I

WELCOME

(1939)

TO THE CHAMBER OF HORRORS, says the sign. The arrow points off toward the right, where a corridor of darkness leads to the glowing irons of the Inquisition, but what the arrow actually announces is a nearby tableau entitled "The Great Presidents."* George Washington stands proudly aloof in his Continental blue uniform, Lincoln sits reflective, and the others display various attitudes of official interest. Teddy Roosevelt, McKinley, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Hoover, Coolidge—the creators of the Hollywood Waxworks Museum have odd ideas about which Presidents are great. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is not here, but a special spotlight on the right bathes Richard Nixon in a sepulchral glow. He looks embalmed.

In the foreground, at the center of this presidential assembly, propped up at a speaker's rostrum ornamented with the White House seal, stands the exemplar of Hollywood and of all southern California, the winsome cowboy with the rueful grin. Ronald Reagan's waxen face (waxworks nowadays are actually made of noninflammable vinyl plastisol) wears an expression of amiable bewilderment. He has been outfitted in a dark blue suit, a white shirt with a collar that looks somewhat too large for him, and a rather muddy striped tie. Life may seem difficult, but the plastic Ronald Reagan stands monumental behind the presidential seal, staring bravely out into the darkness.

"Welcome to Madame Tussaud's Hollywood Wax Museum," says the recorded voice across the aisle, emerging from a murky tableau of Queen Victoria and Madame Tussaud herself. Since this is Hollywood, though, the nearby corridor is lined with niches devoted to the movie industry's official gods and goddesses. Here is Tyrone Power, as the young matador in *Blood and Sand,* about to stab an onrushing bull. Here is Clark Gable in evening dress, looking knowingly at Carole Lombard, and Charlie Chaplin in the ruins of a tuxedo, looking imploringly at Mary Pickford, and Rudolph Valentino in the robes of *The Sheik,* looking soulfully into thin air. The image of the desert seems to inspire in southern California a sense partly of recognition and partly of yearning. Here is a luscious mannequin of Hedy Lamarr as Tondelayo in

* The sources for all facts and quotations in this book may be found at the end, in the Notes section.

White Cargo, lolling in a tent on an implausible white fur rug. She wears a pink orchid over one ear and several strings of brown wooden beads around her neck, and then nothing else down to her flowery pink skirt.

No city west of Boston has a more intensely commercial sense of its own past, and yet that sense keeps becoming blurred and distorted in Hollywood. Not only do the decades vaguely intermingle, so that Harold Lloyd dissolves into the young Woody Allen, but the various forms of entertainment also merge. Any pilgrim arriving in the movie capital is shown the newest shrines of television and rock music, as though they were all the same. The Hollywood Waxworks Museum understands. Just beyond the rather feral figure of the young Shirley Temple, in white lace, the visitor confronts "An Evening with Elvis Presley." In the half-darkness, the strains of "Hello, Dolly" fade into those of "Love Me Tender," and the king of country singers can be observed entertaining Dean Martin, Farrah Fawcett, Flip Wilson, Sammy Davis, Frank Sinatra, and Elizabeth Taylor. Behind this incongruous gathering stands a mysterious row of six costumed footmen, all in eighteenth-century wigs, all holding up candelabra to illuminate Presley's *soirée.*

The waxworks commentary on Hollywood seems at times to go beyond the frontiers of incongruity into the realms of chaos. It is possible to smile at the juxtaposition of Charlton Heston bearing the sacred tablets down from Sinai and a panoramic re-creation of Da Vinci's *Last Supper,* but why is Anthony Quinn standing next to Charles de Gaulle? And why, in this central group, which is dominated by the Beatles but also includes Sophia Loren, Amelia Earhart, and Thomas Alva Edison—why should the figure between Paul McCartney and Jeanette MacDonald be that of Joseph Stalin? One reason may be that there used to be a tableau of the Allied leaders at Yalta, created perhaps for some other waxworks museum somewhere else, and then, according to the portly Mexican who takes tickets at the door, there was a fire here a few years ago, and things have been moved around a bit. Things are always being moved around a bit in Hollywood. "False fronts!" Nicholas Schenck once cried during a guided tour of the outdoor sets at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which Schenck, as president of Loew's, Inc., theoretically ruled, owned, commanded. "False fronts! Nothing behind them. They are like Hollywood people."

