SINCLAIR LEWIS: AMERICAN SOCIAL CRITIC

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

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Sheldon Norman Grebstein

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This is to certify that the

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Russel B. Nye
Major professor

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By

Sheldon Norman Grebstein

A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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AN ABSTRACT

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Approved_____

Despite the importance of Sinclair Lewis as writer and social critic, there has never been a full-scale study of his career or a complete examination of his total literary product. It was the intention of the present writer to remedy this, and to provide in this study both a handbook for the student of Lewis and a foundation for future scholarship.

In general, the dissertation had four main objectives:

1. To give an overall survey of the life and career of Sinclair Lewis.

2. To consider this life and career with special reference to Lewis as a critic of American society and culture.

3. To present a brief summary of the critics' view of Lewis and their reception of his work.

4. To offer some suggestion of Lewis' impact on his time and his place in modern literature.

The writer has not hesitated to correlate episodes in Lewis' literary career with events in his life. Thus, although this study makes no pretense of being a complete or detailed biography, it does attempt to demonstrate how Lewis' experiences affected his outlook and his writing.

For its sources, this dissertation has taken the whole corpus of Lewis' work, including not only his novels, but also short stories, essays, contributions to periodicals, news items, speeches, and, in short, every available bibliographic resource and mention of Lewis that has appeared

in print. In addition, the author has consulted such references as books, scholarly articles, and reviews. He has also made extensive use of Yale University's collection of Lewis material, including original documents and items never before utilized. Consequently, the conclusions in the study represent both a careful study of original sources and a sifting of the best critical and scholarly opinion.

The author has concluded that the literary career of Sinclair Lewis divides into four major phases and has arranged his study accordingly, devoting a chapter to the discussion of each, as follows:

I: The Early Lewis. This includes the investigation of Lewis' environment, education, jobs, travels, and writing, centering around his five early novels, and chronicling the first appearance of his satire and some of his important themes.

II: Social Criticism, Satire, and Success. This analyzes Lewis' career in the decade 1920-1930, the years in which he satirized American society most savagely and attained his greatest success, culminating in the Nobel Prize. The discussion is based largely on the novels, beginning with Main Street.

III: The Affirmative Years. An examination of Lewis' work 1930-1940, a time when his satire and social criticism softened, vehement only in the outstanding It Can't Happen Here.

IV: The Final Phase. The study of the end of Lewis' career, 1940-1950, a period marked by renewed vitality and one notable book, Kingsblood Royal, with several others of varying quality and significance.

In the approach to Lewis' work, the author has attempted to make one thing clear, that no matter what his technique

or subject matter, Sinclair Lewis was a man who loved America and devoted his life to the attempt to improve her.

Sheldon Grebstein

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Introduction

In his last year alive in Italy, lonely and far from home, Sinclair Lewis would stare moodily through his window and say, "I love America. I Love America, but I don't like it." Those words could almost stand as a summary of Lewis' literary career, for he spent his life trying to save America's soul, an act of love, while at the same time he chastised unmercifully her manners, morals, ethics, habits, and social codes. This study is the history of that strange duality in one of our greatest writers.

Although Sinclair Lewis has been the subject of many scholarly articles and essays in periodicals, there has not yet been a complete, detailed survey of his life and literary career. The present writer has attempted, in this dissertation, to provide just that, especially from the viewpoint of Lewis as a critic of modern American life and society. To this end, the author has considered everything that Lewis ever wrote that was available to him, including much original material in the Yale Collection of Lewis' papers. He has also made a careful investigation into scholarly and critical opinion, so that the conclusions presented herein are the result of both a close textual analysis of Lewis' own work and a consideration of the keenest professional comment.

The discussion generally focuses around each of Lewis' novels, at the same time utilizing biographical material, evidence from other of Lewis' writings, contemporary opinion, etc., relating all against a background of the literature and events of the day. It moves from Lewis' birth to his death, and to the best knowledge of the author, omits no important incident, writing, or activity in Lewis' literary career. Also, in the examination of each novel or literary event, there is a brief survey of their critical and popular reception.

This study falls into four main sections, each dealing with a major phase of Lewis' career, chronologically arranged. The first chapter takes the reader from Lewis' childhood to the end of his apprenticeship, from 1885 to 1919. It includes the treatment of Lewis' early environment, education, jobs, travel, and writing, concentrating on his five apprentice novels, and tracing the first appearance of his satiric method and some of his important themes. Chapter Two indicates Lewis' shift from the popular-romance writing of his early work to the satire and social criticism which was to bring him permanent fame in the years from 1920 to 1930, resulting in the Nobel Prize. This chapter contains a detailed discussion of each of the great novels of the decade, Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and Dodsworth, and ends with a close analysis of Lewis' Nobel

Prize Speech, while other of Lewis' literary activities are also considered in their proper places. This chapter is probably the longest and most important section in the dissertation. In Chapter Three the author has tried to show how Lewis grew more and more nostalgic and affirmative in tone from 1930 to 1940, and despite flashes of satiric or narrative talent, how his books steadily deteriorated, with the exception of It Can't Happen Here. The concluding chapter chronicles the last ten years of Lewis' life and career. It establishes his return to satire and social commentary in Gideon Planish and Cass Timberlane, culminating in the memorable crusade against racial prejudice in Kingsblood Royal. Lewis' last two novels, The God-Seeker and World So Wide are discussed in relation to their significance in Lewis' work as a whole.

Throughout this entire study, the writer has tried to justify and explain Sinclair Lewis' literary attempt to prod his native society out of its materialistic wallow, an attempt much misunderstood and reviled by contemporary reviewers who wrote that Lewis was a man who hated America. Only recently have a few perceptive critics begun to see that he was, on the contrary, a man who loved America with a passionate and idealistic love, coupled with an unquenchable desire to make her fulfill the promise of her greatness. It was Lewis' satiric disguise that fooled the critics and

some of the public, for he made no effort to sugar-coat his bitter pills of truth; rather, he seemed to delight in often making them more bitter than they really were. Yet, agree or disagree, praise or curse, deny or affirm as they might, Americans bought his books by the tens of millions, for the fact of the matter was that Sinclair Lewis' truth pills, bitter as only the truth could be, held the cure for the nation's sicknesses, and his diagnoses, satire and all, were too frightening to be ignored.

The world, too, became fascinated by Lewis' unforgettable pictures of twentieth century America, and his books were translated into more languages than those of any other American writer of the time. Finally, as a fitting tribute to his greatest decade, the world thought enough of Sinclair Lewis to make him the first American ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

As various critics have pointed out, Lewis helped America achieve self-recognition. He told his readers things about themselves and their neighbors that they could understand. While his fellow writers fled to Paris to avoid contamination by native philistinism, Lewis stayed here and fought it. His books helped to destroy our taboos, and while they may have made us uneasy, they always ended by making us proud. With others, he provided the substance of intellectual discussion in the first post-war world,

but more than any other, Lewis stimulated a renaissance of our literature in the twenties and thirties. A satirist by nature and a reformer at heart, he attacked evil on virtually every important level of American life, but he never hesitated to identify greatness wherever it existed.

Fascinated by people, Sinclair Lewis entered their world and, in so doing, changed it. He had the satiric genius of turning man into a pathetic puppet, but never a lifeless puppet, for his characters entered our national consciousness and folklore. He himself was a part of the same folklore in that he was the classic irreverent observer, the disrespectful Westerner, the village atheist who sees through phoniness, yet is a part of the very society he mocks.

He denied he was a reformer and he liked to think he was a romantic story-teller, but neither one of these elements was strong enough to stand alone. His greatness was embodied in his ability to combine them into books which were simultaneously memorable fiction and biting social criticism. It was this talent, together with the ever-present ambiguity of love and hate, which gave his work its distinctive solidity and vitality. He reflected the national characteristics of his native land - restlessness, energy, impatience, quick friendliness, hatred of pretense, idealism, and he also exemplified our greatest fault - the tendency

to excess. In short, he was American to the core.

The whole world has read his books and been affected by them. They are, on the whole, a magnificent achievement. The pages to follow contain the record of that achievement.

I. THE EARLY LEWIS

1. Sauk Center: 1885-1903

Any serious consideration of the literary career of Sinclair Lewis and of Lewis as American social critic must begin with an understanding of Lewis' childhood in the Minnesota village where he was born, for this period was to have a deep and abiding influence on his life and work.

Sauk Center, Minnesota, was, in 1885, a perfect birthplace for Harry Sinclair Lewis, because this raw prairie town with its population of twenty-five hundred was a representative sample of provincial America.[1] Here, when Lewis was born, the pioneer tradition was still a vital one and was to considerably influence Lewis, although the last generation of pioneers was to grow old and disappear as Lewis was growing up.[2] Lewis' own father was a doctor with several generations of New England forebears, a man who had left his Connecticut home to travel the pioneer trail into the hinterlands of Minnesota. Here, also, a new generation of pioneers, that of Scandinavian and German immigrants, was arriving, at first resented by the "natives," but in the short span of a few years, their children were to become more American than the Americans.[3]

It was, then, in the environment of a prairie town in the era of its transition from a dynamic frontier settlement to a static, settled community, that Sinclair Lewis grew up.

He was named, so the legend goes, after a traveling theater company, whose performance of "East Lynne" in Sauk Center in December, 1884, so excited Dr. Emmet Lewis that he persuaded his wife to name the unborn baby after the company's founder and leading actor, Harry St. Clair. The baby was born on February 7, 1885, and, as hoped, it was a boy, but when the proud parents drove to the county seat to register the name of the infant, the registrar, who was hard of hearing, wrote down "Harry Sinclair," instead of "Harry St. Clair," and so it remained for posterity. Many years later Lewis was to fulfill the legendary theatrical source of his name.[4]

Lewis' childhood was a crucial period for him and was to permanently affect his character and his writing. Lewis' own writings were a good source of material for the story of his boyhood. On one occasion he wrote:

> I was born . . . in a genuine prairie town, ringed round with wheat fields broken by slew and oak-rimmed lakes, with the autumn flight of ducks from Canada as its most exotic feature. My boyhood was alarmingly normal, mid-western, American - my father the prosperous pioneer doctor whose diversions were hunting and travel; my school the public school, with no peculiarly inspired teachers; my sports, aside from huge amounts of totally unsystematized reading of everything from dime novels and Ned books and casual sentimental novels to translations of Homer, were the typical occupations of such a boy: swimming in the creek, hunting rabbits, playing pom-pom-pull-away under the arc light in the evening. There was not much work - a few evening chores, of the woodbox filling sort.[5]

This is all true as far as it goes, but there is another part of the story that Lewis did not tell here, although he did on other occasions, and this is that other, deeper, part. Lewis

was a poor athlete and a poor student. The boys he admired, his older brother Claude and his "gang," considered him too little and frail to allow him to "hang around" with them, and, in the thoughtlessly cruel way of children, they constantly tricked him into diverting his attention elsewhere, while they vanished and left him all alone.[6] In school Lewis found little compensation for his lack of athletic prowess, for his eighth grade report card showed him to rank seventeenth in a class of eighteen.[7] But Lewis had other talents. He once started a debating society, only to have a teacher take it over and formalize it, ruining it as far as he was concerned.[8] When he was ten, Lewis started a newspaper and tried unsuccessfully to get his classmates interested in it, yet continued to write it regularly solely for his own pleasure even after the others disdained to help.[9]

All this is not to conclude that Lewis turned to writing only because he was a failure at the two great activities of childhood, athletics and school, although this may be partially true. Lewis himself stated the matter perfectly:

> While I was a mediocre sportsman...I was neither a cripple nor a Sensitive Soul. With this temptation to artistic revenge was probable combined the fact that my stepmother (since my father remarried when I was six, she was psychically my own mother) read to me more than was the usual village custom. And my father, though he never spoke of them, did have books in the house and did respect them, as one who had been a schoolteacher before he went to medical school.[10]

In any case, Lewis had decided to be a writer before he was eleven, and by the time he was fourteen had already sent a poem to Harper's.[11]

In the summer of 1899, working at no salary for the Sauk Center Weekly Herald as type-setter, hand press operator, and society reporter, the fourteen year old Lewis had the thrill of first breaking into print with his story of a Sauk Center bridge party. This thrill irrevocably decided Lewis in his literary ambition, although he was fired at the end of the summer when he asked for a raise because, in the words of the editor, he was "already getting more than he was worth."[12] Undaunted, Lewis returned to his journalistic career the next summer as man-of-all-trades on the other town paper, the Weekly Avalanche, for the huge salary of three dollars per week.[13]

But of all Lewis' childhood experiences, it was his reading that had the greatest influence on him. The evidence for this is to be found in Lewis' reminiscences of his own childhood:

> His boyhood was utterly commonplace...except for a love of reading not very usual in that raw new town ...Dickens, Walter Scott, Washington Irving. Doubtless this habit of reading led to his writing. He began as a wild romanticist.[14]

Other examples of Lewis' favorite childhood authors bear out this youthful romantic taste. Howard Pyle's King Arthur stories based on Malory were another strong literary influence,[15] and Thoreau's Walden was Lewis' boyhood vision of Mecca.[16]

This romanticism, born and nurtured in Lewis' early reading, was modified by the reading of Hamlin Garland (whom Lewis later credited with teaching him that American life could be

portrayed frankly and realistically),[17] but still remained the strongest basic element in Lewis' early philosophy and writing. To Sinclair Lewis it was a vital and dynamic ingredient in his nature, compounded out of boyhood dreams and longings, reading, an already active rebellion against the standards of his environment, and a growing, somewhat bitter realization that there were no ruined castles or fair damsels to be rescued in Minnesota.[18]

This sensitive, gawky doctor's son had already felt the lash of the town's opinion and the weight of their judgement, for although the children loved him for his ability to narrate stories that never ended or grew dull, their elders regarded him with good-natured contempt and generally agreed that he "wouldn't amount to much."[19] At home Lewis had to face the silent disapproval of the two men whom he most held in awe and could never impress even at the height of his fame, his father and his brother Claude, who would never admit that being a writer might conceivably be as important as being a doctor.[20] As far as Sauk Center was concerned, Lewis' literary ambitions were just one more proof that he was "queer." Main St., many years later, revealed just how deep Lewis' resentment was against the philistinism of his home town, and also revealed that this resentment had not been forgotten, but had been nursed, slow-burning, through the intervening years. The scorn of the citizens of his birthplace and the disapproval of his adored father and brother were to leave an open wound in Lewis' sensibility which profoundly affected his career and which neither fame nor success nor wealth could ever cure.[21]

So Sinclair Lewis grew up, known to the town not only for his literary notions, but also for other, more serious heresies. He had already earned the personal attention of the Congregationalist pastor by questioning the story of Jonah and the Whale. The Sunday-school teacher also found Lewis to be a rather alarmingly iconoclastic pupil, very reluctant to absorb doctrines and opinions which had traditionally never been challenged.[22] About the time Lewis was a high-school senior, he was being tutored in Greek by an Episcopalian parson who read Plato, chewed tobacco, had been a chaplain in the Confederate army, and was known to have preached evolution. What effect this relationship had on Lewis is a matter of speculation, but the prototype of the "village atheist" or noncomformist which appears all through Lewis' work in such books as Trail of the Hawk, Main Street, and Ann Vickers, probably owes more than a little to this long forgotten free-thinker. Lewis also wanted to study French, but in Sauk Center this was going a bit too far.[24]

Lewis also admired the business and professional men in his town, and one of his boyhood visions was that of a life of success, comfort, and local prestige similar to that enjoyed by the town banker and even his own father, but these Babbitt-like dreams of the Horatio Alger school were submerged by other, more vivid dreams of writing, learning, culture.[25] One of Lewis' earliest, most persistent ambitions was his desire to be a scholar and historian, especially an Egyptologist. An entry

in his diary the winter before he entered Yale is striking proof of this. Written or the occasion of tracing some references on Macaulay, then one of Lewis' favorites, the entry reads:

> All such work as looking up these references gives me a desire to be a master of some subject - say of ancient Egyptian religion or ancient Egyptian history or the geography of the Ancient World or Sanskrit or the History of Rome from 509 B.C. to the Birth of Christ; or the History, Literature and Language of Phoenicia - touching specially or rather studying especially Astarte, a favorite topic of mine.

and further on: "A boy - nay a child of eighteen, knowing or expecting to know anything. I must wait fifty years to begin to learn."[26]

The portrait of the young Sinclair Lewis before he left his home town for the first time to travel East to college is now complete. He was a young prairie romantic, a dreamer and a seeker after knowledge and truth, already something of an individualist and a rebel, and already hopelessly intoxicated by that most potent of brews - printer's ink.

2. Sinclair Lewis at Yale: 1903-1908

It had been decided for Lewis that he was to become a teacher and to go to the University of Minnesota, as any ordinary young man with a bookish inclination would have done.[27] But Lewis was no ordinary bookish young man. He had been reading Charles Flandrau's Harvard Episodes and had been inflamed with the idea of going to Harvard, but Lewis' father insisted on Yale because he had originally come from the vicinity of New Haven, and so Yale was chosen.[28] After six months at Oberlin Academy in Ohio to qualify for the Yale entrance requirement in Greek, Sinclair Lewis made the first long trip of his life East, to New Haven, in September, 1903.

