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The Effects of the Santa Anas

The epitome of the natural world's paradise lies within every "Heaven" on Earth. A lush meadow topped with wild flowers, or a fast-flowing stream swallowed by tree-dotted mountains, breathes every essence of paradise. Yearly rain enveloping these terrains feeds the flora and fauna. But every Heaven has its Hell--or rather, every lush meadow has its desert.

A lack of water starves the "seas of sand"--the overlooked deserts of the world. The "hot skies" and desolate lands of these regions mask a terrain that seems lifeless. Yet in the desert-like chaparral of Los Angeles, the landscape hints at a more animated quality rooted in heat and chaos. The dynamic nature of the city reveals itself in an ever-subtle light. Behind the calmly shifting soils and sands lies a savage culprit--the Santa Ana winds.

Almost every aspect of Los Angeles lies at the mercy of hot, ceaseless winds in Autumn and Winter. The Santa Anas rip through communities and pervade long-lasting tranquility. They spark the chaos of human behavior: all the heat, all the fury, and all the tension.

In her essay "Los Angeles Notebook," Joan Didion describes the intangible effects of the Santa Anas on city dwellers. The violence and unpredictability of the winds are the catalysts of uneasiness. "Whenever and wherever [the Santa Ana] blows, doctors hear about... 'nervousness,' about 'depression.' ... Some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable" (218). Overwhelming tension stands at the

forefront of the winds that are responsible for “deeply mechanistic...human behavior” (217). The weather makes people machine-like. They are unconsciously being programmed by outside forces. The Santa Anas’ effects on Angelenos ultimately lead to catastrophe. Traffic deaths skyrocket during wind season. “A prominent Pasadena attorney...[shoots] and [kills] his wife, their two sons, and himself...[while] A South Gate divorcee [is] murdered and thrown from a moving car” (220). Didion mimics chaotic human behaviors with the tangible destructive force caused by the Santa Anas--the city’s fires. “We will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night” (217). “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” (220). If any “Hell” was to exist on Earth, the effects of the Los Angeles Santa Anas are analogous to it.

Raymond Chandler makes use of the Santa Ana’s scorching qualities throughout his short story, “Red Wind.” While playing a critical role in expressing setting, the “hot wind” itself becomes a character throughout the plot, propagating the intensity of the detective story. It serves as an ultimate explanation for the behavior of Chandler’s characters, catalyzing the tension, uneasiness, and fury. The protagonist, Detective Delmas, admitted to his love interest, Lola Barsaly, that, “Maybe this hot wind has got you crazy too” (179). Later, the Santa Anas are used as an excuse for Delmas when he is held at gunpoint by the policeman, Copernik. ““It’s the hot wind, Sam. Let’s forget it,”” says Ybarra, Copernik’s colleague (213). The Santa Anas are analogous to the confusion, disarray, and anger that Detective Delmas faces when uncovering the story. When finished with his investigation, he finds that the winds also subside along with his cacophony of emotions throughout his journey. The “hot winds” serve as neither an antagonist

nor protagonist in “Red Wind.”; rather, its “character” invokes confusion and disarray in the behaviors of the characters.

Chandler’s Santa Anas spark the same turbulent behavior as described by Joan Didion. Chaos strikes city dwellers with fires and catastrophe. The characters in “Red Wind” become unconsciously agitated by the ceaseless, hot Santa Anas. Implied in both pieces of literature is the deeper concept of the mechanization of nature--whether or not humanity experiences true freewill. Didion and Chandler point to the Santa Anas as the cause of collapsing freewill, tainting the purity of Los Angeles’s “paradise.”