Outside the waxworks museum, which sprouts between Jack's Pipe Shop and the Snow White Coffee Shop, the California sun beats down on the peculiar black sidewalks of Hollywood Boulevard. Relentless sun, the image of fire and destruction. The sidewalks are not entirely black, for the local authorities have embedded in every other panel a gold-edged metal star filled with crushed pink stone. Within each star, they have inscribed one golden name. There are no explanations or definitions of these multitudinous names (more than 1,775 in all). Since they are all here, they must all be famous. As one strolls westward along Hollywood Boulevard, one treads on a remarkably diverse cast of characters: Charles Chaplin, Ken Maynard, Ilka Chase, Richard Barthelmess, Joseph Schenck, Lee Strasberg, Ingrid Bergman, Red Skel-

ton, Robert Merrill, Eddie Cantor, Marie Wilson, Bing Crosby, Milton Berle, Vivien Leigh, Ray Charles, Elvis Presley, Kirsten Flagstad, Bessie Love, Jascha Heifetz, Judy Canova. . . .

The black sidewalks of Hollywood Boulevard lead eventually to Grauman's Chinese Theater, a large pagoda with a scarlet roof supported by prancing dragons. Next to the entrance stand two fierce beasts, about seven feet high, which Grauman's alleges to be "heaven dogs" of the Ming dynasty. "Half lion and half dog these sacred sentinels stood guard for many centuries at a Ming tomb in China," the sign says. "These massive monsters surnamed the dogs of Foo or Buddha combined leonine ferocity with dog-like devotion and served to terrify the transgressors and inspire the righteous." Officially, this strange palace is now Mann's Chinese Theaters, for an entrepreneur named Teddy Mann bought the establishment in the late 1970's and opened two adjoining theaters in the wings that flank the central courtyard; but to the flocks of tourists who come to marvel, Grauman's remains Grauman's. The tourists gather here to gape at the famous footprints and handprints embedded in the concrete panels of Grauman's courtyard.

To Sid Grauman Thanks Rita Hayworth
To Sid A great guy Henry Fonda July 2 '42
To Sid My greatest thrill Jeanne Crain October 7 1949
To Sid His fan Charles Boyer July 24 '42
To Sid Sincere thanks Gene Tierney June 24 '46
Thank you Sid Jimmy Stewart Fri. 13 Feb. 1948
For Mr. Grauman All happiness Judy Garland 10-10-39

A showman is what the yellowing newspaper clippings call people like Sid Grauman. Born in Indianapolis, he got his start by selling San Francisco newspapers for one dollar each in remote Alaskan mining camps during the Klondike gold rush of 1896, and yet he attributed his theatrical successes to "the big boss upstairs." "God does my shows," he said.

Grauman brought luxury to the showing of movies. He spent a million dollars to build the Metropolitan Theater in Los Angeles, but that was modest compared to his Egyptian Theater, which opened in 1922 with live tableaux dramatizing the coming attractions. It was here that Grauman invented the "Hollywood premiere," with spotlights sweeping the skies, and eager crowds assembled behind tasseled ropes to watch the stars arriving in their limousines.

Grauman loved practical jokes, and many of them seemed to involve wax dummies. He once filled his dimly lighted room at the Ambassador Hotel with seventy-five mannequins, then persuaded Marcus Loew, the original Loew of Loew's, Inc., that these were fellow theater-owners whom he had assembled to hear an authoritative account of M-G-M's forthcoming features. Loew apparently improvised an impassioned spiel for the seventy-five attentive dummies. On another occasion, Grauman telephoned Charlie Chaplin and said he

had found a murdered woman in his hotel room. He begged Chaplin to help him. Chaplin hurried to the Ambassador and found Grauman crouched over a bloodstained figure in his bed. Grauman pleaded for help in avoiding a scandal. Chaplin nervously insisted that the police must be called. Grauman finally brought Chaplin closer, to see the ketchup smeared on the dummy in the bed. Grauman's obituary in *Variety* a generation later did not record Chaplin's reaction, but it did say that "among his intimate friends, he was known as a great gagger." Grauman died of heart failure in the spring of 1950, died a bachelor, aged seventy-one, and the only people at his deathbed were his doctor, his secretary for the past twenty-one years, and the publicity chief of 20th Century–Fox.