Eager to see everything he possibly could on this first long trip away from home, Lewis left the train at Albany and proceeded to New York by boat down the Hudson, drinking in the romantic atmosphere of the Catskills, locale of those wonderful legends Lewis had read as a boy in the pages of Washington Irving. In New York, he was bewildered by the throngs of New Jersey commuters, which struck him as something out of Dante's Inferno. He was frightened by the crowds of people and disenchanted by the dirty streets of New York, yet at the same time he felt a kinship with all these thousands of anonymous faces. Seven years later, when he himself returned to work in New York for a few dollars a week, the poignancy and poverty of the lives of all these "little" people, the forgotten men and women whose

ranks he had joined in the great metropolis, were to furnish the background for such of his early books as Our Mr. Wrenn, Trail of the Hawk, The Innocents, and The Job, and later, much of Ann Vickers. Sinclair Lewis was never quite at home in New York, and his later books as well as the early ones gave ample evidence of this. When Lewis finally got to New Haven, its peace and quiet was like a blessing to him after the tumult of New York.[29]

Unfortunately, Yale did not receive Sinclair Lewis with open arms. From the first, Lewis felt himself to be a raw, uncouth Westerner in the midst of suave, sophisticated Easterners, but he was unwilling and by nature unable to curry either the favor or the attention of most of his classmates. His cadaverous, freckled, red-headed appearance, his untiring energy, his unabashed enthusiasm in those of his classes that he enjoyed - all these things marked him as one apart. Lewis had escaped the cramped atmosphere of Sauk Center only to find himself in another unsympathetic social situation. His classmates promptly dubbed him with such nicknames as "Red" and "God-forbid," and just as promptly forgot that he existed.[30] Professor William Lyon Phelps, one of Lewis' few friends at Yale, remembered him thus:

> He was not disliked in college, but was regarded with amiable tolerance as a freak. He took not the slightest interest in the idols of the place - athletics, societies, etc. ... and as he took no interest in these things, he did not see why he should pretend to do so. In other words, he was a complete and consistent in dividualist, going his own way, and talking only about things that interested him.[31]

Lewis had arrived at Yale with the enthusiastic notion that everyone would feel as he did about Yale and about literature, and Yale had given him the cold shoulder.[32] He had thrown himself eagerly into his class work, answering questions, staying after class to discuss the work with his instructors,[33] only to have one professor publically mock him in his Greek class for his over-dramatic translation of Oedipus Rex.[34] But despite such rebuffs, Lewis continued to be feverishly interested in anything literary. He had been, to use his own words, an "inveterate scribbler" even before coming to Yale, and now he again turned to his writing with continued vigor, to the exclusion of almost all other activity.[35] At the same time, he read voraciously, "drawing more books from the Yale library than ... any under graduate has before or since."[36] Lewis was also working at least one night a week on the New Haven Journal - Courier.[37]

Lewis himself best describes the bulk of his writing at Yale:

> On the Yale Literary Magazine and the Yale Courant I showered long medieval poems, with (O God!) ladys clad in white samite, mystic, won-der-ful; tales about Minnesota Swedes; and even two lyrics in what must have been terrible German. Perhaps half of them were accepted. The Lit was solemn, awesome, grammatical, traditional, and completely useless as a workshop; the Courant was frivolous, humble, and of the greatest use.[38]

but there were certain items besides the dozens of inconsequential Tennysonian and Swinburnian lyrics that Lewis turned out which are worthy of careful attention and which are highly

significant as the first recorded expression of themes which were to dominate Lewis' entire work. As a sophomore, Lewis had already published one article in a "real" magazine, and encouraged by this, he began in his sophomore and junior years in 1905 and 1906 to concentrate more and more on serious topics in his writing.[39]

The earliest example of Lewis as a critic and commentator on a phase of modern civilization is to be found in a story called "The Yellow Streak," published in the Yale Literary Magazine in the spring of 1905.[40] The story is about a writer who has been affected by success, and its theme is closely related to what is perhaps Lewis' most beloved satirical target in all of his early writing and which persists, with lesser frequency but not intensity, to the very end of his career; the theme of cultural, literary, and artistic pretension, false intellectualism, or, to use Lewis' own coined expression, "Hobohemia." The moral of the story is clearly drawn and is inherent in the plot: Tennyson Bonn, a poet just beginning to achieve fame, is giving a public reading of his poems. Among those in the audience are an old friend, and a dreary washerwoman whose only touch of romance in life is Bonn's poetry, and a group of famous editors and critics. The moment he sees these literary gods, Bonn directs his reading to them and performs for them alone, forsaking those who really matter, the "little" people. Lewis' opinions on such writers as Bonn can be summarized in the feelings of the broker and the washerwoman, as they watch him prancing on the stage:"

'Has fame changed him,' pondered the broker. 'I'm afraid I saw a querulous, cynical note in those last verses of his ... a catering to the 'classes,' the cynics, the dilettants...'[41] "The washerwoman was unconsciously thinking that she would like it better if the poet's shoulders were broader and his step firmer, and if he carried a rapier instead of a nice roll of tinted paper."[42]

"The Yellow Streak" was but one of several stories which dealt with serious themes, at this stage only in infant form, but later to appear full-grown. Such stories as "The Loneliness of Theodore" (a lonely little boy is snubbed by his playmate).[43] "The Heart of Pope Innocent" (a characterization of a cruel and vain medieval pontiff),[44] and "A Theory of Values" (a boy who planned to go to college becomes a slave to money and business success),[45] all are concerned with classic themes in Lewis' work; loneliness, materialism, religious hypocrisy. At about the same time that Lewis was writing these stories, he had worked himself up to an editorship of the Lit, and his editorials were written almost entirely in a reflective and contemplative mood, usually concerning either literature or New Haven. The following is a perfect example of Lewis' "literary" editorials and of his deep interest in current literary and social movements:

> How much do you know by actual reading of those mighty forces in literature which are accompanying the recent movements in economic thought, and the building up of that new religion, whose trinity is cosmic emotion, beauty-worship, and public service?[46]

In the same editorial, Lewis referred to a host of writers, such names as Hardy, Meredith, James, Howells, Austin, Bronte, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Rossetti, Swinburne, Clough, Ibsen, Tolstoi, Pushkin, Tourgenieff, Gogol, Flaubert, Zola, Huneker, Pinero, Jones, Shaw, D'Annunzio, Sudermann, Yeats, Moore, Nietzsche, Haeckel, Huxley, Moody, Marx, Gorky, Blake, Pater; all indicative of the voluminous reading that Lewis must have been doing at this time. In other editorials of the same type, he praised the American poets Whittier and Riley,[47] and in yet another, he discussed "Fashions in Literature."[48]

It is now very clear that Lewis was an unusual kind of undergraduate. His insatiable thirst for reading was complemented by his restless, curious, lonely wanderings through the streets of New Haven at night, finding treasures in that city which were as exhilarating to the romantic side of his nature as to that observant, indignant part of him which was to later establish his fame. Lewis the romantic, the dreamer who scribbled children's verses and Tennysonian-Swinburnian stanzas, is here manifest:

> Seriously, there are few matters giving the quiet, absolute enjoyment of standing near the big Egyptian gateway of the Grove Street Cemetary, and looking at the classical nobility of this temple, with Diana's silver shield in the dun sky above it... truly, this seems a temple of Diana, cool chaste, regal; the moon looking down on it as an equal. One can sit on the ledge at the foot of the fence, and rise to divinity, like a Neo-Platonist, as he gazes.[49]

While Lewis the social critic, the tireless observer of people and places, is just as strongly in evidence:

> How many of the class in American Social Conditions think that only New York has slums? Do they know of the strange region of Oak Street, of its Saturday night when the Jewish Sabbath is just over? Have they ever seen it at three in the morning, when huge rats frisk boldly down the sidewalks, and the shops are opening for a new day?[50]

Perhaps the most significant thing that Lewis wrote at Yale was an essay called "Unknown Undergraduates," which appeared in the Lit. It was an appeal for understanding and tolerance from the mass of the student body for those whom Lewis habitually championed, the "little" people, the unknowns, the poor, the non-conformists. With a mixture of logic and passion, Lewis pointed out that those "unknown undergrads" are probably those who are most deserving of admiration because of their struggle. He warned against passing judgement on such flimsy criteria as participation in athletics and campus politics; he shrewdly noted that the man who is unknown at Yale because of deeper pre-occupations than winning popularity may be just the one who will do the most for the school in the future. Lewis concluded that it is wise to tolerate those with dissenting view points, because it is often just those men who are too far above the average to conform, for great men have never been known for their conformity.[51] Here spoke Lewis the rebel, the lonely, non-conformist undergraduate who was already best known as a socialist and agnastic.[52] Here spoke the boy who was by nature unable to plunge into the college activities that meant automatic popularity: athletics, fraternity, campus politics. This plea for the unknown undergraduate was in

reality a plea for himself and his kind. The hero of one of Lewis' best short stories, "Young Man Axelbrod," originally published in the Saturday Evening Post in 1917, was Lewis' spiritual kinsman, an "unknown undergraduate," and the loneliness he endured, the indefinable longing for beauty he had, was as true for Lewis as it was for Axelbrod. "Young Man Axelbrod" was essentially the story of Lewis at Yale.

In the meantime, Lewis had already started the incessant traveling that he was to continue for the rest of his life, since in the summers of 1904 and 1906, during the vacations from college, Lewis had worked his way to England on cattle boats, once landing at Liverpool with but fifteen cents in his pocket and saved from starvation only by a three dollar loan from a friend on the boat.[53]

In the fall of 1906, Sinclair Lewis, hurt by Yale's snobbishness and with a taste for adventure whetted by his cattle-boat experiences, went to Upton Sinclair's experimental communist colony "Helicon Hall," in New Jersey. Here he remained from November 3 to December 1, 1906, with his Yale friend, Allan Updegraff, working as a janitor, and seeking to draw some inspiration from such visiting notables as Emma Goldman, Lincoln Steffens, and the proprietor, Upton Sinclair, but finding instead only distasteful work, a general shirking of responsibility on the part of the other residents, and a reigning chaos and disorder.[54] One writer later reported that

Lewis found his Helicon Hall experience an inspiring one, but if Lewis' own account of his experience there is to be taken at face value, this seems dubious.[55]

The rest of that year, 1906-1907, which would have been Lewis' senior year at Yale, continued to be just as hectic as its beginning. After Helicon Hall, Lewis and Updegraff went to New York, where they lived on the edge of starvation, both free-lancing, with Lewis devoting most of his energy to writing children's verses for popular magazines. From March, 1907, to October, Lewis worked as the assistant editor of the magazine Transatlantic Tales, translating stories from German and French into English. In October, Lewis went to Panama by steerage, hoping to get employment on the Canal, but could find no job there and returned.[56] All these experiences of Lewis', living in poverty in New York, the trip to Panama, were to be utilized in such of his early books as Our Mr. Wrenn, The Innocents, and The Trail of the Hawk, but, strangely enough, Lewis never did use his stay at Helicon Hall in any of his fiction. Perhaps, underneath, he did have a feeling of respect for what Sinclair was trying to do, and felt that it deserved silence rather than satire.

All during this time, Lewis had been breaking into print more and more frequently, his published output consisting almost entirely of light verse, with an occasional short story or brief article, but all this was written only to sell, not for posterity, and it reveals little of Lewis' genius except his amazing productivity. He continued to write in the same

vein after his return to Yale in the fall of 1907 and all during his senior year Lewis seems to have given up his writing for the college literary magazines, because the only writings of his extant from his senior year at college are those verses and occasional pieces mentioned above, and a group of themes which Lewis wrote for Professor Phelps' course in Seventeenth Century English literature, themes which indicate only that Lewis was a clever student and that his hunger for literature remained as voracious as ever.[57]

Lewis' graduation from Yale marked the end of one great epoch in his life. Despite his loneliness, despite his impatience with the restrictions of college society, Yale had been a valuable experience for Lewis. He had read deeply there, he had done his first serious writing there, he had gotten a vision of a far better life than could ever be conceived in Sauk Center.[58]

Literature had appealed to him so much that he had for a while toyed with the idea of getting a Ph.D. in English, but he gave this up to devote himself to his first, real, and only love, writing.[59] Lewis had suffered at Yale, but he had also matured. Many years later, when he was famous, he was to joyfully revenge himself on those who had snubbed him in his college days, because those who ignored him as an undergraduate, honored him as an alumnus.[60] For the rest of his life, Lewis was proud that he had gone to Yale,[61] and even such incidents as the Nobel Medal affair, did not in the long run diminish his love for his alma mater.[62]

3. Wanderjahren and Apprenticeship: 1908-1914

Lewis' first job, in the summer of 1908, after his graduation from Yale, was as editorial writer, telegraph editor, and proof-reader on the Waterloo, Iowa, Daily Courier. He was discharged abruptly after ten weeks, because, as editorial writer, he was supposed to keep himself informed of local happenings but did not, preferring to write on larger issues, of national and universal significance.[63] His editorials are worth serious attention because they already reveal Lewis to be an astute and liberal observer of important domestic and foreign happenings. The tone of the editorials is thoroughly earnest, many of them being of a reforming, hortatory, and "self-improvement" nature. Two of these editorials deserve special consideration, for they show the developement of that vital phase of Lewis the social reformer and critic which was to emerge full-grown a few years later. The editorial for August 3, 1908, was called "The Needful Knocker," and showed that Lewis was already conscious of the importance to civilization of the critic and reformer. He wrote:

> It is well known to the philosopher that the clear sighted pessimist is quite as often in the right as the optimist, who is so likely to be blinded by enthusiasm.....The great reformers and martyrs have been knockers for the most part....Yet it was these same knockers who saved the world....The boaster's enthusiasm is the motive force which builds up our American cities. Granted. But the hated knocker's jibes are the check necessary to guide that force.[64]

In another editorial. "The Deadshots," written August 8, 1908, Lewis made his first specific full-length attack on one of his life-long pet hatreds, false clergymen, evangelists, and religious imposters. He demanded that the genuine clergy unite to cast these religious pretenders out of their ranks, lest their infamy corrupt true religion and its honorable ministers.[65] Lewis' indignation here was one of the sparks of that hot fire which Lewis was to set under religion in America in Elmer Gantry, nineteen years later.

After his discharge from the Waterloo paper, Lewis began to travel again: first to New York, where he worked for a charity organization,[66] then to Carmel, California, by day-coach, where he lived several months with William Rose Benet, supporting himself by working as part-time secretary for two lady writers, and selling some short-story plots to Jack London;[67] after that to San Francisco where he had two newspaper jobs and was fired from both for "incompetence," and finally to Washington, D.C., where he was assistant editor of a magazine for the teachers of the deaf.[68] All the while, Lewis was continuing to write, still concentrating on children's and humorous verses for various magazines, but beginning to turn more and more to the kind of short-stories which would appeal to lady readers, although these stories sometimes had a more sober and realistic undertone.[69] Now, as later, Lewis' powers of invention and visualization were tremendous, and he conceived more plots and ideas than any writer could use

in a lifetime.[70] By 1911, Lewis had published sixty-six poems, articles, and short stories,[71] and had earned more than one thousand dollars from his work.[72]

Lewis returned to New York in 1910 to settle down for five years to a variety of jobs in the publishing field, jobs which included manuscript-reader for Frederick A. Stokes Company, assistant editor of Adventure magazine, editor and chief reviewer for the Publisher's Newspaper Syndicate, which supplied syndicated book-review pages for newspapers,[73] and finally, editor and advertising manager for the George H. Doran Company. In April, 1914, Lewis married Grace Livingstone Hegger, and in December, 1915, having sold his first story to the Saturday Evening Post, Lewis resigned from the Doran Company to devote his full time to free-lance writing.[74] Lewis was, of course, constantly writing all during this period, not only the usual light verse, but also poetry of a more serious kind.[75] In 1912 he published his first novel, an adventure book for boys which relates the exciting but incredible adventures of "Hike," a sixteen-year-old boy in the best tradition of Tom Swift. The book was called Hike and the Aeroplane and it was published by Lewis' employer, Stokes. It reveals little about Lewis except his extraodinary talent for ingenious invention and his interest in flying, which had started during his stay in California.[76] But Lewis had a far more serious purpose in writing Hike than either a love of aviation or a passion to entertain teen-age boys Lewis' real reason for writing the book

is to be found in his letter to Professor Chauncy Brewster Tinker, written from New York City, May 19, 1938 (in Yale Collection, item #214):

> I wrote Hike and the Aeroplane for the sole and not very commendable purpose of getting from the firm of Frederick A. Stokes and Company, who paid outright for the book at salary rates, a long vacation to do a few words on my first novel, "Our Mr. Wrenn." The transaction was deplorable on all sides and I believe the book is now worth a lot of money.

Even this early in his career Lewis showed traces of that astonishing ambivalence in writing that has puzzled so many critics, the ability to manufacture the ordinary popular fiction that was most in demand at the moment, and at the same time to preserve intact his integrity and seriousness of purpose in the writing of his serious novels. What critics and scholars have largely failed to realize until recently is that Lewis was as much a romantic story-teller at heart as he was a zealous reformer, and that when these two ingredients were combined equally in Lewis' work, the result was a notable creation, and that when either quality predominated, at the expense of the other, the result was but a mediocre piece of writing.[77]

Hike was written, then, as were most of Lewis' short stories, to enable him to get on with more serious work. That he was thinking seriously, and reading seriously during these years is evidenced by several items which deserve consideration. The first of these is an interview with Lewis by an anonymous reporter, an interview printed in the Buffalo, New York, News for June 28, 1914. The interview was on the topic,

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"Where Lies the Hope of the Average Man," and Lewis' opinions on this matter were as follows:

> There is no question, of course, that our present system of doing business has a tendency to hold down the majority for the benefit of the few. But that has been the tendency of all systems since mankind was born. America is the land of opportunity. A man or woman has more chance here than anywhere else on earth. The thing to do is to wake up and take your chance, fight for it, work for it![78]

The remainder of the interview cited Lewis' views on self-improvement, the way to success, and "getting ahead in the world," and probably without realizing it, he sounded a little like a self-satisfied young executive giving smug advice to a down-trodden underling - the kind of thing that Lewis hated all his life. In any case, this interview, and another piece of writing he did a few months later (see below, "The Passing of Capitalism") reveal a mixture of radicalism and optimism which was peculiar to Lewis at this stage of his career.[79] "The Passing of Capitalism" was Lewis' contribution to <u>The Bookman</u> magazine on the general question "Relation of the Novel to the Present Social Unrest." In this article, Lewis surveyed the whole field of recent fiction and concluded that all important trends were toward a growing hostility to the capitalistic system, and that this system must soon crumble under these attacks. Nothing could more clearly reveal Lewis' infant socialism at this time than this essay, and also nothing is more indicative of Lewis' extensive reading in the most significant literature of that time, the literature of social protest. Among those writers whom Lewis found sig-

nificant were Wells, Dreiser, Herrick, Walpole, Norris, and Sinclair. As far as Lewis was here concerned, H. G. Wells was by far the greatest living novelist and the most clear-sighted of all social critics.[81] Lewis' conclusion to his article was very strongly indicative of his reforming zeal and impatience with the existing social system:

> And does it not by now seem that practically every writer - certainly in America and to some extent in England - who is gravely seeking to present the romance of actual life as it is to-day, must perforce show capitalism as a thing attacked, passing - whether the writer lament or rejoice or merely complain at that passing? Few of them have any very clear idea of how the passing is to occur; as to what is to take its place . . . . Yet there it is, in nearly every seeing writer of to-day - an attack on capitalism.82

It is quite evident, then, both from this essay, "The Passing of Capitalism," and from the fact that Lewis had been, a little earlier, a card-carrying member of the Socialist Party, that he leaned toward the Left. It is also quite logical to expect that from this point Lewis would go on to further espouse the cause of social radicalism, eventually leading, as it led so many other American intellectuals in the 1930's, into Communism. But such was not the case with Sinclair Lewis, for this essay, "The Passing of Capitalism," marked the climax of Lewis' youthful career as a social radical. In direct contrast to this essay, and as evidence of Lewis' departure from the socialist cause, stood his first serious novel, Our Mr. Wrenn and the four others that Lewis was to write in the next five years. These novels were an

optimistic defense of America and the American way of life. Indeed, there was in them the record of existing social inequality and economic injustice, and there was in them Lewis' implicit protest against these things. There was also in these early novels the call to revolt, but Lewis' kind of revolt was never the revolt of the masses against an oppressive capitalistic society. His revolt was that of the romantic idealist, the revolt of the individual against his own individual fears and self-repressions, and not against a specific political or economic system. Even those great revolutionary books of the 1920's-Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry-urged nothing more than a revolt of the American spirit against the forces that threatened to enslave it. Lewis did retain a sort of mild, latent, romantic socialism for most of his life, but this was a socialism compounded more from Lewis' idealism than from any political radicalism. And even in his most violent attacks on American life and society, Sinclair Lewis never seriously suggested any revolt or reform outside the framework of the existing social order.

To sum up, Lewis never did have any really consistent and complete set of political beliefs, but changed with the times. Thus, in the 1920's, when Lewis felt the nation needed liberalism, he was in the vanguard of those who attacked Coolidge; and when, in the 1930's, Lewis saw that the average citizen needed reassurance, not ridicule, his criticism of the American

way grew more and more genial, finally to completely change into praise. In this way, Our Mr. Wrenn, Sinclair Lewis' first serious novel, was as far different from "The Passing of Capitalism" as The Prodigal Parents was to be different from Babbitt. The wheel of Lewis' opinion, which was to turn more than once in his career, made here, then, its first full revolution, from socialism to sentimentality.

