thought. She looked just born, everything moist and fresh, volatile and perfumed."

And bad taste, aggravated with mass stupidity, becomes monstrous taste...

"Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, war. This daily diet made sophisticates of them."

Pop culture calls for conformity, erases individuality, destroys intellect, turns society into a dumb crowd and then drives this buzzing swarm mad.

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## **Emily May says**

Depressing, crushing realization that the American dream isn't all it's cracked up to be, and that Hollywood glitz and glamour is just going to screw you up sooner or later.

This is the Golden Age of Hollywood, full of beautiful actresses, movies, hopes and passion. Tod Hackett gets caught up in this world when he finds himself in an LA studio, working as a set designer. As well as Tod, there's a whole bunch of unfortunate characters pulled into this spotlighted charade, most notably - Faye (a wannabe actress), and Homer Simpson (a sexually clueless Iowan with uncontrollable hands).

Perfect for those who like F. Scott Fitzgerald, but want something even more tragic and depressing than Gatsby.

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## **BlackOxford says**

### **The Deplorables**

There is a jocular theory that at some time in the remote past the North American continental plates shifted and everything that was loose fell into California. Day of the Locust confirms this hypothesis.

The cast of the novel is a ménage of 1930's drifters and grifters attracted by the movies, or the climate or the chance for a little unconventional action. Mostly they are hapless obsessives who, once there, become lost in either an underworld of vice or some form of otherworldly fundamentalism.

In one way or another, everyone in Los Angeles becomes an actor in order to avoid recognising the scrape they're in. Tod acts like an artist and ends up part of the dereliction he portrays; Faye dreams of being a film star and becomes the leading lady of her own tawdry demise; Homer (apparently the inspiration for the Homer Simpson cartoon) wants desperately to be a settled householder and gets his wish - by adopting a completely submissive role to an ungrateful Faye; a transvestite is so good, he can only manage an unconvincing imitation of a male.

These are the American ancestors of today's Deplorables. Like the crowd that assembles for Hollywood premieres, these people do not fetch up in Hollywood, that worldwide symbol of America, without malice or reason:

"It was a mistake to think them harmless curiosity seekers. They were savage and bitter, especially the middle-aged and the old, and had been made so by boredom and disappointment... All their lives they had slaved at some kind of dull, heavy labor, behind desks and counters, in the fields and at tedious machines of all sorts, saving their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs when they had enough."

But these people can't seem to find themselves and it irritates them:

They don't know what to do with their time. They haven't the mental equipment for leisure, the money nor the physical equipment for pleasure... Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment... They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing."

This is the America of Donald Trump: a crusading mob, "a great united front of screwballs and screw-boxes out to purify the land."

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## **Pamela says**

About a year ago, I purchased *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* as a Kindle twofer. I read *Miss Lonelyhearts* a few months back, and finally got around to reading the longer novel. Many people love *The Day of the Locust*, while an equally large group does not. I'm in the latter group.

When it comes to certain novels, I always wonder if people love it for the sake of saying they love it. There's a certain cachet that comes with tossing out references to slightly-obscure yet classic novels. It doesn't mean they have to be enjoyable or even coherent.

As I think about the premise of *The Day of the Locust*, I feel strongly that I *should* have liked it. The setting, the characters, the premise--everything is there that I would like. It's a bit noir meets Russian novel meets existentialism. The novel tells the story of the sycophants surrounding a drop-dead gorgeous 17 year old girl named Faye. Faye Greening lives in Los Angeles, wants to be an actress, enjoys messing around with men, and briefly becomes a prostitute in order to pay for her father's funeral. As you do. The reader mainly sees the story through the eyes of Tod Hackett, an artist working as a set dresser in Hollywood whilst working on his next big painting. He's obsessed with Faye.

Here is a list of other people obsessed with Faye:

Homer Simpson (yes!): A simple, deliberate man from the Plains who moved to California for his health. The author is obsessed with Homer's large hands and their disconnectedness from the rest of Homer's body. I'm sure many theses have been written on the symbolism of Homer's hands, but I interpreted the inertness and heaviness of these usually dextrous body parts to represent Homer's impotence and inability to seize what he wants.