Long before Grauman or Mary Pickford or the Gish sisters came to live here, there were mostly barley fields and orange groves. An Ohioan named Horace Henderson Wilcox, who had been lamed by typhoid fever in childhood but made a fortune in Kansas real estate, began hopefully mapping out avenues and boulevards through these barley fields in 1887. His homesick wife, Daeida, named the prospective settlement after the country place of some friends back in the east: Hollywood. The Wilcoxes were pious. They forbade any saloons in Hollywood; they offered free land to any church built in their barley fields.

Oil was discovered in 1892 near Glendale Boulevard, just a few miles to the south, but Hollywood remained an obscure rural tract until it was bought in 1903 by a syndicate headed by General Moses Hazeltine Sherman, who had made millions in railroads, and Harry Chandler, the future publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. This syndicate managed to get the vacant fields incorporated as an independent municipality. It built a rickety trolley line to the south and called it the Los Angeles–Pacific Railroad, erected the thirty-three-room, Spanish-style Hollywood Hotel on unpaved Hollywood Boulevard, and started a campaign to sell building lots by posting hundreds of signs that said SOLD. Was this the first Hollywood lie? The original deception? The Hollywood town authorities tried to maintain the Wilcoxes' moral tone. Various edicts by the board of trustees in the early 1900's forbade all sales of liquor, all bowling or billiards on Sundays, and the driving of herds of more than two thousand sheep, goats, or hogs through the streets.

Back east, winter storms over the Great Lakes inspired the Selig Studio of Chicago to abandon its filming of *The Count of Monte Cristo,* and to send the star, Francis Boggs, off to California in search of a sunnier location. Boggs found it at Laguna Beach, well to the south of Los Angeles, and finished the filming there in 1907. Indeed, he found the climate so pleasant that he returned to Los Angeles the following winter and converted a Chinese laundry at Eighth and Olive streets into California's first movie studio. The first complete film shot there was called *In the Sultan's Power.*

Other fledgling filmmakers soon followed, not to stodgy Hollywood but to Edendale, a few miles to the east, or to the beach at Santa Monica. It was all rather pristine and primeval. Cops and robbers chased each other through the

streets, and directors improvised their stories as they went along (one of them, Charles K. French, shot 185 films for the Bison Company in a little more than eight months). The official histories explain this first flowering as a happy combination of sunshine, open spaces, and diverse settings: the Sahara, the Alps, and the South Seas could all be simulated within Los Angeles' city limits. And the sun kept shining, all year round.

Many of these pioneers had another good reason for moving west—to escape the law. The moving-picture process had not invented itself, after all. It originated, more or less, in a whimsical wager by Leland Stanford, the railroad tycoon, who in 1872 bet $25,000 that a galloping horse lifted all four feet off the ground at once. Stanford then hired the photographer Eadweard Muybridge to prove him right. Muybridge did so by installing a series of twelve cameras next to a racetrack and filming a classic sequence of a horse in full gallop. In the course of winning Stanford's bet, Muybridge almost invented the movies.

That, however, was left to the restless mind of Thomas Alva Edison, who devised a method of filming movement not with Muybridge's row of cameras but with one camera that could take a series of pictures on fifty feet of continuously running film. Edison, for reasons of his own, photographed a laboratory assistant named Fred Ott in the process of sneezing, and then showed this sequence of moving pictures inside a cabinet called a Kinetoscope. It was one of the big hits of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Other inventors were working along similar lines. In France, the Lumière brothers demonstrated in 1895 that a series of pictures of a railroad train puffing its way out of a station could be projected onto a large screen at a rate of sixteen frames per second. Interesting, if enough people wanted to see a train puffing its way out of a station. Or, for that matter, Fred Ott sneezing.