4. The Apprenticeship Ended: 1914-1919

Our Mr. Wrenn: 1914. Our Mr. Wrenn was not the story of Lewis in New York, but the story of the kind of little people, lonely and searching for happiness, with whom Lewis could not help comparing himself, especially at this period in his life.[83] To be specific, it was the story of the spiritual emancipation of one of these little people. The book was written while Lewis was editor and advertising manager for the George H. Doran Co., and Lewis wrote it in his spare time; nights, week-ends, and commuting on the train from his home in Long Island to his work in New York.[84]

The plot of the book is perhaps best described by its own sub-title "The Romantic Adventures of A Gentle Man." Its hero, Mr. William Wrenn, is a timid, lonely, repressed little man in his thirties, who works in the office of a novelty manufacturing concern in New York, and is bullied by both the office manager and his land lady. Wrenn's only means of escape from his dingy, lonely life in his boarding-house and office are the movies and the reading of adventure books, both of which enable Wrenn to escape into a dream-world of romance, adventure, and travel. His dream-world is suddenly made a fact, when he receives a small legacy, enough to enable him to leave his job and go abroad. He arranges to work his way to England on a cattle boat (just as Lewis did) and on the cattle boat his spirit of independence, which had been first aroused by the unexpected legacy, receives still more encourage-

ment when Wrenn beats the boat bully in a fight and gains the respect of the whole crew. In England, Wrenn travels to Oxford where he meets a pompous American college professor, who patronizingly shows him the sights, but at the same time awakens in Wrenn a thirst for knowledge. From Oxford, Wrenn goes to London where he is terribly lonely until he meets the exotic Istra Nash, an American art student. Meeting her is the third great event in Wrenn's emancipation, for though she teases and patronizes him, at the same time she makes him express his dreams and aspirations and encourages him to believe in his own potentialities. Istra introduces Wrenn to groups of "Interesting People," the world of salons and intellectual gatherings (Lewis' "Hobohemia"). Under Istra's influence Wrenn finds himself awakening to a sense of the beautiful in life, and also to a hopeless love for Istra herself. When Istra suddenly deserts him on a walking trip, Wrenn decides to return to America. Back in New York, he finds that one of his old friends has gone to seed and to drink, and Wrenn, now a manly, resolute fellow, takes him in hand and leads him back to the straight and narrow path. Wrenn returns to his old job, but now he has a new spirit of vigor and determination and he soon demands, and receives, a raise. He moves out of his dreary rooming house into a cheerful, lively boarding home, where all the residents are friendly and sociable. Here, he is attracted to one of the other boarders, a sweet young lady named Nelly Croubel, and she seems to return his admiration. Their budding

romance is threatened by the sudden reappearance of Istra Nash, but even Wrenn's new-found intellectuality (since his return from England he has been reading widely and has even written a play) does not blind him to the fact that he and Istra are basically incompatible, and that Nelly is really the right girl for him. This is the last stage in Wrenn's spiritual re-birth. He has been able to triumph over a poignant but mistaken love affair, and as the book ends, he has settled down happily with Nelly to a simple life of domestic felicity in a flat in the Bronx.

In this, Lewis' first novel, the basic themes and characters which were to dominate all of Lewis' early work and a considerable amount of his later writing were already fully conceived. The plot resolved itself to this basic situation: A "little" man, repressed by social circumstances and by his own lack of boldness, finds the means to break out of the life-pattern which is stifling him, and by so doing, is able to find personal fulfillment and happiness. Nothing could have been more typical of Lewis at this point in his work. Not only was the plot structure typical, but also the theme of revolt or emancipation, the narrative style, the mixture of sincerity, sentiment, and irony, and several basic Lewis character types. Wrenn, in his struggle to achieve personal dignity, was a prototype of such later Lewis heroes as Babbitt and is the exact male counterpart of Una Golden, in Lewis' novel <u>The Job</u> (1917). Istra Nash was a prototype of Fran Dodsworth (Dodsworth, 1930), and Olivia Lomond (<u>World So Wide</u>, 1951), and

also had more than a little in common with Carol Kennicott of Main Street (1920), namely, the same desire for beauty and freedom. She is the symbol of both exotic femininity and of that superficial intellectuality that Lewis loved to satirize all through his work, and especially in this early period. It is Istra who, in a rare moment of sincere self-evaluation, makes what is almost a classic comment on the whole matter of "Interesting People," and their pretensions to "Freedom:"

> Interesting People - You find 'em in London and New York and San Francisco just the same. They're convinced they're the wisest people on earth. There's a few artists and a bum novelist or two always, and some social workers.....
> Being free, of course, they're not allowed to go and play with nice people, for when a person is Free, you know, he is never free to be anything but Free.[85]

Other standard Lewis character-types introduced here for the first time were the pompously self-important scholar, Dr. Mittyford, the slattern land-lady, Mrs. Zapp, and the sweet, virtuous, simple, loyal Nelly Croubel, the prototype of Leora of Arrowsmith (1925), and the first in a long line of Lewis' portrayals of faithful, domestic wives.

As many scholars have pointed out, Our Mr. Wrenn established a basic pattern in Lewis' work.[86] Here, as in the other early novels and many of the later ones, the lowly protoganist strives against the dullness of life, with Lewis' strong compassion and sympathy (often seasoned with a dash of irony) for his hero evident throughout.[87] But Our Mr. Wrenn had special reference for Lewis because Wrenn's cattle-boat trip, loneliness, and interest in foreign places were all parallels

of Lewis' own experience. No one has better summarized the relationship of Mr. Wrenn to Lewis than Harrison Smith, in his Introduction to the 1951 edition of Our Mr. Wrenn:

> He was always sorry for the little, submerged people in cities and small towns; he created William Wrenn in their image, and he gave him a glimpse of romance and the wide world, and he finally brought him back into the safe harbor of love and marriage .... Lewis was not so sure of himself when he wrote his first novel that he did not still see himself in his worst moments as the boy from Minnesota, perhaps doomed to sink into the mediocrity he portrayed.
>
> (pp. ix-x.)

Such, of course, was not to be the case; Lewis was not to sink into mediocrity, but to rise to fame.

Our Mr. Wrenn was as typical in style as in theme. The wealth of incident, the feeling of movement and travel, the dialogue, the satiric portraits that were to characterize Lewis' later books, were all to be found here in basic form. Lewis' knack of ironically summing up a character with a few deft strokes, one of the keys to his success as a satirist, already showed considerable developement, as for example in the portrait of Mr. Wrenn's landlady:

> Mrs. Zapp was a fat landlady. When she sat down there was a straight line from her chin to her knees. She was usually sitting down. When she moved she groaned, and her apparel creaked. She groaned and creaked from bed to breakfast, and ate five griddle-cakes, an egg, some rump-steak, and three cups of coffee, slowly and resentfully. She creaked and groaned from breakfast to her rocking-chair, and sat about wondering why Providence had inflicted upon her a weak digestion.88

or, in the even more briefly devastating description of Mittyford, the American college professor:

> Mittyford had a bald head, neat eyeglasses, a fair family income, a chatty good-fellowship at the Faculty Club, and a chilly contemptuousness in his rhetoric class-room ... . He wrote poetry which he filed away under the letter "P" in his letter file.89

As regards social criticism, Lewis appeared here only briefly as a social critic. Our Mr. Wrenn was essentially a romance and a story of one man's developement from non-entity to happiness. His loneliness, his hum-drum life in office and boarding house perhaps did imply a criticism of American society, but were not fundamentally intended as such. Nevertheless, the book is important for an understanding of Lewis and his career, although not in regard to Lewis as a social critic. In fact, the only direct comment that Lewis made on our society in Our Mr. Wrenn was as follows, and even this was only in a half-serious tone:

> The 5000 princes of New York to protect themselves against the four million ungrateful slaves had devised the sacred symbols of dress-coats, large houses, and autos as the outward and visible signs of the virtue of making money, to lure rebels into respectability and teach them the social value of getting a dollar away from that inhuman, socially injurious fiend, Some One Else. That Our Mr. Wrenn should dream for dreaming's sake was catastrophic; he might do things because he wanted to, not because they were fashionable; whereupon police forces and the clergy would disband, Wall Street and Fifth Avenue would go thundering down. Hence, for him were provided those YMCA night book-keeping classes administered by solemn earnest men of thirty for solemn credulous youths of twenty-nine; those sermons on content; articles on "building up the run-down store by live advertising," Kiplingesque stories about playing the game; and correspondence-school advertisements, that shrieked, "Mount the ladder to thorough knowledge - the path to power and to the fuller pay envelope."

Yet such passages do hint at what Lewis was to say much more vehemently and at much greater length, beginning with Main Street.

To sum up, Our Mr. Wrenn represents the following fundamental themes, characters, and qualities in Sinclair Lewis' work:

1. It shows Lewis as a romantic, optimistic story-teller, the aspect of him that predominated in his first five novels.

2. It reveals Lewis' sympathy for the "little people," the downtrodden, and the under-dog, an aspect of Lewis which was later to be more fully evident, especially in such novels as Kingsblood Royal.

3. It is an example of Lewis' use of the theme of revolt. Wrenn is a hero because he dares to break away from the dreary security of his life and at least partially fulfill his dreams. Wrenn is thus basically like Babbitt, although without Babbitt's ability. The theme of revolt was a classic and recurrent theme in Lewis. It was often linked with Lewis' sympathy for the under-dog, as it is here, for example.

4. It demonstrated Lewis' hatred of false intellectualism and false intellectuals, a quality especially typical of his work before 1920.

5. It suggested Lewis' enchantment with distant lands and his interest in the theme of an American in Europe. This theme was to receive Lewis' full treatment in Dodsworth.

6. It has the first examples of some classic Lewis character types, the most notable of which are Wrenn, the prototype of the Lewis rebel-underdog; Nelly, the prototype of all of Lewis'domestic, loyal women; and Istra, the prototype of all of Lewis' clever, egocentric, fascinating, beautiful but bad women; the definite original of Fran Dodsworth.

7. It offered a brief, but not especially important glimpse of Lewis as social critic.

8. It was the first appearance of several of the basic qualities of Lewis' style, notably: irony, satiric description, and dialogue.

In the next year, 1915, Lewis was to publish another novel, The Trail of the Hawk, which was not only to develope some of the important traits of Lewis' work already demonstrated in Our Mr. Wrenn, but was also to advance several significant new elements.

The Trail of the Hawk: 1915. The Trail of the Hawk, or "A Comedy of the Seriousness of Life," as Lewis sub-titled it, was like Our Mr. Wrenn not deeply autobiographical, but was also like Our Mr. Wrenn in its use of many of Lewis' early interests and experiences. The hero, Carl "Hawk" Ericson, was by far the most attractive of any in Lewis' first five novels, and he was in the line of such later Lewis heroes as Martin Arrowsmith and Samuel Dodsworth. All three were peculiarly modern, twentieth century heroes, for Hawk Ericson was a pioneer aviator, Arrowsmith a pioneer scientist, and Dodsworth a pioneer captain of industry. Trail of the Hawk was also similar to Our Mr. Wrenn in being written in odd moments of Lewis' spare time from his publishing job in New York.[91] And finally, Trail of the Hawk was like Our Mr. Wrenn in being basically a tale of adventure and romance but also containing more than a little that was serious and significant to Lewis and to his later career.

Lewis' interest in flying had already been demonstrated in his first book, Hike and the Aeroplane and he was now to exploit it even more; revolt against small-town narrow-mindedness, travel, and a love story were the other ingredients of Trail of the Hawk, and together they united to form a book which avoided that "second-novel slump," often the downfall of many young writers. The story is essentially a simple one and bears a close relationship to one of Lewis' few basic plot structures. It is as follows:

Carl Ericson, a second generation Norwegian-American, the son of an unimaginative carpenter, grows up in the little Minnesota town of Joralemon (which is very like Lewis' home town, Sauk Center, and also like Gopher Prairie of Main Street). As a boy he has a spirit of romance and adventure which is nourished by his friendship with Bone Stillman, the village eccentric, who encourages Carl to leave Joralemon, lest he be eventually overcome by village mediocrity (an incident which perhaps suggests Lewis' own youth).

Carl goes to Plato College, a small local college, where he is active in athletics and becomes a popular campus figure, but where he also attends classes in literature taught by a liberal, young, Eastern-educated professor. During his first summer vacation from college, Carl gets his initial thrill of flying when he and his friends build and fly a glider. Soon after the resumption of classes, Carl's literature professor scandalizes the campus and the town by publically praising

the new theories advanced by Wells and Shaw. In the ensuing uproar and scandal, Carl gets into public disfavor by openly defending the "radical" professor. Social pressure is exerted on him to keep quiet, but when the final moment of decision arrives, Carl stands up to defend the professor before an assembly of the whole college, and shortly after this leaves college rather than recant.

The year that follows is one of privation, travel, and adventure for Carl.. He is, successively, an itinerant laborer, a hobo, a touring actor, a saloon flunkey, a worker in Panama and Mexico, and finally a garage mechanic in Oakland, California. Here (like Lewis), Carl becomes interested in aviation to the extent that he leaves his garage and learns to fly. After graduating from the flying school, Carl tours as a dare-devil stunt flyer until he wins several prizes in various air races and contests. By this time Carl has become known as "Hawk" and becomes enshrined as a hero in an America rapidly growing air-conscious. After Carl has won a considerable amount of money in air competition, he decides to settle down in New York and devote himself to business. Meanwhile, his friends are killed one by one in crashes and accidents.

In 1912, Hawk goes to work for the Van Zele Motor Corporation, and invests his money in this company in the developement of a new kind of auto, specially planned for long motor trips (one of Lewis' own schemes). He sinks into a routine life in New York and becomes a frequent visitor at the home

of the Cowles', a family from his own home town of Joralemon. Gertie Cowles, his childhood sweetheart, now grown plump and plain, sets her cap for Carl, but in the meantime, he has met and been enchanted by the lovely, upper-caste Ruth Winslow. Ruth and Carl begin to fall in love, but Ruth hesitates because she feels that Carl is socially her inferior. Eventually, however, Carl's personal qualities and fame as an aviator win Ruth, and they marry and settle down to a quiet domestic life. Carl is suddenly stricken seriously ill and after he recovers, he and Ruth find their marriage threatened by violent squabbles, born of the pressures of business, city life, and their different backgrounds. However, they soon realize that their only chance for happiness lies in leaving New York for a life of travel and variety (a definite parallel of Lewis' own marriage at that time). As the book ends, Carl and Ruth are outward bound for South America, where Carl has taken a new job and where they expect to find romance, adventure, and new happiness.

The predominant qualities of Lewis' early novels are quite evident here even in the bare outline of the story. Travel, adventure, love and reomance was the basis of all of Lewis' work in the period before 1920, with the exception of The Job. The style, although it showed increasing skill and facility, like all of Lewis' other novels was most heavily impressed with the stamp of the writing Lewis was doing all through these years for such popular slick magazines as the Saturday Evening Post.[92] The plot, as suggested above, was one which Lewis used,

with variations, again and again. One scholar, Harry Hartwick, has summed up this classic Lewis plot:

> The plot of Lewis' novels is relatively constant. A boy (or a girl) grows up in a hidebound country village, catches a vision of something finer from someone, goes to college, discovers that the "home-town mind" has invaded even our halls of learning, leaves school, travels . . . finds that marriage can also be a Babbitt trap, struggles to escape from Philistia, and either fails with Carol Kennicott and Babbitt, or achieves a degree of victory, as Hawk Ericson, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth and Ann Vickers do.[93]

Just as Lewis' classic plot-types appeared in his early books, so did basic character types, some of which have already been noted in Our Mr. Wrenn. In Trail of the Hawk, there were several new character prototypes, the main one being the prototype of the village radical, Bone Stillman, who was the ancestor of Miles Bjornstam in Main Street and one in a long line of Lewis dissenters, radicals, liberals, and rebels. Another Lewis classic character type was the hero, Hawk Ericson, who was not only a modern knight in armor, but also combined the same capacity for rebellion against ideological tyranny and the same zest for adventure and nonconformism as Martin Arrowsmith. Both were peculiarly twentieth century rebels against convention.[94] In another sense, Hawk Ericson was a prophecy, for another young flyer named Lindbergh, with a background amazingly similar to the fictional one of Hawk Ericson, was to gain world fame years later.[95] But more important, Hawk Ericson, together with his mentor Bone Stillman, had a direct relationship to a theme which had been suggested in Our Mr. Wrenn and now received fuller

developement, the theme which five years later in Main Street was to bring Lewis universal recoognition as one of the most important writers of his time, the theme of revolt against the village mind.[96] Joralemon and Plato College were Lewis' particular targets and examples of his revolt against the small town and what it stands for in Trail of the Hawk.[97] This fundamental hatred of Lewis' which was to receive far more extensive and vigorous expression in his later books, was briefly anticipated here, in Lewis' description of Plato College:

> Life at Plato was suspicious, prejudiced, provincial, as it affected the ambitious students; and for the weaker bretheren it was philandering and vague. The class work was largely pure rot - arbitary mathematics, anitquated botany, hesitating German, and a vertitable military drill in the conjunction of Greek verbs.98

If Plato College represented the forces of stagnation, what were the forces of progress and liberalism? These are summed up explicitly in the classroom speech of Professor Frazer, the "radical" young English instructor who was here unquestionably none other than Sinclair Lewis:

> "Do you realize that I am not suggesting that there might possibly some day be a revolution in America, but rather that now I am stating that there is, this minute, and for some years has been, an actual state of warfare between capital and labor? Do you know that daily more people are saying openly and violently that we starve our poor, we stuff our own children with useless bookishness, and work the children of others in mills and let them sell papers on the streets in red-light districts at night, and thereby prove our state nothing short of insane? If you tell me there is no revolution because there are no barricades, I point to actual battles at Homestead, Pullman, and the rest."99

Obviously, Lewis' latent socialism still had a spark of life, yet, as in Our Mr. Wrenn, Lewis did no more than suggest it here, and Carl Ericson, like all of Lewis' other heroes, never seriously considered political radicalism as a solution to any of the problems that he faced.

Hawk Ericson was a Lewis hero because he dared to revolt, like Mr. Wrenn, against the forces of stagnation and routine. The non-conformism which drove him from Plato College also drove him to give up security in exchange for the quest for happiness, and the concluding pages of Trail of the Hawk are filled with a restlessness against the restraining bonds of job, marriage, and society, which was typical of Lewis' early novels, expressed in such passages as this:

> However much he believed in the sanctity of love's children, Carl also believed that merely to be married and breed casual children and die is a sort of suspended energy which has no conceivable place in this overcomplex and unwieldy world.
>
> (p.404)

and this:

> "People don't run away from slavery often enough. And so they don't ever get to do real work, either ... . There's nothing that our own civilization punishes as it does begetting children. For poisoning food by adulterating it you may get fined fifty dollars but if you have children they call it a miracle - as it is - and then they get busy and condemn you to a lifetime of being scared by the boss ... . Perhaps if enough of us run away from nice normal grinding, we'll start people wondering just why they should go on toiling to produce a lot of booze and clothes and things that nobody needs ... . The rebellion against stuffy marriage has to be a whole lot wider than some little detail like changing from city to country.
>
> (p.407)

and the book ended with Carl and Ruth on their way abroad, agreeing, "How bully it is to be living, if you don't have to give up living in order to make a living. (p.409).