Claude Estee: A screenwriter to whom I do not remember being introduced in the narrative. It happened (probably), but it wasn't memorable. Or rather, Claude wasn't memorable.

Earle Shoop: The fake cowboy who is very, very, very tall and wears a ten-gallon hat. He is also very boring.

Miguel: A Mexican cockfighter who ends up living in Homer's garage.

Abe Kusich: A bookie, criminal, and dwarf who is foul-tempered, foul-mouthed, and serves little purpose in the narrative.

Faye herself. Noteworthy things about Faye include platinum hair, a habit of running her tongue over her lips, and her breasts that were not small, but "placed wide apart and their thrust was upward and outward." This seems to be an important detail because later, Tod imagines Faye looking at the stars and her breasts pointing up. So, just in case you missed it, the femme fatale possesses a levitating bosom. I'm sure this is also some sort of strange metaphor for her personality but I seriously cannot be bothered with psychoanalyzing the author's description of Faye's breasts. For pete's sake, all ladies have breasts and they all look different.

Bringing all of these odd characters together could have made for an interesting story, but it's really a slow,



sad plodding through the inevitable tragedy and breakdown of the most likable and innocent character.

Well, it's slow and sad except for the horribly violent parts, like the stomach-churning cockfight scene. Or how about Tod's attitude toward Faye: "Nothing less than rape would do. The sensation he felt was like that he got when holding an egg in his hand. Not that she was fragile or even seemed fragile. It wasn't that. It was her completeness, her egglike self-sufficiency, that made him want to crush her." Oh goody. Rape. Tod has rape fantasies about Faye often, and this seems completely reasonable to him. I had to reread that paragraph because I couldn't quite believe it the first time around. This is insupportable and inexcusable thinking.

I didn't find the prose to be particularly inspired, either. One serious clunker actually made me laugh, even though it's not funny. After Faye starts working as a call girl, Tod confronts her and yells at her about it (but also wants to rape her???). Later, it's stated that "she wasn't angry, but grateful for his lecture on venereal disease." Is this some sort of joke? Other reviewers have talked about the humor of this book. If all of what's bothering me is sarcasm, it's in poor taste and so heavily veiled that it's practically wearing blackout curtains.

The final scene, which involves a rather nonsensical riot, did impress me with West's ability to create a sense of claustrophobia and helplessness in the face of mindless madness. I felt as if I were being borne along and crushed by this maddened crowd along with Tod.

Hollywood is the enemy here, and I felt that West was trying to do to Hollywood what Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* did for tony New York society, with one vital difference: *Gatsby* was infinitely better.

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## Brad says

### Book 130. The last book in my 2011 *goodreads* Reading Challenge

Just before I started reading *The Day of the Locust*, I read something that compared Nathanael West favourably to Hemingway and Fitzgerald, suggesting that his proper place was amongst the literary elite of his day.

I kept a watchful eye open for anything that hinted at a quality on par with Papa or Scott, but once the book started to take shape, I found myself trying, instead, to find a comparison that could accurately describe how it felt to be reading *The Day of the Locust*.

Imagine a clean and sober Jack Kerouac writing a novel about insane circus freaks who've escaped a mental institution, while attempting to retell *The Sun Also Rises* with cock fights instead of bull fights (and all the hamfistedness of the resulting metaphors), and channelling and morphing Fitzgerald's love of party-life decadence into party-life decrepitude, with a whole lot of abuse, a little bit of OCD and never-ending soap-box rants, and you've got a good picture of how *The Day of the Locust* feels to read.

It's not bad, but it's not good either, and I bet it would make a much better film than a novel.

The most interesting part of the book, for me, is its evocation of violence. In Faye, the book contains the only

genuinely abusive female character I can remember reading, and it is frightening to watch the way she harms Homer Simpson (yep, that's really his name) both physically and emotionally. But her violence is inherited, inbred, an ineluctable part of her humanity, and just another manifestation of violence in a book full of violence. In fact, every act in the book is an act of violence. Love is violence, weakness is violence, quiet is violence, stoicism is violence, art is violence, caring is violence, kindness is violence, desire is violence, everything is violence.