In 1903, an Edison Company cameraman named Edwin S. Porter created a completely different kind of motion picture. Instead of simply filming an event, he created events to be filmed. *The Life of an American Fireman* recorded the rescue of a woman and her child from a burning building. *The Great Train Robbery* recorded exactly what its title promised. These dramas could be shown on sheets hung up in empty stores, and thousands of people were willing to pay a nickel to see them. They were especially popular among immigrants who knew little English. Edison tried to preserve his control over this lucrative process by creating the Motion Pictures Patents Company in 1909, and then licensing others to exploit his discoveries.

Little did he know the ingenuity of the founders of Hollywood. The "Trust," as Edison's company came to be known, kept filing lawsuits in New York against all would-be pirates, but who could track down and enjoin all the violators of New York court orders in obscure suburbs of Los Angeles? Movies could be shot in a few days, and production companies could be dissolved and recreated almost as quickly. "The whole industry . . . is built on phony accounting," David O. Selznick once remarked. And if every other evasion failed, the Mexican border was only about a hundred miles away.

Years before Bertolt Brecht ever came to Hollywood, he had something like this in mind when he wrote the opening of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Somewhere in an America of Brecht's own imagining, a battered truck carrying three fugitives from justice broke down and sputtered to a halt "in a desolate region." "We can't go on," said Fatty, the bookkeeper. "But we've got to keep going," said Trinity Moses. "But ahead of us is only the desert," said Fatty. "You know, gold is being discovered up the coast," said Moses. "But that coastline is a long one," said Fatty. "Very well, if we can't go farther up, we'll stay down here . . ." said the Widow Begbick. "Let us found a city here and call it 'Mahagonny,' which means 'city of nets.' "

> It should be like a net,
> Stretched out for edible birds.
> Everywhere there is toil and trouble
> But here we'll have fun. . . .
> Gin and whiskey,
> Girls and boys. . . .
> And the big typhoons don't come as far as here.

If Brecht's vision of an unknown future was prophetic, so was that of the Hollywood Board of Trustees. In 1910, it officially banned all movie theaters, of which it then had none. That same year, however, the town of Hollywood was jurisdictionally swallowed up by Los Angeles, which saw no particular virtue in restricting the newcomers' enterprises.

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Thornton Wilder, ordinarily a friendly soul with a rather jaunty manner, was going out to dinner with some old friends in Hollywood one evening when he suddenly began to describe a vision of utter devastation. "You know, one day someone is going to approach this area and it will be entirely desert," the playwright told his friends, Helen Hayes and her husband, Charles MacArthur. "There will be nothing left standing, stone upon stone. . . . God never meant man to live here. Man has come and invaded a desert, and he has tortured this desert into giving up sustenance and growth to him, and he has defeated and perverted the purpose of God. And this is going to be destroyed."

The prospect of cataclysm is one of Los Angeles' oldest traditions. The threat lies in the earth itself, in the sweet-smelling tar that still oozes up out of the La Brea pits, the hungry graveyard for generations of goats and deer, and also the saber-toothed tigers that pursued them to their death. The skeletons of a hundred lions have been unearthed here, and more than fifteen hundred wolves, and one human being, a woman who is believed to have been twenty-five or thirty years old when her skull was mysteriously smashed in about nine thousand years ago.

The first Spanish explorers, led by Don Gaspar de Portolá, riding westward in the summer of 1769 along what is now Wilshire Boulevard, took awed

note of "some large marshes of a certain substance like pitch . . . boiling and bubbling," and wondered whether that hellish swamp was the cause or the consequence of the half-dozen earthquakes that had shaken the area during the previous two days. Don Gaspar rode on, and another two years passed before Franciscan missionaries returned to found the San Gabriel Mission, and then, a decade later, El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciuncula, the Town of the Queen of Angels.