The above passages were indicative of Lewis' feelings about society at this time. The indictment, the criticism, were beginning to take on earnestness, and the solution was also made quite clear, escape by flight. Almost all of Lewis' heroes and heroines, Mr. Wrenn, Hawk Ericson, Carol Kennicott, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, Ann Vickers, Fred Cornplow, Hayden Chart - all flee from the forces that oppress them, some flee permanently, some to return. In The Trail of the Hawk Lewis the story-teller predominated, but Lewis the reformer and social critic was becoming more evident, at least by implication. At the same time, another phase of Lewis here became obvious for the first time, the Lewis who could in one moment savagely satirize America, and in the next warmly praise and defend it. Lewis the optimist and patriot here prevailed, for he was proud of Carl Ericson, the second generation American who was a symbol both of the new pioneer, and of the America that was his motherland. Through the eyes of Carl, Lewis saw this proud picture of early twentieth century America, a vision quite different from that of unwelcome foreign critics:

> He saw the vision of the America through which he might follow the trail like the pioneers whose spiritual descendant he was. How noble was the panorama that thrilled this one-generation American can be understood only by those who have smelled our brown soil; not by the condescending gods from abroad who came hither to gather money by lecturing on our

> evil habit of money-gathering and return to Europe to report that America is a land of Irish politicians, Jewish theatrical managers, and mining millionaires who invariably say, "I swan to calculate;" all of them huddled in unfriendly hotels or in hovels set on hopeless prairie. Not such the America that lifted Carl's chin in wonder.[100]
>
> (p.121).

Finally, one other new theme must be mentioned in reference to this novel, the conflict between East and West. One scholar has stated that this contrast and conflict of the sophistication, elegance and class society of the East and the immensity, drabness, energy and equalitarianism of the West is the basic theme of Lewis' early books.[101] This is true to some extent of Trail of the Hawk and almost entirely of Free Air, but has very little significance in Our Mr. Wrenn, The Innocents or The Job. In Trail of the Hawk, of course, Carl symbolizes the West and Ruth the East, but the conflict is far less central than that in Free Air, for Carl has fame, some wealth, and a veneer of sophistication, while Ruth is well-placed socially and economically, but certainly not out of Carl's reach. Lewis gave direct voice to this matter only once in Trail of the Hawk, and the speaker was Ruth's "Aunt Emma," a formidable dowager with a rather inflated sense of self-importance:

> "I don't suppose it's possible for Westerners to have any idea how precious family ideals are to Easterners. Of course we're probably silly about them, and it's splendid, your wheatlands, and not caring who your grandfather was; but to make up for those things we do have to protect what we have gained through the generations"
>
> (p.348).

But despite Aunt Emma, the difference in the backgrounds of Ruth and Carl was never more than a temporary bar to them and their romance, and from the moment they meet, the outcome of their love affair is never really in doubt. In Free Air, however, it was quite a different matter. However, further investigation of this matter will be reserved until the discussion of that book.

To conclude, Trail of the Hawk may be summarized as follows:

1. It was the combination of romance and adventure with the dash of social criticism and commentary which was perfectly typical of Lewis' first five novels.

2. It continued themes and character types suggested in Our Mr. Wrenn, notably the theme of the solution of the tediousness of life through escape, and the character of the hero who dares to escape.

3. It brought in the major new themes of: a) the hatred of the village mind and the revolt against it; b) the conflict of East and West, or, the romance of a boy and girl from two different social levels (this had been already suggested somewhat by Mr. Wrenn's romance with Istra Nash, but the difference in these two characters was much more intellectual and spiritual than social).

4. It revealed the growing infringement of Lewis the social critic upon Lewis the romantic story-teller.

After Trail of the Hawk Lewis was not to publish another novel for two years, but this next novel, The Job, was to be by far the most serious of Lewis' early books and was to contain for the first time a full-length examination of an important phase of contemporary American civilization.

The Job: 1917. Lewis' third novel The Job, was similar to Our Mr. Wrenn and Trail of the Hawk in that it was a combination of Lewis the story-teller and Lewis the social critic. But in The Job Lewis the social critic appeared more often than in the earlier books, with the result that The Job was Lewis' best, most serious, novel before Main Street. Lewis was no longer telling a tale for the mere sake of the telling in The Job. Rather, he was using the narrative form to deliver a message and a judgement, and though Lewis was still fundamentally optimistic, he nevertheless revealed that he was fully conscious of the darker side of what he wrote.[102]

The Job is the story of Una Golden, a small-town girl who comes to New York to find a job to support herself and her widowed mother. She goes to a commercial school to learn secretarial work and after her graduation, she finds a job in the office of the publishers of a trade magazine. There she meets and falls in love with Walter Babson, a clever but restless and irresponsible young editor. Their love affair ends, however, because marriage seems impossible under the pressures of poverty, the burden of Una's helpless mother, and Walter's restlessness, which finally drives him to accept a position in the West. Una loses her job, but soon finds another. About this time Una's mother suddenly becomes ill and dies, and Una is left alone in New York. Her life in New York, which at best had never been too happy, now seems hopelessly drab and lonely. Things look a little brighter when Una moves

into a boarding house for working girls, where she is surrounded by a group of lively, spirited young women. Under their influence, Una's downtrodden spirit begins to revive. On her summer vacation Una meets Eddie Schwirtz, a middle-aged, vulgar, but good-natured salesman, who shows a romantic interest in her. After she returns from vacation, Una moves into an apartment with one of her friends from the girls' home and also takes a new job in the office of a huge cosmetic manufacturing company, where she is soon worn out by the tensions of office politics and cliques. When her room-mate leaves to get married, Una falls back on her only support, Eddie Schwirtz and marries him. It is immediately apparent to Una that the marriage is a mistake, and when Eddie loses his job and begins to drink and go into debt, Una goes back to work as a secretary in a real-estate agency. Here, for the first time, she is able to take a real interest in her work and begins to study the real-estate business on her own time. In the meantime, Eddie has found another job and has recaptured his self-confidence, but when he tries to make Una quit her job and return to their former way of life, Una rebels and leaves him for good. Free of the worry of her unhappy marriage, Una becomes a successful real-estate promoter on her own. She also becomes interested in hotel-keeping and developes the idea of a chain of family hotels. She brings her idea to the owner of a system of hotels and he hires her for an executive position in his organization. On her new job she

meets her old flame, Walter Babson, and their love bursts forth anew. He proposes, and she accepts, but with the reservation that in the future she will keep both her job and her independence.

It seemed obvious that Una Golden was a sort of female Mr. Wrenn, and that her career was another of Lewis' stories of the spiritual emancipation of a "little" person, with this difference. Where Wrenn gained his freedom through travel, and where Hawk Ericson gained his through escape, Una Golden finds her success and happiness in business, in hard work, and in self-improvement. She developes from an oppressed, plain, insignificant secretary to a chic, confident, aggressive executive and she does it within the structure of the business world. Yet, like all of Lewis' heroes and heroines, Una Golden dares to revolt against the forces of convention and dull security. She first revolts when she refuses to remain in her little home town and wait for someone to marry her, but goes instead to New York to make her own way. She revolts again when she refuses to be dominated by her crude husband, Eddie Schwirtz. She revolts once more when she succeeds in overcoming the prejudices about a woman in business, prejudices which would have kept her a secretary all her life, had she succumbed to them. And she revolts for the last time in accepting a second marriage only on terms of equality with her husband, a situation which defied all social convention. If he can be married and hold a job, why so can she, and have

children too! In her revolt, Una was a typical Lewis heroine. Not only was she reminiscent of Wrenn and Carl Ericson, she was also a prototype of such later Lewis characters as Carol Kennicott, and especially of Ann Vickers.[103]

Lewis had, in his kinship for the submerged little people of great cities like New York, already shown himself to be a humanitarian, but here, in his first full-length creation of a female character, Lewis also showed himself to be an advocate of the cause of feminism. Lewis used Una not only as the mouthpiece for her own cause but also as the spokesman for his comments on life and society. Una's place in this society was explicitly stated:

> She was an Average Young Woman on a Job; she thought in terms of money and offices; yet she was one with all the men and women, young and old, who were creating a new age. She was nothing in herself, yet ... Una Golden humbly belonged to the leaven who, however confusedly, were beginning to demand, "Why, since we have machinery, science, courage, need we go on tolerating war and poverty and caste and uncouthness, and all that sheer clumsiness.[104]

Lewis' interest and identification with the growing forces of social criticism and reform have already been suggested and The Job further indicated this indentification and indicated that Lewis was fully conscious of the growing realism in American literature, for The Job marked both a contribution to that literature and concession by Lewis to it, as compared with his other work of the period 1914-1919.[105]

By this time it must be apparent that Lewis was not only in the intellectual avant-garde of his day but also in advance

of it. Istra Nash of Our Mr. Wrenn was a character who summed up a phase of her time.[106] She could have existed in reality no earlier than she did in Lewis' fiction. Hawk Ericson was a symbol of that pecularliarly modern, developement, aviation, and, similarly, Una Golden represented a type of person who had just recently come into existence, the white-collar girl, a type which had been almost unknown before 1900, and a type which was to change the whole character of the American business and office world after World War I. What, then, could have been more timely than Sinclair Lewis' The Job, published in 1917?[107]

In The Job, Lewis the rebel and romantic idealist was much in evidence, in such passages as this:

> Una Golden was not a philosopher; she was a workaday woman. But into her workaday mind came a low light from the fire which was kindling the world; the dual belief that life is too sacred to be taken in war and filthy industries and dull education; and that most forms and organizations and inherited castes are not sacred at all.
>
> (p.185).

and this:

> She knew that the machines were supposed to save work. But she was aware that the girls worked just as hard and long and hopelessly after their introduction as before; and she suspected that there was something wrong with a social system in which time-saving devices didn't save time for anybody except the owners.....She envisioned a complete change in the fundamental purpose of organized business from the increased production of soap or books or munitions - to the increased production of happiness.
>
> (p.235).

While Lewis the feminist spoke here, in the person of Una Golden:

> "Maybe ... the business woman will bring about a new kind of marriage in which men will have to keep up respect and courtesy ..... I wonder - I wonder how many millions of women in what are supposed to be happy homes are sick over being chambermaids and mistresses till they get dulled and used to it. Nobody will ever know."
>
> (p.270).

Despite Lewis' indictment of modern society, he still had a hopeful vision of the future that revealed the fierce idealism in the very core of his sensibility, an idealism that was the source of a great many of his attacks on society. It was also this same idealism that had been at the root of Lewis' short-lived membership in the Socialist Party. Accordingly, as the above passages indicate, Lewis' vision in The Job was of a Utopian business world, and his optimism was that of the young-liberals of the day who saw change at hand and believed it meant progress. They had been encouraged by Wilson's election and the promise of "New Freedom," and their hopes of social reform were strong.[108] Just how strong Lewis' own hopes were is evident here:

> For "business," that one necessary field of activity to which the egotistic arts and sciences and theologies and military puerilities are but servants, that long-despised and always valiant effort to unify the labor of the world, is at last beginning to be something more than dirty smithing. No longer does the business man thank the better classes for permitting him to make and distribute bread and motor cars and books. No longer does he crawl to the church to buy pardon for usury. Business is being recognized - and is recognizing itself - as ruler of the world.
>
> With this consciousness of power it is reforming its old, petty, half-hearted ways; its idea of manufacturing as a filthy sort of tinkering; of

> distribution as chance peddling and squalid shop-keeping; it is feverishly seeking efficiency..... In its machinery .... But, like all monarchies, it must fail unless it becomes noble of heart. So long as capital and labor are divided, so long as the making of munitions or injurious food is regarded as business, so long as Big Business believes that it exists merely to enrich a few of the lucky or the well born or the nervously active, it will not be efficient, but deficient. But the vision of an efficiency so broad that it can be kindly and sure, is growing - is discernible at once in the scientific business man and the courageous labor-unionist.
>
> (pp. 25-26).

How much Lewis' optimism was to change to bitterness, and his hope to pain at what had become of this world of business he had so fondly idealized, was nowhere more evident than in Babbitt, only five years after The Job. But in those five years not only Lewis but the whole generation of young idealists had changed, for the illusion of 1917 gave way to the disillusion of 1920, and for the next ten years it was the "lost" generation who dominated American letters, while American literature resounded with the noise of the attacks by its expatriate native sons.

The aspect of Lewis that was later to bring him the greatest notoriety, his satire, was fully displayed for the first time in The Job. In Our Mr. Wrenn and Trail of the Hawk Lewis had appeared now and again in satiric guise to comment briefly on various human foibles, and he did the same thing in The Job; for example:

> The effect of grief is commonly reputed to be noble. But mostly it is a sterile nobility. Witness the widows who drape their misty weeds over all the living; witness the mother of a

> son killed in war who urges her son's comrades to bring mourning to the mothers of all the sons on the other side.
>
> (p. 133).

But this was nothing compared to the characterization in The Job of Eddie Schwirtz, Una Golden's salesman-husband. For the first time here Lewis gave his readers one of his later-to-be-famous satiric descriptions of a standard American type. Just as all of Lewis stock characters were to do, so did Eddie Schwirtz damn himself with his own words; words that were apparently the actual speech pattern of the average American, but were in reality a clever parody and exaggeration of this pattern by Lewis into an effective medium of satire. For example, thus spoke Eddie Schwirtz on the matter of intellectuals and literature:

> "All these here critics telling what low-brows us American business men are! Just between you and I, I bet I knock down more good, big, round, iron men every week than nine-tenths of these high-brow fiddlers - yes, and college professors and authors, too."
>
> "Understan' me; I'm a high-brow myself some ways. I never could stand these cheap magazines ..... I read Reverend Henry Van Dyke ..... and Billy Sunday, and all these brainy, inspirational fellows, and let me tell you I get a lot of talking-points for selling my trade out of their spiels, too."
>
> (pp. 197-8).

For the first time Lewis had found someone to hate in Eddie Schwirtz, and he did not hesitate to take advantage of the situation. His success as a satirist stemmed from this moment, when Lewis first attacked the American social order through one of its most typical members, the traveling salesman.[109]

The Lewis satiric method was here in its essential form. That is, the character to be satirized reveals his sensibility (or rather his lack of it) through his own words, and in Eddie Schwirtz's case, he shows himself to be truly one of the herd, a man not only vulgar and vain, but also utterly without the power of independent thought. His idea of "inspirational" reading gave evidence of this and his opinions on socialism, opinions formed from a combination of stupid commonplaces and cliches, just about conclude the matter:

> "But most of these socialists are just a lazy bunch of bums that try and see how much trouble they can stir up. They think that just because they're too lazy to find an opening that they got the right to take the money away from the fellas that hustle around and make good. Trouble with all these socialist guys is that they don't stop to realize that you can't change human nature."
>
> (p. 208).

The reader's unfavorable opinion of Eddie is justified even further as the story progresses, for he turns out to be a worthless dissipated drunkard who almost manages to ruin Una's life. A contemporary reviewer neatly summed up the character of Eddie Schwirtz:

> Mr. Lewis has put all the banality of all the American drummers into this one genial swine ... . He is the composite of all the complacent American barbarians who ever guzzled prosperity and bragged generosity and whined affliction at the first flick of nature's whip.[110]

Whatever else Eddie Schwirtz may have been, he was also the first in a long line of Lewis' portrayals of the "genial swine" of America. There was more than a little of George F. Babbitt

already noted down in this early prototype, but Babbitt had what Schwirtz lacked, a strong, although repressed, longing for beauty and freedom, while Schwirtz rejoiced in his swinishness.

Even in the books which contained Lewis' long indictment of America, beginning with Main Street, Lewis was still basically an optimist, although his optimism was often so deeply buried beneath his satire that the reader lost sight of it. But in The Job this optimism was clear and all-conquering. Despite his realization of the drabness of the world of factory and office, despite his realization that business had already dominated America and that America's new president was Henry Ford, not the man in the White House, The Job proved that Lewis could still look upon this disturbing state of affairs with a hopeful eye and a confidence that the fundamental purpose of organized business would change "from the increased production of soap or books or munitions - to the increased production of happiness." It was a hope and confidence felt not only by Lewis but also by his own generation, and it was a hope and confidence that Lewis never completely abandoned, however much he might despair of it.

To conclude, The Job was still not a "problem" novel, although it was by far the most heavily weighted with social issues of Lewis' early books. These social issues were feminism, the place in business and in the home of the new working woman, and the role of business in America. As regards

plot, the novel was similar both to Lewis' early books and also to a later one, Ann Vickers. Stylistically, it was more satirical than any of Lewis' previous work, and it was especially notable in this respect for the way it characterized a new Lewis prototype, a prototype - ancestor of Babbitt and of all Lewis' other average American business men. The heroine, Una Golden, was Lewis' first full-scale female character, and she received realistic and sympathetic treatment. She shared the lot of other Lewis heroes and heroines in suffering loneliness and travail but she too at last finds happiness in revolting against the conventional modes of conduct so that she can gain freedom.

Of all Lewis' writing before 1920, The Job is the most likely to achieve permanence, while Lewis' next book, The Innocents was easily the weakest of his first five novels, doomed to obscurity by the sentimentality and nonsense that fills its pages. The discussion to follow will prove that this harsh judgement is a just one.

The Innocents: 1917. Just as The Job was the most earnest of Lewis' early novels, so was The Innocents, published in the same year, 1917, the most romantic, optimistic, and sentimental. It had a few serious themes, but these were implicit, not explicit as in The Job, and a couple of significant character types; but by and large The Innocents was a perfect example of Lewis the story-teller and romancer, and showed the influence of the popular fiction that Lewis was writing for the Saturday Evening Post at this time.

The most astute critical comment ever made about The Innocents was that by Lewis himself, and it took the form of the "Dedicatory Introduction" to the book. It reads as follows:

> If this were a ponderous work of realism, such as the author has attempted to write, and will doubtless essay again, it would be perilous to dedicate it to the splendid assembly of young British writers, lest the critics search for Influences and Imitations. But since this is a flagrant excursion, a tale for people who still read Dickens and clip out spring poetry and love old people and children, it may safely confess the writer's strident admiration for Compton Mackenzie, J.D. Beresford, Gilbert Cannan, Patrick MacGill, and their peers, whose novels are the histories of our Contemporaneous Golden Age. Nor may these be mentioned without a yet more enthusiastic tribute to their master and teacher (he probably abominates being called either a master or a teacher), H.G. Wells.[111]

The plot of the novel is a simple and fantastic one. It concerns Mr. and Mrs. Appleby, "The Innocents," two old people who live a quiet life in New York City until they are inspired to invest their life savings in a tea room on Cape Cod. Their venture prospers for a while, but they are soon forced out of business by a rival establishment which features an "arty" atmosphere. After this failure, the Applesbys, penniless, are

compelled to live with their daughter and son-in-law, a Babbit-like couple, where they are treated so badly that they again return to New York. At first, with both of them working, they manage to get along, but eventually things get so bad that they even attempt suicide. At the last moment, Mr. Appleby relents and saves them both. This marks the lowest point in the tone of the story.