I feel like all that violence could have been dealt with more effectively -- and been more meaningful -- in a short story. A story culminating in the stomping (a literal jumping up and down on the victim's back) of the little boy, Adore, by Homer (insane, at the time, and beyond any kind of responsible control) without all the crap to get us there and minus the over-the-top riot would have been an exceptional achievement rather than the meandering mess that West left us with.

Nathanael West does not belong in the pantheon of great American writers. He is no Hemingway, no Faulkner, no Steinbeck (but then I don't think F. Scott Fitzgerald belongs in the same league as those writers either). But West's interesting all the same, and if you are interested in reading about one man's vision of violence during the Great Depression in the United States, *The Day of the Locust* will work for you.

Or you could just read something by a drunk and stoned Jack Kerouac and really enjoy yourself.

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## Baran ????? says

Kitapla ilgili GR'deki yorumlara bakınca en temelde söylenen şey, Çekirgenin Günü Hollywood dünyasının sahteliğini, kitlelerde oluşan algı ile perde arkasındaki realitenin çatışması, kah mizah ve kah hüznü alan bir hiciv. Ben buna kitapta en beğendiğim son sayfalardaki üst kurmacasal kısım (bu sahnedeki karakter bende hayranlık duygusu uyandırdı, keke metnin bütününe yayıp derinleştirilebilseydi), bir de karakterlerin dağ başında dans edip ekstazik bir şekilde kendilerin geçip cinsellik ve şiddete savrulmaları, horoz dövüşü ve Tod'un sert tecavüz fantezisinin yoğunluğunu da eklemek isterim. Yazar bu kısımlarda duygunun, ve gerçekliğin ve edebi gücün tüm imkanlarından yararlanmı gibi gözüküyor. Ancak bu değerlendirme kitabın tümüne yapmam, arka kapak yazısı ve kitapla ilgili söylenenlerin gölgesinde okumaya başladım bu kitap biraz hayal kırıklığı oldu. Çünkü, karakterler, Fante Faye, Steinbeck'in Fareler ve İnsanlar'ından Lennie karakterinin türdeşleri Homer, Harry, Miguel, ve tabii ki Tod gerçek ve güçlü karakterler olarak çizilse bile, her ne kadar romanın merkezi karakterlerden ziyade Hollywood sanrısının sahteliği olsa da, şahsen romanı ciddi olarak güçlü bir merkezden yoksun olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çünkü bazen Hollywood'da iş arayan, ün arayan karakterlerin çaresizliği, boş hayalleri merkeze gelirken, bazen de cinselliğin, şiddetin, bazen de tüm bunlardan azade insanın kimsesizliğini, kitlelerin "vahşiliğini" merkeze alıyormuş gibi geldi bana. Yani kitap bazen Homer'in hikayesi iken, bir bakıyorsun Faye'in, sonra bir bakıyorsun Tod'un, sonra bir bakıyorsun Hollywood'un hikayesiyim. Kanaatimce bu anlatıda boşluklar yaratıp birbirine sıkıca bağlanmamış bir kolaj çalışması ve andırıyor. Büyük Buhran sonrası Amerikan Edebiyatına merak duyanlar ve Hollywood dünyasının Amerikan Gerçekliği içerisinde kurcalayan (kitabı okurken aklıma sürekli Gore Vidal'ın Kent ve Tuz romanı geldi) eserlere ilgili duyanlara tavsiye ederim....

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## Darwin8u says

This is where the world ends

This is where the world ends  
This is where the world ends  
In a poisoned meringue of L.A.'s winter.

This book has amazing characters, incredible scenes, and breaks my heart with every page. It set the scene for every David Lynch movie grotesque and the soundtrack for every Pixies song your head can bend itself around. Also, the best cock fight scene in all of literature.

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