The city that now numbers more than ten million inhabitants is built atop the San Andreas fault, and when one of the eight-lane freeways cracks open, the traffic simply streams on. Earthquakes are commonplace, and so are the landslides that carry $500,000 hillside homes crashing down into Topanga or Mandeville canyon. But if the trembling and splitting of the insubstantial earth seems fundamental to southern California's half-suppressed sense of fear, there is something even more primal in the sense of desert, aridity, desiccation, burning heat, and hence fire. The very life of the city derives from a thin vein of water, built with vast expense and corruption across the desert from the Rockies. And in the mountains that surround Los Angeles, every autumn brings drought and fire. In 1961, the brushfires blazed out of control and destroyed 460 homes, then worth more than $25 million, in the Bel Air region; in 1976, nearly 168,000 acres throughout the state went up in smoke; in 1978, another 200 homes were destroyed near Malibu. In November of 1980, winds of up to 100 miles an hour drove fires all across the hillsides, fire in Carbon Canyon, fire around Lake Elsinore, fire in Bradbury, near Duarte, fire in Sunland, in the Verdugo Hills. In the streets of downtown Los Angeles, people could smell the odor of charred chaparral and scrub oak and sumac. In the summer of 1983, fire even swept through the Paramount Studios and destroyed the half-century-old "New York Street" set that had provided scenes for *Going My Way* and *Chinatown* and, of all things, *The Day of the Locust.*

The droning voices on the car radio brought constant reports of fire in the mountains as Maria Wyeth sped aimlessly along the freeways in Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays.* The news was both a sign of larger disaster and a sign of nothing at all. "The day's slide and flood news was followed by a report of a small earth tremor centered near Joshua Tree . . ." Maria noted as she sat in a rented room, preparing herself for divorce and abortion, "and, of corollary interest, an interview with a Pentecostal minister who had received prophecy that eight million people would perish by earthquake on a Friday afternoon in March."

Miss Didion ascribed both the fires and the hysteria partly to the Santa Ana, a hot wind that comes whistling down from the northeast, "blowing up sandstorms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to the flash point." The Santa Ana brings dread and violence, she wrote in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem,* because "the city burning is Los Angeles' deepest image of itself. . . . At the time of the 1965 Watts riots what struck the imagination most indelibly were the fires. For days one could drive the Harbor Freeway

and see the city on fire, just as we had always known it would be in the end. Los Angeles weather is the weather of catastrophe, of apocalypse. . . ."

Nathanael West had seen the same prophecy in fire. Tod Hackett, the central character in *The Day of the Locust,* kept planning and sketching an epic painting to be entitled "The Burning of Los Angeles." "He was going to show the city burning at high noon, so that the flames would have to compete with the desert sun and thereby appear less fearful, more like bright flags flying from roofs and windows than a terrible holocaust. He wanted the city to have quite a gala air as it burned, to appear almost gay. And the people who set it on fire would be a holiday crowd."

West was thirty-five, scarcely more than a year from his absurd death in an automobile crash, when *The Day of the Locust* burst forth and then disappeared in the spring of 1939. He had hoped that its success would free him from the drudgery of Hollywood scriptwriting, but despite the praises of Scott Fitzgerald, Edmund Wilson, and Dashiell Hammett, the novel sold exactly 1,464 copies. That brought West's earnings from four novels over the course of nearly a decade to a total of $1,280, less than a month's pay at his weekly rate of $350 at RKO, which promptly put him back to work writing a remake of *Tom Brown at Culver.* "Thank God for the movies," West wrote to Bennett Cerf, publisher of *The Day of the Locust.*

Like most writers of his time, West was familiar with failure and financial ruin. His father, a somewhat diffident building contractor, sank into bankruptcy during the late 1920's while West was in Paris savoring the pungencies of the surrealists. Back in New York, West could support himself only by working as a night clerk in a hotel partly owned by relatives. That was hardly the role in which he had imagined himself. Born Nathan Weinstein, the young West had repeatedly experimented with new identities, acquired the nicknames "Pep" and "Trapper." He forged a high school transcript to enter Tufts, transferred to Brown with the transcript of a different Nathan Weinstein, then began signing himself Nathan von Wallenstein Weinstein. "He loved custom-tailored clothes . . . first editions and expensive restaurants," his college friend and future brother-in-law S. J. Perelman wrote in *The Last Laugh.* "He fancied himself a Nimrod and fisherman, largely, I often suspected, because of the colorful gear they entailed. . . . For a brief interval, he even owned a red Stutz Bearcat, until it burst into flames and foundered in a West Virginia gorge."