The suicide episode gives the old people new courage, so, with blithe hearts, they start on a walking trip West, for no place in particular. On the way they find that many people are willing to help them and they also find that they are becoming a legend. They encounter a band of hoboes, move in with them, and soon take over the leadership of the whole hobo camp. One of the leading hoboes teaches the old man the art of practical psychology and the value of self-confidence. Thus, when the hobo camp breaks up, the two travelers go on their way wiser than before. Soon, they find that their legend has preceded them wherever they go and has assumed great proportions, replete with newspaper publicity, etc., all of which results in their being treated like visiting royalty everywhere. They finally arrive in Lippittsville, Indiana, where "Dad" Appleby is offered, and accepts, a partnership in a shoe store. They settle down in Lippittsville and become leading citizens almost overnight, even buying a home of their own. The final triumph of "the Innocents" comes when they are visited by their Babbitt-like son-in-law, who has come out to

rescue them, but who is instead thoroughly humbled and impressed by their reputation in the town. As the book ends, the Innocents are able to look forward to peace, prosperity, and happiness for the rest of their lives.

As the plot resume indicates, the story had many themes already familiar in Lewis' early work. The Innocents were exactly the kind of obscure little people that Lewis loved and pitied, living their life in New York City as if it were a desert island, largely unmoved by the masses of people and the tumult of life around them. In this, they were like Mr. Wrenn, Hawk Ericson, and Una Golden, and it was quite obvious that Lewis had, or pretended to have, at least as much affection for the Innocents as for his other characters. Also, like these other fictional folk, the Innocents find happiness by daring to break away from "sensible" behavior and, of all things, attempting the rather incredible stunt of walking out West. The moral of the story was once again quite clear: Happiness awaits those who defy convention and look for it, wherever the search might lead.

The mood was, of course, romantic and optimistic. It was another example of that phase of Lewis' romanticism which Professor T.K. Whipple called the "Arnold Bennett" type, or, "the romance of the commonplace," that romance which finds strangeness and beauty in common life.[112] This aspect of Lewis has already been glimpsed in the discussion of his three previous books, especially <u>Our Mr. Wrenn</u>. However, as regards the pro-

tagonists of The Innocents, Mr. and Mrs. Appleby, they were fundamentally unreal, incredible characters, while Mr. Wrenn was basically a real and credible person.

Despite the prevailing mood of fantasy, there were occasional flashes of Lewisian satire on several of his favorite themes and character-types. The first of these was the familiar Lewis peeve, the "Hobohemians," and their traditional environment of pseudo-intellectuality. The specific targets for Lewis' lash in The Innocents were Miss Mitchen's Tea Room and the artistic types who frequented it. These twin targets were the occasion for Lewis' longest sustained satiric outburst, one of the few such in the book:

> When Miss Mitchen resolved to come to Grimsby Center her group of writers, who had protected themselves against the rude, crude world of business men and lawyers by living together in Chelsea Village, were left defenseless. They were in danger of becoming human. So they all followed Miss Mitchen to Grimsby and contentedly went on writing about one another.
> There are many such groups, with the same summer watering places and the same winter beering-places. Some of them drink hard liquor and play cards. But Miss Mitchen's group were very mild in manner, though desperately violent in theory. The young women wore platter-size tortoise-shell spectacles and smocks that were home-dyed to a pleasing shrimp pink. The young men also wore tortoise-shell spectacles, but not smocks - not usually at least ... .
> All of the yearners read their poetry aloud, very superior, and rising in the inflection. It is probable that they made a living by taking in one another's literary washing. But they were ever so brave about their financial misfortunes, and they could talk about the ballet Russe and also charlotte russes in quite the nicest way.
> (pp.52-3).

It was Miss Mitchen and her colony of Hobohemians who competed with the plain but honest tea-room of the Applebys, and event-

ually drove them out of business, thus deserving the hate and scorn of every good citizen. This feeling of Lewis for Miss Mitchen and her kind was one of his most rankling resentments, one that often caused him to lose his perspective to the extent that he entered the opposite camp, the camp of philistinism. Yet, it was philistinism that Lewis really hated and fought all his life. However, this dichotomy was most evident in Lewis' work before 1920, rather than his later writing.[113]

Lewis' antipathy for the philistines did find expression in The Innocents, for the characters of Lulu and Harris Hartwig, the daughter and son-in-law of the Applebys, represented the essence of philistinism. They were definite fictional ancestors of Mr. and Mrs. George F. Babbitt, and their life was just as sterile. Lewis' brief satiric description of the Hartwig home in The Innocents was both a prophecy of things to come and a sample of the kind of thing that was to bring fame:

> The Hartwigs' modest residence was the last word in cement and small useless side-tables and all modern inconveniences. The furnace heat made you sneeze, and the chairs, which were large and tufted, creaked. In the dining-room was an electrolier made of seven kinds of inimical colored glass, and a plate-rack from which were hung department-store steins. On the parlor table was a kodak album with views of Harry in every stage of absurdity. There was a small car which Mr. Hartwig drove himself. And there was a bright, easy, incredibly dull social life; neighbors who went out to the country club to watch the tennis in summer, and played "five hundred" every Saturday evening in the winter.
>
> (p. 94).

Thus far Lewis the romancer and Lewis the social-satirist had been evident in The Innocents, but the last and most surprising aspect of Lewis that here revealed itself was Lewis the defender of the small town and small town life, a hitherto unsuspected side of the writer. Lewis' description of small towns had been, until this, uniformly unfavorable. Thus, The Innocents was unique in Lewis' early work and almost entirely unique in the whole body of his serious work before 1930 in picturing the small town as a happy and good place to live.[114] True, there was no full-length description in the book of an Auburn, happiest village of the plain, but the implication in this novel was very clear, for Lippittsville, Indiana, was the place where the Applebys find their home and their happiness. The only explicit comment Lewis had to make in The Innocents about the small town was that here a man could retain his individuality and dignity, regardless of his profession, while in a city like New York, a man was only one of an anonymous multitude: "In a village, every clerk, every tradesman, has something of the same distinctive importance as the doctors, the lawyers, the ministers." (p. 193). Finally, Lewis clearly indicated the contrast between the Applebys' sordid life in the callous and cruel city of New York, and the happy fulfillment of their prosperous life in the neighborly and pleasant village of Lippittsville, Indiana.

This sentimental view of village life was the key to the essential romanticism of The Innocents and also possibly to its

weakness as a novel, as two scholars have contended.[115] It was unquestionably the poorest of Lewis' early books and probably of all his work. The flashes of satiric observation in it were not nearly enough to lift it even into the realm of mediocrity, and it will continue to be of interest only to students and researchers of Lewis. But Lewis' next book, Free Air, while it shared some of the weaknesses of The Innocents, also illustrated some of the most important aspects of the early Lewis and is definitely worthy of detailed consideration.

Free Air: 1919. Free Air was a Lewis romance, pure and simple. It was the tale of the cross-country courtship by automobile of Milt Daggett, a garage mechanic from Minnesota, and Claire Boltwood, a rich girl from Brooklyn; and the route they took, from Minnesota to Seattle, exactly paralleled a motor trip that Lewis made with his wife in 1918.[116] Lewis reported this trip in a series of articles written for the Saturday Evening Post, and these articles were as filled with the joys of motoring and the thrill of discovering the vastnesses and beauties of the American hinterland as Free Air. However, just as in the novel, the articles struck an occasional serious note in their reporting of some of the rudenesses of folk met on the way (especially garage mechanics) and in their strong general condemnation of the poor condition of hotels and restaurants in the West. Many of the incidents that appeared in Free Air as the fictional adventures of Milt and Claire were, in reality,

descriptions of Lewis' own actual experiences on his cross country trip.[117]

The story of Free Air was this: Milt Daggett, a young garage owner in the hamlet of Shoenstrom, Minnesota, falls in love at first sight with Claire Boltwood, a rich and sophisticated Eastern girl, when she has to stop at his garage for repairs to her car. She and her father are making a motor trip from Brooklyn to Seattle. As soon as Claire leaves, Milt immediately packs his bag and takes off in his auto in hot pursuit of the Boltwoods. He follows Claire across the country, acting as her protector and knight-in-armor in saving her from such assorted perils and mishaps as road hazards, evil hitch-hikers, unscrupulous hotel proprietors, bears, and mountains. During all this, Milt falls more and more deeply in love with Claire, while she too begins to feel considerable affection for Milt, both as a guardian angel and as an attractive young man.

The situation is complicated, however, by the sudden arrival of Jeff Saxton, Claire's smooth, wealthy suitor from the East, who appears on the last part of the trip to squire Claire to her final destination, Seattle. Jeff's appearance serves to make Milt even more self-conscious of his own lack of caste and culture, factors which he had realized from the beginning would be obstacles to his courtship of Claire. The climax of the story comes after they have all arrived in Seattle, where Claire stays with her snobbish cousins, the Gilsons, and

where Milt begins to attend classes at the University, at the same time acquiring a little badly needed social polish. In a swift succession of scenes, the reader is given a contrast between Milt's rough but vital pioneer background and the Gilson's glittering but rather empty social set. Milt comes off rather well in these encounters and finally wins Claire, who realizes at last that manners can be learned but that basic qualities of character cannot. So, as the book ends, Claire, won by those sturdy virtues that first attracted her to Milt, drives off gaily with him in his new "tin lizzy" on the road to other adventures, and, of course, happiness.

As this plot-digest indicates, this story was romance and adventure in the best tradition of the early Lewis and of the Saturday Evening Post, in which Free Air appeared as a serial before it was published in book form. Here again was the typical early Lewis zest for romance, travel, love, adventure. Here again were the roads to happiness clearly marked by the signposts of non-conventional behavior, for Milt defied all common sense and convention in pursuing a girl he sees for only a moment and Claire defies all conventional social codes in marrying a man who is far below her in class, wealth, and background. In their defiance of convention Milt and Claire were similar to the heroes and heroines of Lewis' other early novels, especially Carl and Ruth in Trail of the Hawk.

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In accord with the prevailing atmosphere of adventure and young love in Free Air was the exultation shared by Milt and Claire (and Sinclair Lewis) in their discovery of the wonders of the vast American hinterland. The exultation that Lewis himself felt represented, in the opinion of one eminent scholar, a vision of an American Utopia that persisted all through Lewis' career.[118] This was an extension of the "happy village" concept already suggested in The Innocents, while in Free Air this concept had its main expression in Claire Boltwood's discovery that what she had at first taken for the rudeness and offensive curiosity of the people she meets in the western small towns enroute, the hotel clerks, waitresses, and traveling salesmen, was really friendliness and a practical display of American equalitarian democracy:

> "Why!" Claire gasped, "why they aren't rude. They care - about people they never saw before. That's why they ask questions... . There's people in the world who want to know us without having looked us up in the Social Register!"[119]

Claire also learns that if she wants friendliness, she in return must meet these people as equals, not inferiors:

> She had learned that what had seemed rudeness in garage men and hotel clerks was often a resentful reflection of her own Eastern attitude that she was necessarily superior to a race she had been trained to call "common people." If she spoke up frankly, they made her one of their own and gave her companiable aid.
>
> (p. 66).

Finally, Claire learns to respect the Western farmer, his courage, his cleanliness, and his surprising enlightenment about the essential matters of life: "In fact, Claire

learned that there may be an almost tolerable state of existence without gardenias or the news about the latest Parisian imagists."[120] By the time Claire arrives in Seattle, she has become so steeped in frontier democracy that she is annoyed at the social pretensions of certain groups in that newly-arisen city and is able to see a certain basic American incongruity:

> "I like your Seattle. It's a glorious city. And I love so many of the fine, simple, real people I've met here. I admire your progress. I do know how miraculously you've changed it from a mining camp. But for heaven's sake don't forget the good common hardiness of the miners. Somehow, London social distinctions seem ludicrous in American cities that twenty years ago didn't have much but board sidewalks and saloons."
>
> (p. 286).

Here Lewis, in the person of Claire, spoke partly in the role of the philistine and partly as something more, the hater of pretense and hypocrisy, qualities which were among the most basic Lewis hatreds. How he expressed his feelings about them will receive full investigation in the chapter to follow.

But Lewis' attack on the social pretension of the West was only a portion of a larger theme, a classic theme in the early work of Sinclair Lewis, a theme that offered the single serious aspect of Free Air: the conflict of East and West. The plot that Lewis used in Free Air, in which the Westerner wins the Eastern girl away from her social-register suitor, was a familiar one in American fiction, even in 1919. However, Lewis gave it an original twist in making his hero a

garage mechanic who, significantly, comes from a small Minnesota town, and whose father was a pioneer doctor, like Lewis' own.[121]

It has already been noted that Claire found the West friendly, courageous, and admirable in its pioneer virtues. These were the qualities that Lewis also admired in the West and never stopped admiring, even in Main Street. But, in addition, Claire found the West primitive in its mode of life, especially as represented in its towns, hotels, and restaurants. Claire, looking through Lewis' eyes, found Western towns drab and depressing, typified by the appearance of the town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota: "peaked wooden buildings and squatty brick stores with faded awnings; ... a red grain elevator and a crouching station and a lumberyard."[122] And many of the inhabitants of the towns were as crude as the towns themselves, as for example, in Milt Daggett's town of Shoenstrom, Minnesota:

> There were two factions in Shoenstrom: the retired German farmers who said that German was a good enough language for anybody, and that taxes for schools and sidewalks were yes something crazy, and the group who stated that a pig-pen is a fine place, but only for pigs.
>
> (p. 50).

Milt Daggett was, of course, the leader of the second group, but he was even more than that.

Milt Daggett was the symbol here of the entire West, both in its virtues of pioneering strength, courage, ingenuity, and democracy, and in its faults of crudeness, vulgarity, and

philistinism - but especially in its virtues. To Lewis, he was a hopeful symbol of the new West, for he combined the virtues of the covered-wagon pioneers with the modern desire for self-improvement, and his vehicle was not a Conestoga wagon but an automobile. To sum up, Milt was the "Western democratic hero" and Claire was the "aristocratic Eastern heroine,"[123] and the social distance between Milt and Claire was that same distance which Lewis himself found to stretch between Sauk Center and New Haven and New York.[124]

The contrast between East and West was most clearly evident in Free Air in the characters of Milt Daggett, Jeff Saxton, and the Gilsons. Jeff and the Gilsons represented the social polish and caste-system of the East, but they also stood for effeteness and pretension. Milt proves he can learn to be a gentleman by donning a dress suit and comporting himself correctly at the opera, while Jeff and the Gilsons show that they could never attain the qualities that Milt symbolizes: equalitarianism, democracy. They cannot help themselves; their wealth and sense of caste make it impossible for them not to think of themselves as superior beings, as aristocrats. Of all the things that were anathema to Lewis, this class-consciousness was one of the foremost. As far as Lewis was concerned, there was only one valid aristocracy, that which Jefferson called "natural aristocracy," or the aristocracy of talent and ability. Lewis' dislike for Jeff Saxton and what he represented was apparent in the following passage in Free

Air (one of the few satiric passages in the book), in which Lewis characterized Jeff sharply and unattractively:

> Jeff Saxton ... was clean and busy; he had no signs of vice or humor. Especially for Jeff must have been invented the symbolic morning coat, the unwrinkable gray trousers, and the moral rimless spectacles ... . When he was asked questions by people who were impertinent, clever, or poor, Jeff looked them over coldly before he answered, and often they felt so uncomfortable that he didn't have to answer.
> (p. 10).

In contrast to Jeff's supercilious coldness was Milt's frank geniality. However, Milt, unfortunately, did lack Jeff's sophisticated smoothness and ease of bearing, and when in the course of the story Milt enters a state university to seek social skill, along with academic learning, he finds that the influence of Jeff Saxton's world has followed him even there:

> The American state universities admit, in a pleased way, that though Yale and Harvard and Princeton may be snobbish, the state universities are the refuge of a myth called "college democracy." But there is no university near a considerable city into which the inheritors of the wealth of that city do not carry all the local social distinctions. Their family rank, their place in the unwritten peerage determines to which fraternity they will be elected, and the fraternity determines with whom - men and girls - they shall be intimate.
> (P. 272).

But even with this barrier Milt does manage to gain enough social confidence to finally convince Claire that their love is strong enough to surmount all complications of society, and that if lovers stick together they are society. So, with the realization that "neither Shoenstrom nor Brooklyn Heights

is quite all of life," Milt and Claire drive off into the sunset, concluding Free Air and the last of Lewis' novels of apprenticeship.[125]

From all the discussion above about the conflict of East and West, the attack on social pretension, etc., it would seem that Free Air was a "problem" novel rather than a story of romance and adventure. Not so, for the courtship of Milt and Claire, the sights, events, and description of their trip across country form the bulk of the book and the prevailing mood was one of light-hearted qaiety and romance, as typical of Saturday Evening Post writing of 1919 as of 1953. The whole East-West matter was incidental and was given the same mock-importance as any of the stock, expected plot complications that exist in all popular-fiction romances, including those that Lewis was writing all through the years 1914-1919.[126] It is only the serious student of Lewis who must seek a deeper significance in all this as it relates to the whole corpus of Lewis' life and work.

The following summary will review and synthesize some of the more important factors in Lewis' career before 1920, and will also attempt to suggest some basic conclusions, conclusions which will take on added importance in the light of the discussion of Lewis' more famous books, beginning with Main Street.

5. Summary and Conclusions: 1885-1919

The disapproval of his own family and of the residents of the drab town of Sauk Center, Minnesota, where Sinclair Lewis grew up, were not enough to keep him from wanting to become a writer. Inflamed by the romantic reading of his boyhood, he set out for Yale, a shy and idealistic youth with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and an infinite curiosity about life, only to again find himself, after his arrival in New Haven, in a new unsympathetic social situation. Yet despite the rebuffs he suffered at Yale, Lewis found a measure of fulfillment in writing for the college periodicals, reading, and in a very few deep friendships, especially with his English professors. His early writing at college showed the continuing influence of his childhood reading and the romantic bent of his nature, for it was largely in terms of lyric poetry on courtly themes that Lewis first expressed himself. But soon his college writing became increasingly serious, including short stories and essays on such matters as intellectual pretension, the underdog, new forces in literature, the city of New Haven, and restricting social conventions.

Just as important to Lewis as his college life were his experiences during school vacations as a hand on cattle-boats going to England, as a member of Upton Sinclair's experimental settlement in New Jersey, as a struggling free-lance writer

living in New York's Gas House district, and as a steerage-passenger to Panama, seeking employment in the building of the Panama Canal. All the while Lewis was tasting deeply of life's adventure and of its bitterness.

After a year away from school, devoted to the adventures listed above, Lewis returned to Yale to graduate, only to resume his wandering immediately after graduation. He worked for a newspaper in Iowa and for a charity organization in New York. He went across the country to live for a while in a writer's colony at Carmel, California. He settled down for a time to work at various newspaper jobs in San Francisco, but of all this activity only a few editorials written for the Iowa paper remain to indicate that Lewis was as deeply aware as ever of the seriousness of life and that he was familiar with the social forces of the day. Then, as later, his writings showed him to be a mild, disorganized, radical.

In 1910 Sinclair Lewis came back to New York to work at various jobs in the publishing field, writing in his spare time. His first book, Hike and the Aeroplane(1912), an adventure story for boys, was written expressly for the purpose of getting enough time off from his job to start his first serious novel, Our Mr. Wrenn. When the book did appear in 1914 it revealed the basic qualities that were to distinguish all of Lewis' early work and much of his later writing. These qualities included a deep sympathy for the "little" people who form the anonymous masses of America's great cities

and a conviction that even the most commonplace of these people had the chance for love, romance and adventure in their lives. But the little person was doomed unless he transmitted his dreams into action, Lewis wrote, and the way to do this was to break through the entangling net of job, convention, habit. Lewis' first hero, Mr. Wrenn, did just that and found happiness.

Carl Ericson, the protagonist of Lewis' second novel Trail of the Hawk (1915), continued the emphasis on the pioneer virtues of daring and exploration of the unknown, for he was of that new breed of pioneers, the aviator. Carl defied the forces of convention in college, in the choice of a career, in business, and in marriage in order to find his particular road to happiness. As in Our Mr. Wrenn, the prevalent themes of this novel were adventure, travel, and romance, but there also appeared an important new character type, the village radical, and an important new theme, the revolt against the village mind.

Lewis' third novel The Job (1917), was remarkable in his early work in that its main character was a girl, Una Golden. She was the female counterpart of Mr. Wrenn, for she too begins as an insignificant wage slave in New York. However, where Mr. Wrenn and Carl Ericson found success in escaping from the business world, Una Golden succeeds by staying in it and fighting her way up, after first freeing herself from an unhappy marriage. In his first two novels Lewis had not depicted bussiness as an especially sinister thing but as a kind of imper-

sonal trap which could be opened only by determined struggle. But in The Job Lewis for the first time (and also for the last time for many years) portrayed business as a young giant with a great destiny, although a giant in need of control lest it turn into an evil, destructive, monster. Yet, Lewis was optimistic enough about it to predict a happy future, despite its evil potentialities. Finally, The Job contained Lewis' first villain, one Eddie Schwirtz, a prototype of Babbitt and one of those highly representative members of that Utopian business world that Lewis described so prematurely, a salesman.

The Job was Lewis' most important and serious book before 1920, but the novel which appeared in the same year, The Innocents, was the most romantic and inconsequential of his early work. It concerned the incredible adventures of a dear old man and his sweet old wife, two members of the underdog masses that Lewis lauded so sentimentally, and its saccharine-flavored nostalgia and Saturday Evening Post technique make it now very nearly unreadable. It is notable only for Lewis' surprisingly warm account of village life (in keeping with the general tone of the book), a brief portrait of a Babbitt-like couple, and a cursory attack on one of Lewis' favorite early themes, "Hobohemia." Like all of Lewis' previous heroes and heroines the "Innocents" also escape a grim life in the big city by doing the unconventional, in their case, a fantastic walking trip west.

The Innocents and Lewis' last book of this early period, Free Air (1919), both showed the effects of the popular-fiction short story writing that Lewis had been doing in quantity all during these years, for Lewis had supported himself after 1915 mainly through the manufacture of stories for the Saturday Evening Post and similar magazines. These stories themselves have deservedly been forgotten, with one or two exceptions, because despite their facility of plot and technique they revealed nothing worth consideration that did not appear in better or fuller form in the novels.

Free Air was a blend of just those familiar ingredients of love, romance, and adventure that Lewis marketed for popular consumption in his short shories, but the book was lifted above the level of pleasant trash by the same dashes of shrewd commentary and theme that had saved the other novels from sharing the same grave as the short stories. The serious theme in this case was one that Lewis had already introduced in Trail of the Hawk, the conflict of East and West, symbolized in Free Air by the romance of the Western hero, Milt Daggett, and the Eastern heroine, Claire Boltwood. Each character revealed Lewis' ambiguous feelings - his love of the West's pioneering qualities and his hatred of its drabness and crudeness - his admiration of the East's sophistication and his antipathy towards its cold, effete, rigid social structure. As in the other books, Milt and Claire find salvation by overcoming the things in their backgrounds that would keep them from attaining happiness.

If most of Lewis' early work was, admittedly, dominated by optimism, love, romanticism, sentiment, the question arises as to how it could have any significance to Lewis as a social critic - for it was Lewis the social critic and satirist, not the romantic story teller, who won the Nobel Prize and millions of readers all over the world. The answer to this question is as follows: Lewis' romantic story-telling stemmed from his desire to attain popular success in writing the kind of thing he thought the reading public wanted. Every young writer falls under the same spell at least temporarily and Lewis was no exception. But in a deeper sense Lewis' romanticism was rooted in his optimism, and that optimism was sincere and was shared by the entire generation of young American intellectuals. With the exception of a few writers, such as Dreiser and Herrick, American literature and thought in the 1890's and early 1900's were optimistic and confident. True, Steffens, Sinclair, Norris, and others had exposed certain serious flaws in the American Utopia. True, Howells, in The Rise of Silas Lapham and A Hazard of New Fortunes had chronicled the new social classes and the new pressures that had arisen from a free-wheeling system of capitalistic enterprise. Still, on the whole, the years from 1885 to 1915 were "The Confident Years," as Van Wyck Brooks recently called them, and Lewis, already displaying the seismographic sensitivity to the climate of opinion which was to be one of his most outstanding qualities, shared the confidence and optimism of his generation.

This is not to say that Lewis' confidence was thoughtless or his optimism blind. As early as his junior year at Yale Lewis had shown himself to be fully cognizant of the new and radical forces that were emerging in literature and social thought, forces strong enough to win Lewis to their side but never strong enough to weaken his faith in America's potentialities for self-improvement. As late as 1917 Lewis could, in The Job, critically examine American business and conclude that it was pointed toward good, not evil. And his optimism about business was only part of that he felt about people, for all of his early heroes and heroines were able to escape from their social chains while most of his later protagonists were not, or at best could make only a partial escape. Finally, Lewis' faith in the leveling power of American equalitarian democracy enabled him to write stories in which Western heroes penetrated the barriers of class, caste, and wealth to win their Eastern sweethearts. Lewis never denied anywhere in his early work that there were no such social barriers, nor did he deny that the business world had its snares and pitfalls, and he certainly did not approve of them. But he did believe, and the corpus of his work before 1920 stands as evidence, that the barriers could be surmounted and the traps could be avoided.

After 1920, the critics wrote about Sinclair Lewis as a man who hated America and about his books as the documents of that hate. Nothing could have been further from the truth,

as a few modern scholars are just beginning to realize, for Lewis, even at his most savagely satiric, was a man who wrote from a deep-seated idealism. Thus, his indictments of America, beginning with Main Street, were those of an idealist who had seen many of his ideals violated and much of his optimism betrayed, but in only one book, Elmer Gantry, did Lewis ever completely lose hope or fail to give the reader a promise and a prophecy of better things to come. As will be evident in the discussion in the following chapter of Lewis' writing in the decade 1920-1930, Sinclair Lewis was something of a disappointed optimist and a disillusioned idealist, but he was also a patriot who never completely lost his faith in America.

Footnotes to Chapter I

1. Benjamin Stolberg, "Sinclair Lewis," American Mercury, LIII (Oct., 1941), 453.

2. Merton Murdock Jeffers, The Significance of the Pioneer in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis, unpublished Brown University M.A. thesis (Providence, R.I., 1951) pp.4-5.

3. For a remarkable example of Lewis' insight and interest in the socio-economic situation in his native state, see his shrewdly analytical article "Minnesota, the Norse State," Nation, CXVI (May 30, 1923), 624-7.

4. Bennett Cerf, "Trade Winds," SRL, XXVIII (Nov. 3, 1945), 20.

5. Quoted in Charles C. Baldwin, The Men Who Make Our Novels (N.Y., 1919), p.225.

6. Lewis related several amusing anecdotes of his boyhood, including incidents of this kind, in his article "Breaking Into Print," Colophon, XI (Winter, 1937), 217-8.

7. David Dempsey, "In and Out of Books," New York Times Book Review, CI (Feb. 10, 1952), 8.

8. Christian Gauss, "Sinclair Lewis vs. His Education," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV (Dec. 26, 1931), 21.

9. Lewis, "Breaking Into Print," p.218.

10. Ibid., p.218.

11. Ibid., p.217.

12. Ibid., p.218.

13. Sinclair Lewis, "I'm An Old Newspaperman Myself," Cosmopolitan (April, 1947), part I, 153.

14. Sinclair Lewis, "Self-Portrait," in Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane, The Man From Main Street (N.Y., 1953), p.49.

15. Clifton Fadiman, "Party of One," Holiday, XIII (March, 1953), 6.

16. Maule and Cane, p.169.

17. This occurred in Lewis' Nobel Prize address. For the exact reference see the complete text of this address in the New York Times, LXXX (Dec. 13, 1930), 12.

18. Fadiman, p.6.

19. Hazel Palmer Lynam, "The Earliest Lewis," SRL, X (April 14, 1934), 628.

20. In 1947 Lewis wrote, "For sixty years I have tried to impress my brother Claude. It has been my chief object and my chief failure." "I'm An Old Newspaperman Myself," p.27.

21. In the light of testimony from such reputable scholars as Perry Miller and Ramon Guthrie, both of whom also knew Lewis personally, this conclusion must be given some serious consideration. Later, Lewis' feeling of not being appreciated as a writer was to extend to include all of America. It was one of his most important and recurrent themes. See Perry Miller, "The Incorruptable Sinclair Lewis," Atlantic, CLXXXVII (April, 1951), 34; and Ramon Guthrie, "The Labor Novel Sinclair Lewis Never Wrote," N.Y. Herald Tribune Book Review, XXVIII (Feb. 10, 1952), 1.

22. David Karsner, Sixteen Authors to One (N.Y., 1928), p.69.

23. Ibid., p.68.

24. Ibid., p.68.

25. W. E. Woodward, "The World and Sauk Center," New Yorker, IX (Jan. 27, 1934), 25.

26. Quoted in Gauss, "Sinclair Lewis vs. His Education," p.54.

27. Karsner, p.70.

28. Gauss, p.54.

29. Sinclair Lewis, "That Was New York: And That Was Me," New Yorker, XII (Jan. 2, 1937), 20-21.

30. John Koch, "Sinclair Lewis ... Campus Nonentity," Yale Daily News (March 22, 1951), 5.

31. William Lyon Phelps, "Men Now Famous," Delineator, CCXVII (Sept., 1930), 17.

32. Ibid., p.5.

33. Chauncy Brewster Tinker, "Sinclair Lewis, A Few Reminiscences," Yale Alumni Magazine (June, 1952), 10. Professor Tinker and Professor Phelps were two of the few men at Yale who recognized Lewis' genuis and encouraged it. On Dec. 6, 1920, Sinclair Lewis wrote a letter to Tinker (this letter

33. Continued
is now in the Yale Collection of Lewis material, items #209-214) which read, in part: "There is more than a flicker of you in Main Street; there is (whether you like it or not) a strong and abiding influence from you in everything I write which shows sense or sensibility." Also, see Lewis' tribute to Phelps, "William Lyon Phelps," SRL, XIX (April 1, 1939), 3-4.

34. Gauss, p.55.

35. Lewis, "Breaking Into Print," p.218.

36. William Rose Benét, "The Earlier Lewis," SRL, X (Jan. 20, 1934), 421.

37. Lewis, "I'm An Old Newspaperman Myself," p.153.

38. Lewis, "Breaking Into Print," p.218.

39. Sinclair Lewis, "Did Mrs. Thurston Get the Idea of The Masquerader from Mr. Zangwill?" The Critic, XLVI (June, 1905), 551-4.

40. Sinclair Lewis, "The Yellow Streak," Yale Literary Magazine, LXX (April, 1905), 271-3. Lewis first used the term "Hobohemia" to describe pretensious intellectuals, phony artists, and their admiring hangers-on as the title of his first short story published by the Saturday Evening Post for April 7, 1914. He later also wrote a play with the same title based on this story. The play was produced in Greenwhich Village, the very scene it mocked, on Feb. 8, 1919. The Yale Collection has what is possibly the only extant copy of this play.

41. Ibid., p.272.

42. Ibid., p.273.

43. Sinclair Lewis, "The Loneliness of Theodore," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (Nov., 1905), 44-52.

44. Sinclair Lewis, "The Heart of Pope Innocent," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (Jan., 1906), 154-5.

45. Sinclair Lewis, " A Theory of Values," Yale Monthly Magazine, I (April, 1906), 220-8.

46. Sinclair Lewis, " Editor's Table," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (May, 1906), 333.

47. Sinclair Lewis, "Editor's Table," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXII (Feb., 1907), 212.

48. Sinclair Lewis, "Editor's Table," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (June, 1906), 374.

49. Sinclair Lewis, "Editor's Table," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXII (Jan., 1907), 166.

50. Sinclair Lewis, "Editor's Table," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (April, 1906), 287.

51. Sinclair Lewis, "Unknown Undergraduates," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXI (June, 1906), 335-8.

52. Carl Van Doren, Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch (N.Y., 1933), p.35; also, Leonard Bacon, "Yale, '09," SRL, XIX (Feb. 4, 1939), 13-14.

53. Wayne M. Womer, "Sinclair Lewis Was My Sailor," unpublished article in the Yale Collection (#304). Lewis used his cattle-boat experiences as the basis for part of his first novel, Our Mr. Wrenn.

54. For an amusing account of Lewis' experiences at Helicon Hall, one that entirely omitted any idealistic or inspirational theme, see Sinclair Lewis and Allan Updegraff, "Two Yale Men in Utopia," New York Sun (Dec. 16, 1906); also in the Yale Collection of Lewis' own clippings.

55. op. Karsner, p.73.

56. Van Doren, op. cit., p.72.

57. Sinclair Lewis, fifteen short essays written for Professor Phelps' undergraduate course in Seventeenth Century English Literature, Jan.-May, 1908 (in Yale Collection).

58. Van Doren, p.72, noted that in the summer of 1905 Lewis had started a novel called "The Village Virus," which was the germ-cell of Main Street. Also, in "Breaking Into Print," p.220, Lewis told how all during college he had been trying to plan a serious novel to be called "The Children's Children," a prelude of a literary genre that was later to be popular, the revolt of the young against the old. In Lewis' plan each new generation was to revolt against the old one and move West. Lewis never wrote more than ten pages of this, but planning and visualizing it gave him a great deal of invaluable experience.

59. Sinclair Lewis, letter to Norman Foerster, July 30, 1931 (in Yale Collection, item #321).

60. Harrison Smith, in his recent essay "Sinclair Lewis: Remembrance of the Past," SRL, XXXI (Jan. 27, 1951), 8, described how Lewis revenged himself, after he had won the Nobel Prize, in the only class dinner he ever attended. When Lewis rose to speak at this dinner, he named every occasion on which he had been snubbed at Yale, including the date, place, weather, and person responsible. His audience boisterously applauded the speech, after which everyone relaxed and enjoyed themselves.

61. Perry Miller, op. cit., p.33.

62. Smith, p.36, relates in full and amusing detail the episode of Lewis' attempt to give the Nobel Prize Medal to the Yale library.

63. Sinclair Lewis, "I'm An Old Newspaperman Myself," p.154.

64. This and Lewis' other editorials for the Waterloo Daily Courier are included in Lewis' own collection of clippings (in Yale Collection).

65. Ibid.

66. The Yale Collection (item#185) has the case history cards of applicants to the Joint Application Bureau in New York, where Lewis was employed for November and December, 1908. These cards, in Lewis' own handwriting, reveal his interest and sympathy for the destitute and unfortunate. They also indicate his realization that the pitiful stories of these people were possible material for fiction (in Trail of the Hawk the hero, Carl Ericson, in one scene, goes to the Joint Application Bureau in search of work).

67. William Rose Benet, "The Earlier Lewis," pp.421-2, has a detailed account of Lewis' sojourn in Carmel.

68. Lewis humorously described this early failure as a newspaperman in "I'm An Old Newspaperman myself, " Cosmopolitan (May, 1947), part II, p.49ff.

69. Examples of such Lewis stories were "They That Take the Sword," Red Book (May, 1909), 107-116; "The Dawn," Pittsburgh Dispatch Literary Magazine (May 1, 1910), 7; and "A Promising Young Man," The Coming Nation (published in Girard, Kansas), XXXIII (April 29,1911), 3-4.

70. Benet, p.70, testified that Lewis had a whole trunk full of material, notes, ideas, plots, etc. Also, see Lewis' ideas and notes made during his Carmel days (in Yale Collection, items #158-164). One of these ideas, "The World Police,"

70. continued
was submitted to Jack London as a plot for a story, but was rejected by him. This sketch was reprinted in part in Maule and Cane.

71. See Harvey Taylor's bibliography of Lewis' work, which is still the most complete list of the early writings. It is appended to Van Doren's Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch.

72. Lewis' manuscript book (Yale Collection, #154) has a list of his writing submitted to various magazines, 1905-1911, and an account of his literary earnings for this period.

73. W. E. Woodward, "Sinclair Lewis Gets the Job," SRL, XXX (Nov. 1, 1947), 10-11. Also see Lewis' reviews, written under several pseudonyms, in his own collection of clippings (Yale Collection).

74. The source for much of Lewis' biography in this section is Van Doren's biography, cited above.

75. See especially the manuscript of an unpublished poem called "Free Us From Freedom," probably written in 1912 or 1913 while Lewis was working for Stokes. Also see the mss. of sixteen poems written around the same time, many of them on love themes and mostly unpublished (Yale Collection, #182).

76. Benet, p.421. Also see the letters from Glenn Curtiss, J. A. D. McCurdy and Paul W. Beck (all notable pioneer airmen and all friends of Lewis) to Stokes recommending the factuality and merit of Hike and the Aeroplane (these letters in Yale Collection). Lewis' interest in aviation was later manifest in Trail of the Hawk.

77. All through his career Lewis insisted that he was not a reformer, but a "romantic medievalist," as he called himself in the introduction to his Selected Short Stories (N.Y., 1935). The bulk of his work and all of his great novels stand, of course, in direct contradiction to his own statement, yet such novels as Mantrap (1927) and Bethel Merriday (1940), and most of the short stories, were ample evidence of the story-teller in him.

78. In Lewis' own collection of clippings (Yale Collection).

79. The Yale Collection has Lewis' membership card in the Socialist Party of New York, showing he was a dues-paying member from Jan. 16, 1911 to April, 1912 (item #190). But many years later Lewis was to tell an acquaintance that he was a socialist in his youth only because at that time "it was the thing

79. continued
not to do." The reference for this statement is to be found in a letter dated Feb. 26, 1939 from Scott C. Osborn to Professor Grant C. Knight. This letter, now in the possession of Professor Knight, English Dept., University of Kentucky, describes Mr. Osborn's meeting and conversation with Lewis in Louisville, Kentucky, just after a performance of the latter's play "Angela Is Twenty-Two," with Lewis in the leading role.