Perelman, who first went to Hollywood to write the scripts for the Marx Brothers' *Monkey Business* and *Horse Feathers,* described the movie capital as "a dreary industrial town controlled by hoodlums of enormous wealth," but he was capable of making marvelous fun of it. "The violet hush of twilight was descending over Los Angeles as my hostess, Violet Hush, and I . . . headed toward Hollywood," he wrote in *Strictly from Hunger.* "In the distance a glow from huge piles of burning motion-picture scripts lit up the sky. The crisp tang of frying writers and directors whetted my appetite. How good it was to be alive. . . ." West's description was more bleak. "This place is just like Asbury Park, New Jersey," he wrote to Josephine Herbst. "The

same stucco houses, women in pajamas, delicatessen stores, etc. There is nothing to do except tennis, golf or the movies. . . . All the writers sit in cells in a row and the minute a typewriter stops someone pokes his head in the door to see if you are thinking. Otherwise, it's like the hotel business."

West came to Hollywood in 1933 because Darryl Zanuck's new Twentieth Century Pictures had paid him four thousand dollars for the movie rights to his novel *Miss Lonelyhearts.* This was the era when producers frightened by the advent of talking pictures offered contracts to almost any playwright or novelist or newspaperman who gave any evidence of knowing how to write sharp dialogue. And they all came—William Faulkner, Robert Sherwood, Aldous Huxley, Dorothy Parker, even Maurice Maeterlinck. . . . Twentieth Century proceeded, of course, to turn West's brilliant and bitter satire into what it called a "comedy-melodrama" entitled *Advice to the Lovelorn.* West himself never worked on the project but got himself a job as a junior writer at Columbia. His first assignment, *Beauty Parlor,* was never produced; neither was his next one, *Return to the Soil.*

West worked hard, did as he was told, and seemed not to mind the triviality of his assignments. From the start, he was more interested in exploring the peripheries of Hollywood. He told friends of his encounters with gamblers, lesbians, dwarfs. He began writing a short story about three Eskimos who had been brought to Hollywood to star in an adventure movie and were stranded there after its failure. As the narrator from the studio's publicity department remarked, "It was about Eskimos, and who cares about Eskimos?"

Hollywood jobs were as transitory as Hollywood itself. During a long siege of unemployment, made worse by sickness, West lived in a shabby apartment hotel off Hollywood Boulevard called the Pa-Va-Sed, tenanted by a raffish assortment of vaudeville comics, stuntmen, and part-time prostitutes. He began frequenting the city's Mexican underworld, going to cockfights at Pismo Beach. He began imagining all these figures as the characters in a novel that he planned to call "The Cheated." He told a friend about a newspaper story, perhaps imaginary, of a yacht named *The Wanderer,* which had sailed for the South Seas with a strange assortment of passengers: movie cowboys, a huge lesbian, and, once again, a family of Eskimos.

These were the outcasts who eventually peopled *The Day of the Locust.* There was no Jean Harlow or Rita Hayworth in West's Hollywood, only Faye Greener, with her "long, swordlike legs," whose invitation "wasn't to pleasure but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love." In her one movie role, as a dancing girl in a Damascus seraglio, she "had only one line to speak, 'Oh, Mr. Smith!' and spoke it badly." In this Hollywood, there was no Gary Cooper either, only Earl Shoop, the inarticulate cowboy who survived by poaching game in the hills while he vaguely hoped for a job as a movie extra. And instead of the Zanucks and Selznicks, West introduced Honest Abe Kusich, the dwarf bookmaker, complete with black shirt, yellow tie, and Tyrolean hat. And, of course, the Gingos, a family of Eskimos.

The Hollywood that attracted these outcasts remained always beyond their grasp, rich and tantalizing. West insisted on demonstrating that their city of dreams was really nothing more than "the final dumping ground," a "Sargasso of the imagination." Searching for Faye, who had found a bit part in a movie about Waterloo, Tod Hackett got lost in the back lots and wandered through a tangle of briers past the skeleton of a zeppelin, an adobe fort, a Dutch windmill, a Trojan horse, and "a flight of baroque palace stairs that started in a bed of weeds and ended against the branches of an oak." By following a red glare in the sky, Tod eventually found his way to the new set that was being built for the battle of Waterloo, but just as he reached the slopes of an artificial Mont St. Jean, the whole set collapsed under the charging cuirassiers. "Nails screamed with agony as they pulled out of joists. . . . Lath and scantling snapped as though they were brittle bones. The whole hill folded like an enormous umbrella and covered Napoleon's army with painted cloth."

Theater people have traditionally taken delight in the artifices of their calling, fondly citing Shakespeare's reflections on the world as a stage and all the men and women merely players, but West saw the artificialities of Hollywood as part of a sinister California pattern that eventually became clear only in our time, when San Clemente and Pacific Palisades emerged on the national political landscape. It was a pattern partly of physical extremes, of burning deserts and alkali flats, but also of the spiritual extremes that West derided as the Church of Christ Physical, where "holiness was attained through the constant use of chest weights and spring grips," the Tabernacle of the Third Coming, where a woman in man's clothing preached the "crusade against salt," and the Temple Moderne, where the initiates taught "brain-breathing, the secret of the Aztecs."

The pattern of California extremism became manifest in an atmosphere of rancor and disappointment and ultimately violence. West saw this spirit in the swarms of middle-class migrants who had retired to southern California in the hope of finding some kind of pleasure before they died. They were the people who waited restlessly at a movie premiere at Grauman's—or Kahn's Persian Palace Theatre, as West called it—and who finally burst into mindless rioting. "Until they reached the line," West wrote, "they looked diffident, almost furtive, but the moment they had become part of it, they turned arrogant and pugnacious. . . . All their lives they had slaved at some kind of dull, heavy labor, behind desks and counters . . . saving their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs when they had enough. . . . Where else should they go but California, the land of sunshine and oranges? Once there, they discover that sunshine isn't enough. They get tired of oranges, even of avocado pears and passion fruit. Nothing happens. They don't know what to do with their time. . . . They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing."

There was a Gary Cooper in West's Hollywood after all, but only as an unseen figure rumored to be somewhere nearby. Two women caught in the

milling mob tried to figure out how the chaos began. "The first thing I knew," said one, "there was a rush and I was in the middle."

"Yeah," said the other. "Somebody hollered, 'Here comes Gary Cooper,' and then wham!"

"That ain't it," said a man in a cloth cap and sweater. "This is a riot you're in."

"Yeah," said another woman. "A pervert attacked a child."

"I come from St. Louis," said the first woman, "and we had one of them pervert fellows in our neighborhood once. He ripped up a girl with a pair of scissors."

"He must have been crazy," said the man in the cap. "What kind of fun is that?"

Everybody laughed. They were enjoying themselves. Rioting was something to pass the time, and as Tod Hackett was swept along by the crowds, he imagined them all as the arsonists of his painting, imagined working on the painting itself, "modelling the tongues of fire so that they licked even more avidly at a corinthian column that held up the palmleaf roof of a nutburger stand."

This city of the inferno, both cruel and grotesque, was somewhat different from the Hollywood that had bewitched the American imagination, and the reviews of West's book were respectful but unenthusiastic. Clifton Fadiman wrote in *The New Yorker* that it had "all the fascination of a nice bit of phosphorescent decay." To Scott Fitzgerald, West wrote: "So far the box score stands: Good reviews—fifteen percent, bad reviews—twenty-five percent, brutal personal attacks—sixty percent." In June, just a month after publication, Bennett Cerf informed West that the sales for the latest two weeks numbered exactly twenty-two copies. He added that the "outlook is pretty hopeless." Cerf was sadly disappointed. "By God," he declared, "if I ever publish another Hollywood book, it will have to be 'My 39 ways of making love,' by Hedy Lamarr."