80. Sinclair Lewis, "The Passing of Capitalism," Bookman, XL (Nov., 1914), 280-6. Also reprinted in Maule and Cane.

81. Wells probably had more influence on Lewis than any other modern writer, and with the exception of Dickens, more influence than any writer of any period. Our Mr. Wrenn was definitely in the manner of Wells' Mr. Polly, and Babbitt has some indebtedness to Tono-Bungay. For a detailed account of Wells' influence on Lewis and for a study of the possible origin of some of Lewis' social ideas, see Arthur B. Coleman, The Genesis of Social Ideas in Sinclair Lewis, Ph.D. thesis now in progress at New York University. Wells' influence was also noted in Grant Overton, "The Salvation of Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXI (April, 1925), 183; Woodward, "The World and Sauk Center," p.26; and Perry Miller, p.32. For Lewis' own statement of Wells' influence on Lewis' whole generation, see his essay "A Generation Nourished on H. G. Wells," New York Herald Tribune Books (Oct. 20, 1946) pp.1-2.

82. Lewis, "The Passing of Capitalism," p.285.

83. Van Doren, p.52.

84. Harrison Smith, Introduction to Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn (N.Y., 1951), p.vii.

85. Ibid., pp.91-2

86. See especially Maxwell Geismar, Last of the Provincials (N.Y., 1947), pp.69-70; V. F. Calverton, The Liberation of American Literature (N.Y., 1932), p.431; T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen (N.Y., 1928), pp.221-3; Leo and Miriam Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," Coll. Eng., IV (Feb., 1943), 288-92; and Ima Honaker Herron, The Small Town in American Literature (Durham, N.C., 1939), p.379.

87. John T. Flanagan, "A Long Way to Gopher Prairie: Sinclair Lewis' Apprenticeship," Southwest Rev., XXXII (Autumn, 1947), 406.

88. Our Mr. Wrenn, p.3.

89. Ibid., p.65.

90. Ibid., p.27.

91. Sinclair Lewis, "How I Wrote A Novel On Trains and Beside the Kitchen Sink," American, XCI (April, 1921), 16-17.

92. See Henry Longan Stuart, "Novels From the Grub Street Days of Sinclair Lewis," New York Times Book Review, LXXII (April 22, 1923), sect.III, p.3, for a keen analysis of Lewis' early style. On Lewis' early use of travel and adventure themes see Flanagan, p.407.

93. Harry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction (N.Y., 1934), p.276.

94. Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction (Chicago, 1940), p.166.

95. See Sinclair Lewis' letter to George Leroy White, Jr., quoted in White's Scandinavian Themes in American Fiction (Phila., 1937), p.137. The letter reads, in part: "It is interesting that when a real Hawk did come, in Charles Lindbergh, years after my book, he was a Scandinavian and he came from a village forty miles from mine."

96. Stuart P. Sherman, in his pamphlet The Significance of Sinclair Lewis (N.Y., 1922), p.5, noted this first appearance of Lewis' hatred of small-town intellectual stuffiness.

97. Herron, The Small Town in American Literature, p.380.

98. Sinclair Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk (N.Y., 1930), p.62.

99. Ibid., p.91.

100. One of the most surprising contradictions of the many in Lewis' nature was his patriotism. For a long time during the decade following Main Street, Lewis was characterized by the critics as a man who hated America. It is now apparent that Lewis' love for America was one of the main sources of his attacks on it. A savage critic of America's faults himself, he hated criticism by foreigners, especially visiting English lecturers, whom he satirized in many of his novels and stories as hypocritical charlatans who grew fat on the American wealth they publically derided. For an example of Lewis' satire on such people see his short story "Dollars Chasers," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV (Oct.17 and 24, 1931) 3-5, 16-17.

101. Geismar, Last of the Provincials, pp.82-4.

89. Ibid., p.65.

90. Ibid., p.27.

91. Sinclair Lewis, "How I Wrote A Novel On Trains and Beside the Kitchen Sink," American, XCI (April, 1921), 16-17.

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101. Geismar, Last of the Provincials, pp.82-4.

102. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction, pp.168-9, felt that "Lewis is not primarily a story-teller," but "an expositor who uses the narrative form." Although this was partially true of The Job, Main Street, and the other novels of social criticism that followed, it was not true of Lewis' other early novels and of such later ones as Mantrap, Work of Art, Bethel Merriday, Cass Timberlane, etc; and of most of Lewis' short stories. The important point is that only rarely was Lewis either pure story-teller or pure social critic or expositor; usually, he is both simultaneously. All of Lewis' best books had these two qualities in equilibrium, and his work deteriorated as one quality predominated at the expense of the other.

103. The similarity of Ann Vickers to Una Golden has been noticed by many scholars, e.g., Herron, p.380, and Hartwick, p.256. Hartwick called The Job "one of the best novels ever done on the life of a wage slave in Manhattan."

104. Sinclair Lewis, The Job (N.Y., 1944), pp.129-130.

105. Sherman, pp.8-9, and Boynton, p.168, both noted The Job as being revelatory of Lewis' social thinking at this time. As regards the relationship of The Job to the literature of realism, or, in fact, the relationship of Lewis' career before 1930 to this literature, see Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature (N.Y., 1930), pp.329-340, for an excellent summary.

106. Geismar, p.76, says that "Istra ... seems to sum up ... a phase of Aesthetic Revolt that followed hard on the heels of the Progressive Movement in America."

107. Contemporary reviewers had high praise for the truth and significance of The Job. One anonymous reviewer, writing in the Nation, CIV (April 12, 1917), 433, said: "The Job is an earnest and sincere document in favor of independence and self-expression for women. The author is not at all concerned to conceal his purpose, nor does he hesitate ... to drop the role of story-teller and lecture us on woman's wrongs, new methods of business, and what not... . Often it is very good lecturing." While Francis Hackett, in the New Republic, X (March 24, 1917), 234, stated: "The Job is just the answer to those who give too much importance to business as it is, and too little to workmanship and economic independence."

108. Lloyd Morris, Postscript to Yesterday (N.Y., 1947), p.136.

109. Henry Longan Stuart, "Novels From the Grub Street Days of Sinclair Lewis," p.3.

110. Hackett, p.234.

111. Sinclair Lewis, The Innocents (N.Y., 1917).

112. Whipple, Spokesmen, pp.221-2, offered perhaps the best treatment of the romantic side of Lewis and a penetrating analysis of all of Lewis' work before 1928.

113. This occasional philistinism of Lewis was another of the bewildering contradictions in his nature which is verified in almost everything written about him by people who knew him well. In one sense, it was what caused him to love Babbitt at the same time that he flayed him. The matter will receive more detailed consideration elsewhere in this study.

114. The instances of Lewis' favorable descriptions of small towns in his work were indeed few and far between. They are: The Innocents, 1917; Work of Art, 1934; It Can't Happen Here, 1936; and Prodigal Parents, 1938. Notice that from 1917 to 1934 Lewis had nothing good to say about the small town, while all of his favorable descriptions seem to be grouped into a short period in the 1930's when Lewis' work was marked by mellowness and gentle introspection.

115. Leo and Miriam Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," pp.288-9, believe that Lewis' work was powerful only so long as it was satiric and hostile to Main Street, and that as it grew sentimental about Main Street, so it grew steadily weaker. They feel, with considerable justification, that this was especially true of Lewis' early work.

116. Harrison Smith, ed., From Main Street to Stockholm (N.Y., 1952), p.X.

117. Sinclair Lewis, "Adventures in Automobuming, "Saturday Evening Post, CXCII (Dec. 20 and 27, 1919) pp.5,24; and CXCIII (Jan. 3, 1920), 20. Long-distance motoring was probably Lewis' favorite form of recreation at this time and means of satisfying his unquenchable wanderlust. The adventures be described in these articles were the basis for much of Free Air. As regards hotels and restaurants, this seemed to have been a fetish of Lewis', for he absolutely could not tolerate poor service or dingy hotels. His interest in hotels finally resulted in his writing an entire book about them, Work of Art (1934).

118. Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years (N.Y., 1952), pp.502-3.

119. Sinclair Lewis, Free Air (N.Y., 1919), p.46.

120. Ibid., p.102. This was Lewis the philistine peeking through.

121. Flanagan, p.409.

122. Free Air, p.36. This was, of course, the same Gopher Prairie which Lewis was to immortalize the next year in Main Street. Also, see Herron, p.381.

123. Geismar, p.82.

124. Van Doren, p.54. The whole matter of East versus West, as it appeared in Free Air and other of Lewis' novels, takes on a personal significance to Lewis' own life in the light of evidence presented in the novel Half A Loaf, by Grace Hegger Lewis (N.Y., 1931). In this novel, presumably the fictional account of their marriage, in reply to Dodsworth, Mrs. Lewis suggested that Lewis always considered himself the raw, uncouth Westerner and felt a definite inferiority about his background in comparison with his wife's Eastern upbringing, especially during their courtship. As a matter of fact, it later appears in Half A Loaf that this basic difference was one of the causes of the eventual disintegration of their marriage. Thus, in Free Air, the reader does not go far amiss if he reads something of Lewis and his courtship of Grace Livingstone Hegger (Mrs. Lewis) into the fictional characters and romance of Milt and Claire, and the same thing holds true of Carl and Ruth in Trail of the Hawk.

125. Free Air, p.370.

126. During the years 1915-1919, Lewis did a great deal of traveling, supporting himself mainly through free-lance short-story writing, because his novels (with the exception of Free Air) sold poorly. All of Lewis' forty-five short-stories in this five year period were written for the Saturday Evening Post and similar magazines. In general, they only repeated the themes in the novels. Those which do have special significance will be mentioned in passing as they relate to Lewis' more serious work.

II. SOCIAL CRITICISM, SATIRE, AND SUCCESS

1. Main Street: 1920

Sinclair Lewis' apprenticeship had been long and arduous. It had included the writing of poetry, essays, book reviews, short stories, and five novels. He was ready to do a big book, a serious book, one that might not meet with popular success, but one that would express the experience and truth accumulated and saved all through his apprentice period. This experience and truth was finally given a local habitation and a name that was to be heard around the world and was to become a permanent part of the American language. That name was Main Street.

Main Street had been gestating in Lewis' consciousness for a long time. He had first conceived the idea for the book at home in the summer of 1905, on vacation from his sophomore year at Yale. In that first attempt at it he wrote twenty thousand words, but somehow lost the manuscript soon afterward. In Lewis' second attempt, around 1916-1917, he wrote approximately thirty thousand words, of which he was able to use ten thousand in the final version.[1] The Innocents and The Job had been only interludes in the writing of Main Street, and the popular success of Free Air had given Lewis the money he needed to quit popular fiction writing so as to devote himself entirely to Main Street.[2] The book was finally finished in 1920 in Washington, D. C., where Lewis had gone specifically for that purpose.[3]

Sinclair Lewis had first started the book in 1905 because his neighbors' snide remarks about him, the Eastern college boy on vacation in his Minnesota home town, had led him to question seriously for the first time the American myth of good-neighborliness.[4] In its original conception the book was to be called "The Village Virus," and it was to be the tale of a brilliant lawyer who succumbs to small-town mediocrity (Guy Pollock was the vestige of this in Main Street).[5] In its final version, fortunately, the story was given a universal application because its protagonist was not a professional man nor the effect of the village virus limited to just this type of person. Thus, in making the central figure a woman, a woman differing from the average only in having a little more soul, Lewis captured the spirit and the significance of his entire generation. The name of Carol Kennicott, the heroine, was to become a household word and Main Street was to become an American classic.

The subject of Main Street was something that Lewis had known intimately for half his life, a small town in the American Middlewest. In his travels through America, Lewis had found that all small towns had something in common, ugliness, especially in the West. He also found everywhere the same smugness and hostility to individualism that had tormented him as a boy in Sauk Center. Thus when Lewis announced in the foreword of the book that Main Street was a symbol of the small town everywhere, he spoke with authority. And it was in this

foreword that he indicated the savage indictment which he was to make in detail in the pages of the novel, the indictment against village materialism, village architecture, and above all, the village mind:[6]

> This is America - a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.
>
> The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota." But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina Hills.
>
> Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.
>
> Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture. Sam Clark's annual hardware turnover is the envy of the four counties which constitute God's Country. In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message, and humor strictly moral.
>
> Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself and alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?[7]

The plot of <u>Main Street</u> was an inseparable combination of story and message, both of which were essential to the power of the book. The real action begins when Carol, a young, eager idealistic bride arrives in Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, with her new husband, Dr. Will Kennicott, a kindly, plain, stolid man. Carol sees immediately from the appearance of the town that her ardent ambition to reform and beautify it

will be a stupendous task, so ugly and drab is Gopher Prairie's aspect.

Despite the warmth of her welcome by Will's friends, Carol soon discovers that the people are as hopelessly biased and narrow-minded as their town is ugly. She forgets her dismay for a while in the sweetness of her husband's love, in the surface cordiality of the townsfolk, and in the discovery of two kindred romantic souls, Vida Sherwin, the schoolteacher, and Guy Pollock, the lawyer. Carol's first attempt to crack the thick social ice of the town is to give a gay Chinese-motif which everyone seems to enjoy, but which makes no dent in the social habits of Gopher Prairie.

Winter comes and the gloom of Gopher Prairie begins to weigh heavily on Carol's spirits. At the "Jolly Seventeen" bridge club she finds that the women are even more reactionary and opinionated than the men. And Carol's remaining good will toward the town is completely exploded when Vida Sherwin tells her that she has become disliked and gossiped about because of her 'airs,' her Chinese party, her home decorations, etc. From this point on, Carol becomes terribly conscious of the town's opinion and her attitude changes from one of reform to a simple desire to be tolerated. She is, however, somewhat heartened and again encouraged to reform by her meeting Miles Bjornstam, the village radical, and Gopher Prairie's only other individualist.

Carol's first attempt at reforming Gopher Prairie is to get Will to like poetry. This fails. Her second reform is to try to revive the town culturally through the Thanatopsis Club, the ladies' literary group. This fails. Her next plan concerns the beautification of the town architecturally. This fails. After this, Carol organizes a little-theater group, which gives one play, then stops functioning. Finally, Carol serves as a member of the library board, but cannot arouse the other members to do anything constructive.

In the meantime, Carol's life with Will has had its vicissitudes. The arrival of a child makes her temporarily lose her interest in reform. She respects Will for his work but she hates prejudices and his lack of progressive ideas. They have several serious quarrels and, without realizing it, begin to drift apart. Matters are not helped when both Will and Carol have little extra-marital romantic flings. Carol's, with Erik Valborg, a handsome, artistically-inclined tailor's apprentice, sets the town's gossip-mill working again. This, and other incidents in which she sees the town's cruelty toward those who violate its codes, cause her to flee from Gopher Prairie, and Will takes her to California for a vacation.

They return to find Gopher Prairie booming materially and in a "boosting" spirit. This glorification of mediocrity and coronation of smugness is more than Carol can stand, and, taking her child, she leaves Will and goes to Washington,

both as an escape from Gopher Prairie and as an attempt to recover her lost individuality. In Washington, Carol works in a government office and is disillusioned by the office world but also finds the intellectual freedom, companionship and gallantry that in Gopher Prairie she had forgotten existed. Under these influences Carol soon recovers her courage and poise, and for the first time, achieves real objectivity. After a year and a half, Will visits her and they become lovers again, but he does not urge her to return unless she so decides voluntarily.

Carol finally resolves to go back to Gopher Prairie after two years in Washington. There, she has a second child. She also has gained a new matter-of-fact attitude that allows her to accept the town for what it is without ever succumbing to it. And, as the story ends, Carol prophecies that her baby will accomplish in the future what she has failed to do herself, yet she can still look forward to that day without shame, knowing that she has done her best.

Carol Kennicott, the heroine, was a fully realized and memorable character, but she was also the medium of expression in Main Street that Lewis used to express his feelings about the things he hated in his home town of Sauk Center and all towns like it.[8] Like Lewis, Carol is an incurable visionary, and one of her first visions, as she approaches Gopher Prairie for the first time on the train, is that same vision of Lewis

the idealist regarding the vast Midwestern prairie through which she rides. The vision is a profound one, containing the possibility of both future good and evil:

> Here - she meditated - is the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middlewest; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos like red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. An empire which feeds a quarter of the world - yet its work is merely begun. They are pioneers, these sweaty wayfarers, for all their telephones and bank accounts and automatic pianos and co-operative leagues. And for all its fat richness, theirs is a pioneer land. What is its future? She wondered. A future of cities and factory smut where now are loping empty fields? Homes universal and secure? Or placid chateaux ringed with sullen huts? Youth free to find knowledge and laughter? Willingness to sift the sanctifies lies? Or creamy-skinned fat women.....who after much expenditure of labor and bad temper still grotesquely resemble their own flatulent lap-dogs? The ancient stale inequalities, or something different in history, unlike the tedious maturity of other empires? What future and what hope?
>
> (pp. 24-5)

Carol's first view of Gopher Prairie does little to encourage her, for she sees the town as nothing more than a "frontier camp," only a tiny interruption in the great plains that surround it. And her view of Gopher Prairie was probably that of Sinclair Lewis, returning from Yale, seeing his birthplace in the harsh light of reality from which sentimental boyhood memories had largely vanished:

> In all the town not one building save the Ionic bank which gave pleasure to Carol's eyes; not a dozen buildings which suggested that, in the fifty years of Gopher Prairie's existence, the citizens had realized that it was either desirable or possible to make this, their common home, amusing or attractive.

> It was not only the unsparing unapologetic ugliness and the rigid straightness which overwhelmed her. It was the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors.
> (p.337)

To her chagrin Carol soon learns, as Lewis learned, that the town's opinions are as ugly as their buildings, for at the first party she attends, she hears the views of three of Gopher Prairie's leading citizens, Ezra Stowbody, the banker, Jack Elder, the planing-mill operator, and Dave Dyer, the druggest, on some of the leading questions of the day. Their sage pronouncements may be summarized thus:

1. Fear of forclosure of their bank loans is the only factor that keeps the local farmers from becoming "radical."

2. Unions, profit-sharing, wage-scales, welfare, insurance, and old-age pensions are all the work of nosy radicals and college professors, all of whom are really socialists in disguise. Such innovations would weaken the worker's independence and also reduce profits.

3. The only solution to such problems is to hang all the agitators.

(pp. 49-51)

The one element that saves Carol from the crack-up that would result from constant contact with the Gopher Prairie viewpoint is the beauty of the magnificent land that surrounds the town, the same beauty in which Lewis took refuge as a boy from the inquisitive eyes of the townsmen. Such passages as the following are typical of the frequent outbursts of lyricism in Main Street, and also provide effective contradiction to the critics who condemned Lewis for his supposedly unrelieved satire, unfairness, and lack of lyric feeling:[9]

> They drove home under the sunset. Mounds of straw, and wheat-stacks like bee-hives, stood out in startling rose and gold, and the green-tufted stubble glistened. As the vast girdle of crimson darkened, the fulfilled land became autumnal in deep reds and browns. The black road before the buggy turned to a faint lavender, then was blotted to uncertain grayness. Cattle came in a long line up to the barred gates of the farmyards, and over the resting land was a dark glow.
> Carol had found the dignity and greatness which had failed her in Main Street.
> (p. 58)

But Carol cannot escape the stultifying forces of the town for very long. They are ever present in her own home in the person of her husband Dr. Will Kennicott, who is, despite his superior intelligence, still hopelessly rooted in that smug pride in Gopher Prairie which Carol, and Lewis, hated more than all else. This civic pride is expressed by Will, who conveys to Carol one of the town's favorite self-conceptions, that of liberality and independence:

> "This is an independent town, not like these Eastern holes where you have to watch your step all the time, and live up to fool demands and social customs, and a lot of old tabbies always busy criticizing. Everybody's free here to do what he wants to." He said it with a flourish, and Carol perceived that he believed it.
> (p. 98)

And all this when Carol knows she is being watched and criticized by everyone in town, even the boys who hang around the drug store!