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Hedy Lamarr. Hedwig Kiesler was her real name, Hedwig Kiesler Mandl by marriage, aged twenty-five or thereabouts, a recent immigrant from Vienna. What was there about Hedy Lamarr that should make a sedentary New York publisher like Bennett Cerf, thinking about Hollywood in 1939, start to glow when he thought of her and her thirty-nine ways of making love?

Probably it was the rumors surrounding *Ecstasy,* in which she had been photographed, from a discreet distance, darting through some trees and going for a swim in the nude. When *Ecstasy* was first imported into the United States in the fall of 1934, it was immediately seized by the customs authorities. An official committee, including Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, wife of the Secretary of the Treasury, viewed the film and professed itself shocked not by the nude swimming but by a subsequent scene in which the camera focused on Hedy Lamarr's face while a man supposedly made love to her. "I was not

sure what my reactions would be, so . . . I just closed my eyes," Miss Lamarr later recalled.* " *'Nein, nein,'* the director yelled. 'A passionate expression on the face.' He threw his hands up and slapped them against his sides. He mumbled about the stupidity of youth. He looked around and found a safety pin on a table. He picked it up, bent it almost straight, and approached. 'You will lie here,' he said. 'I will be underneath, out of camera range. When I prick you a little on your backside, you will bring your elbows together and you will *react!'* I shrugged. . . ."

The customs authorities demanded that this scene be expunged; the distributors refused, so *Ecstasy* was not only banned but literally burned. The distributors imported another copy, and managed to get it past customs, but then a federal jury in New York declared that it was "indecent . . . and would tend to corrupt morals." Various legal appeals permitted showings in Boston, Washington, and Los Angeles. The litigation and publicity rumbled along in New York until a censored version was officially approved in 1940.

By then, of course, Hedy Lamarr was famous, both as a beauty and as a fugitive. Her husband, Fritz Mandl, a munitions manufacturer and a secret financial backer of the Austrian Nazis, was reputed to have spent more than $300,000 buying up and destroying copies of *Ecstasy*. He also kept its heroine under close supervision in his palace in Vienna. According to her disputed memoirs, she disguised herself as her own maid and fled to Paris. The subsequent gossip in Hollywood, according to Errol Flynn, was that the beautiful prisoner had persuaded Mandl to let her wear all the family jewels at a dinner for the Nazi Prince Ernst von Stahremberg, then pleaded a headache and disappeared. When Flynn asked her at a party to tell the details of her departure from her husband, she answered only, "That son of a bitch!"

Frau Mandl's flight in the summer of 1937 led her to London, and there to the hotel of Louis B. Mayer, the chief of M-G-M, and thence to the S.S. *Normandie,* bound for New York. Mayer just happened to be traveling on the same boat; the actress presented herself as a governess to a violin prodigy named Grisha Goluboff; by the time the boat docked in New York, she had acquired M-G-M contracts for both the violinist and herself (at five hundred dollars a week), and a new name as well. When a *Daily News* reporter went to the pier to interview "The Ecstasy Lady, brunette Hedy Kiesler," she said, "My name is Hedy Lamarr. Please call me that." Mayer had apparently named her after Barbara La Marr, a great beauty he had admired in the 1920's, who had succumbed to drugs and alcohol. After Mayer shipped his newest acquisition to Hollywood and signed her up for English lessons, however, he didn't know what to do with her. It was apparently Charles Boyer who encountered her at a party and then persuaded the producer Walter Wanger to borrow her, for a fee of fifteen hundred dollars a week to Mayer, as his leading lady in *Algiers*.

* *Ecstasy and Me: My Life as a Woman,* was signed and copyrighted by Hedy Lamarr in 1966, but she later filed suit, trying unsuccessfully to prevent its publication. Although the book was apparently based on taped interviews, her suit contended that the work produced by Leo Guild and Sy Rice was "fictional, false, vulgar, scandalous, libelous, and obscene."