The town's fleering eyes rob Carol of her confidence and reforming spirit, but not for long, for she befriends Miles Bjornstam, the only other outspoken rebel in Gopher Prairie.

However, she and Miles differ basically in their aims, as he himself tells her: "You want to do something for the town. I don't! I want the town to do something for itself." (p.141).

Another interesting figure is Guy Pollock, the lawyer, who leads a hermit-like existence. For awhile, Carol hopes he will join in her crusade, but soon realizes that Guy has fallen victim to the "Village Virus," which he himself defines for her:

> "The Village Virus is the germ which - it's extraordinarily like the hook-worm - it infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces. You'll find it epidemic among lawyers and doctors and ministers and college-bred merchants - all these people who have had a glimpse of the world that thinks and laughs, but have returned to their swamp."
>
> (pp. 155-6)

It was the Village Virus, grown into a malignant cancer, that was to be the real villain of Lewis' next book, Babbitt, and was to continue to be the villain, in different shapes and forms, of all of Lewis' books until the very end of his career. For to Lewis the Village Virus symbolized more than a disease that attacked professional men in small towns. It was the germ of the diseases of reaction, prejudice, smugness, provincialism, convention everywhere. Thus, the fear of social disapproval that kept Babbitt a slave in 1922, and the prejudice that sought to keep the negroes slaves in Kingsblood Royal in 1947, were to Lewis, all offspring of the same self-reproducing germ cell, the Village Virus, first chronicled in Main Street in 1920.

Carol's revolt against Gopher Prairie was intended to be more than one woman's rebellion against one smug town. Lewis

meant her to represent the whole growing discontent of the new generation with the status quo. He made this clear in a passage which extended the significance of Gopher Prairie from Minnesota, U.S.A., to the entire world, from 1920 to now. It was a classic form of Lewis' sympathy for the underdog and the oppressed. It was a classic expression of Lewis' idealistic fervor. It was a classic prophecy of the significant events already taken place in this century and continuing to take place every day, in America, Europe, Africa, Asia. It is a tribute to Sinclair Lewis as a prophet and as a social critic, here speaking as Carol Kennicott in 1920:

> "I believe all of us want the same things - we're all together, the industrial workers and the woman and the farmers and the Negro race and the Asiatic colonies, and even a few of the Respectables. It's all the same revolt, in all the classes that have waited and taken advice. I think perhaps we want a more conscious life. We're tired of drudging and sleeping and dying. We're tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We're tired of always defferring hope till the next generation. We're tired of hearing the politicians and priests and cautious reformers (and the husbands!) coax us, 'Be calm! Be patient! Wait! We have the plans for a Utopia already made; just give us a bit more time and we'll produce it; trust us; we're wiser than you.' For ten thousand years they've said that. We want our Utopia <u>now</u> - and we're going to try our hands at it. All we want is everything for all of us! For every Hindu nationalist and every teacher. We want everything. We shan't get it. So we shan't ever be content - "
>
> (pp. 201-2)

Carol had retained one last illusion about Gopher Prairie, the illusion that the farmers in the surrounding areas depended upon the town for its services and as a market for their crops. But even this last justification for Gopher Prairie's existence

vanishes when she hears one farmer tell another how the town's merchants and transport companies unite to form an unbreakable bloc, completely controlling the farmers. And finally, the townspeople despised as socially inferior these same farmers from whom they gained their living and whom they victimized.

With this last, the arraignment was now complete, needing only a summary. Lewis provided that summary in a section of Main Street (pp. 264-269) in which he completely put aside the pose of Carol Kennicott and spoke directly to the reader in tones of such denunciation of small-town life as had rarely been heard before in American or any other literature.

Lewis began by summarizing the two popular traditions of the American small-town. The first, that of the "happy village," was prevalent in popular fiction and existed only there. The second, that of the "rustic village," where the characters speak in terms of "I swan," and "I calc'late," existed only in vaudeville and in cartoons. It had long since passed out of existence. Lewis concluded:

> Carol's small town thinks not in hoss-swapping but in cheap motor cars, telephones, ready-made clothes, silos, alfalfa, kodaks, phonographs, leather-upholstered Morris Chairs, bridge-prizes, oil-stocks, motion-pictures, land-deals, unread sets of Mark Twain, and a chaste version of national politics. (p. 264)

Why are millions of people, especially women and young men fleeing their homes in country towns and moving to the cities, Lewis asked? (This movement to the city was an established sociological fact and one of major significance in

American life in the twentieth century). And he supplied his own answer by depicting in terms of unrestrained revulsion the environment which these millions sought to escape, the environment which he himself had fled:

> It is an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment ... the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God.
> A savorless people, gulping tasteless food, and sitting afterward, coatless and thoughtless, in rocking chairs, prickly with inane decorations, listening to mechanical music, saying mechanical things about the excellence of Ford automobiles, and viewing themselves as the greatest race in the world.
> (p. 265)

Of course, Lewis' explanation of the phenomenon of the shift of rural population to urban areas is rather an oversimplification of the matter. True, it may have been the drabness of their environment that caused many young people to flee the farm and the small town, but there are other factors to be considered, such as:

1. The gradual displacement of farm labor by the machine.

2. The lure of the city lights, higher wages, greater economic opportunity.

3. The increasing difficulty for the small farmer to eke out a living under the conditions imposed by buyer and shipper combinations (this factor was suggested in <u>Main Street</u> and, of course, in Norris' work much earlier).

4. In fine, the whole situation may well have been summarized in the song then popular, "How Ya' Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm, After They've Seen Paree?" Thus, Lewis' own answer, if not definitive, was at least close to the heart of the matter.

Finally, Sinclair Lewis ended his indictment in a long, eloquent passage which showed how mechanization and ignorance prevailed not only in Gopher Prairie but was beginning to corrupt all America. It was a profoundly pessimistic passage, but also one born of the deepest zeal, for if Lewis did not care, he could not have written what follows:

> Doubtless all small towns, in all countries, in all ages, Carol admitted, have a tendency to be not only dull but mean, bitter, infested with curiosity. In France or Tibet quite as much as in Wyoming or Indiana these timidities are inherent in isolation.
>
> But a village in a country which is taking pains to become altogether standardized and pure, which aspires to succeed Victorian England as the chief mediocrity of the world, is no longer merely provincial, no longer downy and restful in its leaf-shadowed ignorance. It is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills and sea of color, to set Dante at boosting Gopher Prairie, and to dress the high gods in Klassy Kollege Klothes. Sure of itself, it bullies other civilizations, as a traveling salesman in a brown derby conquers the wisdom of China and tacks advertisements of cigarettes over arches for centuries dedicate to the sayings of Confucius.
>
> Such a society functions admirably in the large production of cheap automobiles, dollar watches, and safety razors. But it is not satisfied until the entire world admits that the end and joyous purpose of living is to ride in flivvers, to make advertising-pictures of dollar watches, and in the twilight to sit talking not of love and courage but of the convenience of safety razors.
>
> And such a society, such a nation, is determined by the Gopher Prairies. The greatest manufacturer is but a busier Sam Clark and all the rotund senators and presidents are village lawyers and bankers grown nine feet tall. (pp. 266-7)

This was Lewis' last gun in his attack against Main Street and it was also his opening shot in the assault on American materialism, beginning with Babbitt.

Carol's revolt has reached its climax. Beyond this it can go not further, and like Lewis' earlier heroes and heroines, she takes refuge in escape, in her case, to Washington, D. C. This is the turning point of the novel, for once Carol is away from Gopher Prairie she begins to achieve an objectivity that she had lacked before and she begins to see more clearly what her role as a reformer must be:

> And why, she began to ask, did she rage at individuals? Not individuals but institutions are the enemies, and they most afflict the disciples who most generously serve them. They insinuate their tyranny under a hundred guises and pompous names, such as Polite Society, the Family, the Church, Sound Business, the Party, the Country, the Superior or White Race, and the only defense against them, Carol beheld, is unembittered laughter.
> (p. 430)

Lewis' basic optimism, so long submerged in the fury of his denunciation of Main Street, again begins to show through toward the end of the novel, when Carol perceives that her revolt has not been in vain, nor is her return to Gopher Prairie an admission of defeat, as so many critics have interpreted it:[10]

> Though she should return, she said, she would not be utterly defeated. She was glad of her rebellion. The prairie was no longer empty land in the sun-glare; it was the living tawny beast which she had fought and made beautiful by fighting; and in the village streets were shadows of her desires and the sound of her marching and the seeds of mystery and greatness.
> (p. 442)

As the book draws to a close, Lewis' optimism grows stronger and stronger, for he concludes that there is majesty in this land after all, a majesty of youth and expanse, and the struggle against Main Street is but one aspect of the life struggle everywhere:

> She looked across the silent fields to the west. She was conscious of an unbroken sweep of land to the Rockies, to Alaska; a dominion which will rise to unexampled greatness when other empires have grown senile. Before that time, she knew, a hundred generations of Carols will aspire and go down in tragedy devoid of palls and solemn chanting, the hum-drum inevitable tragedy of struggle against inertia.
>
> (p.450)

There is hope for the future. Lewis declared, and it rests in the minds of the little children, who will accomplish what their parents have failed to do, as Carol points out to Will:

> "Look!" She led him to the nursery door, pointed at the fuzzy brown head of her daughter. "Do you see that object on the pillow? Do you know what it is? It's a bomb to blow up smugness. If you Tories were wise, you wouldn't arrest anarchists; you'd arrest all these children while they're asleep in their cribs. Think what that baby will see and meddle with before she dies in the year two thousand! She may see an industrial union of the whole world, she may see aeroplanes going to Mars."
>
> (p. 450)

So ended Main Street, Sinclair Lewis' first important book, one that carved for him a permanent place in American literature. It was a tract for the times, yes, but it was also a great novel, for without the poignant story of Carol Kennicott, her dreams, her failures, her marriage, there would

not have been the strong framework to bear the weight of Lewis' social criticism. Lewis the social critic and Lewis the impassioned story-teller were here inextricably intermeshed, and neither could have succeeded without the other.

Despite the violence of its denunciations, Main Street was a labor of love.[11] Lewis himself testified to this. In an article called "The Pioneer Myth," published in the New York Evening Post for Feb. 5, 1921, he wrote that America was using its pioneer myth as an excuse for its lack of artistic creativity. He wrote this not as an attack on America, but from "a love of Main Street, from a belief in Main Street's inherent power, a belief so strong that the writer is not silling, like the Wild West fictioneers, to insult America by believing we are all so commonplace that we can find romance only by making believe that we are frontier homicides."[12] To Carl Van Doren, Lewis wrote a letter from Italy in October, 1921, which not only disclaimed the supposed influence of Madame Bovary and Spoon River Anthology on Main Street that Van Doren had pointed out in his articles "The Revolt from the Village" (printed in the Nation), but also stated his affection for the people in Main Street whom he had apparently satirized.[13]

The symbol of Lewis' affection for Main Street was Dr. Will Kennicott, who, although hopelessly rooted in Gopher Prairie's provincialism, was a man with a spirit of his own. He is, in the novel, the foil and the contrast to Carol, and

his solidity and maturity are so strongly etched, that he often makes Carol and her cause look ridiculous in comparison, an effect of which Lewis was well aware. Although there can be no proof of such a statement, it is interesting to speculate that Dr. Will Kennicott represented those sturdy qualities possessed by Lewis' own father and brother, qualities that Lewis could not help admiring at the same time that he satirized them.

The significance and influence of Main Street on its time was enormous and can never by fully estimated. It was the literary atomic bomb of its age and its repercussions are still being heard. It has sold over two million copies in original and reprint editions, and how many more have read the book defies exact computation.[14]

The timeliness of the book lay in its theme, one already developed in Lewis' earlier work - revolt. The revolt in Main Street was not only Carol's against the town, but the revolt of a generation just emerged from a war to "make the world safe for democracy." The feeling of dissatisfaction and criticism which was shared by most of the young intellectuals of Lewis' day had been growing for a long time, and it was to receive its first full expression in the decade beginning with the end of World War I, the 1920's. Main Street was one outburst of that critical spirit, while such writers as Eliot, Fitzgerald, Cabell, Cummings, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Anderson, Masters, and others of the "Lost Generation" ex-

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pressed different phases of the same revolt, along with a host of minor writers, including Dell, Van Vechten, Hergesheimer, Hecht. The fact of this whole intellectual and literary spirit is too well known to need proof here, and the list of those writers of the 1920's who shared in and expressed the discontent of their generation reads like a distinguished list of twentieth century American novelists.

But Main Street had a special significance of its own.[15] The theme of the "happy village" in literature stems from ancient times and was closely related to the pastoral tradition. It was a recurrent theme in English literature, and the concept of contented rural life ruled supreme, with a few notable exceptions such as Crabbe's poem "The Village," intended as corrective to Goldsmith's unblemished portraits of rural life. This romantic concept of country life was taken over into American literature to rule undisturbed until the last decade of the nineteenth century, when Howe's Story of a Country Town and Garland's Main-Travelled Roads appeared. The attack on the village had intensified in the years just before the publication of Main Street with Master's Spoon River Anthology and Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, but neither of these met with the popular reception or aroused the controversy that Main Street did.

It is impossible to say exactly what in Lewis' book so perfectly coincided with the temper of the time so that "Main Street became a term of opprobrium over-night,"[16] but it had

something that was strong enough to set the whole nation talking about it and to revitalize the whole field of American publishing.[17] The time was ripe for the man and Lewis, with that sensitivity to the climate of opinion that was from then on to characterize his best work, was ripe for the time. Perhaps no better explanation of Main Street's success has ever been given than that of Irwin Cobb, who said: "People in the cities are sure to like it because it makes fun of rural places and the folks that live in villages and little towns have to read it just to find out what Sinclair Lewis is saying about them."[18]

In any case, the critics immediately recognized the importance of the book and praised it accordingly.[19] One writer called it "one of the milestones in the discovery of America,"[20] while an English critic wrote: "One is tempted to generalize about American characteristics on the basis of nearly every chapter of this book. It sums up brilliantly and mercilessly everything that the new generation in America detests."[21] The public took Main Street even more seriously than the critics, as contemporary observers have recorded. One reporter, in an article in a popular magazine, noted the deep influence that the book was having on the American mind:

> What seems to me most significant about the whole affair of Main Street is the painful conscientiousness of any number of people in regard to it. "This is America," says Mr. Lewis in his own italicized foreword, and far from his being lynched, there is a widespread uneasy fear that his picture may largely be true.....

> For everyone who has revolted against the book one has met a dozen who with a deep discomfort of soul, accepted it ... and asked the Great American Question: What are we going to do about it?[22]

Another of the many testimonials scattered through the books, newspapers, and periodicals of the time read as follows:

> In common with many other people I read Main Street when I was in America. It was hardly possible to avoid buying it and reading it... . A lady remarked to me, "Every American should read Main Street as a penance. Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, is the twentieth century substitute for Concord, Massachusetts! Alas!"[23]

Intellectual America was obviously in a self-conscious, critical mood. Its idealistic optimism had ended by 1920, and with the inauguration of Harding, and continuing under Coolidge, the nation was about to enter into its most hectic, unbalanced peacetime decade, the 1920's.[24] The high-mark of Lewis' career was to exactly coincide with that decade, and in those ten years he was to produce four more great novels, which, like Main Street, will be read as history if they are ever forgotten as literature. The second of those great novels, Babbitt, coming two years after Main Street, was a logical continuation of it, for the critical eye which Lewis had focused on the village he was to shift to an examination of the state of the entire nation.

2. Babbitt: 1922

With Main Street Sinclair Lewis had established himself as a writer who, however irritating, could not be ignored by any intelligent American. For Lewis in 1920 in Main Street, and again in 1922 in Babbitt, had taken his place among the great American fabulists, the tall-story tellers as typical of America as apple pie, the fable-makers distinguished by their derision, their mimicry, and their affection for the very things they deride. In Main Street Lewis had created the archetype of the American small town, and in Babbitt he created the archetype of the American city and the American business man. The response to Lewis was America's traditional response to its home-grown critics, for America has never been able to resist looking into a mirror if that mirror is placed before it. And when the nation looked into the mirror that Lewis held up, it saw, in amazing detail, the resemblance of a land sick with the Village Virus and pale under the shadow of the dollar sign.[25]

Main Street was the story of a life which Lewis had actually lived, and its veracity of detail and reproduction of small-town speech and thought patterns were taken from Lewis' own experience. It was, admittedly, exaggerated in part, but it had, nevertheless, an undeniable sense of truth that gave it sting. Babbitt continued that same sharpness and detail, but whereas Main Street needed little research because Lewis

had lived it, Babbitt showed that Lewis was a writer who could so thoroughly project himself into an environment that he could quickly absorb it and retain, after leaving it, its essence, resemblance, and significance. More important, Lewis had a gift of impersonation and mimicry that enabled him to be anyone he wanted. Thus, he could strike up an acquaintanceship with a stranger on a train, in a hotel or restaurant, and by pretending to be from the same common background, in a few minutes completely lay bare the man's soul and win him over to confidence. This chamelion-like gift of changing his personality to match every background, and to record conversations on his mental sound-track (to be replayed at will), was one of Lewis' most valuable talents, for it enabled him to produce the astounding fidelity of detail so typical of his work at this time and so essential to his satiric effects. Sinclair Lewis used this skill of his not only in writing but also in his social life, as many of his friends have recorded in their accounts of his fabulous personality.[26]

In any case, Babbitt was neither conceived nor prepared over night. For years, in his constant traveling all over America, Lewis had been subconsciously gathering material in conversation, observation, contemplation. The Job had given him some experience in writing about the business world, especially in creating the character of Eddie Schwirtz, who was in many ways like Babbitt. In other of his early books, Lewis had suggested the freedom-destroying tendencies of business

and job. Also, beginning in 1916 in a number of short stories, Lewis had depicted some of the shady practices and unhealthy tensions in modern commerce. The hero of these stories was an unscrupulous character whom Lewis mockingly named Lancelot Todd, whose particular talent lay in advertising, publicity, and promotion, fields for which Lewis always had the greatest distaste because of the way they were carried to excess in America. In any case, Todd was a prototype of many of the characters in Babbitt. Another preliminary to Babbitt was the short story "A Matter of Business," in which the hero, like George F. Babbitt, has to choose between integrity and profit.[28]

Main Street was just the success that Lewis needed to inspire him to write Babbitt, and the structural solidity and artistic control evident in Babbitt were the byproducts of that success.[29] Lewis had realized, with the critical acclaim and popular reception accorded to Main Street, that the nation was exactly attuned to the kind of social criticism that he was eminently equipped to render. Moreover, Main Street's success had demonstrated to Lewis that he need never again be what he himself called a "facile Post trickster." The critics had agreed on only one real flaw in Main Street, its exterior approach, which stressed type over individual character developement, and in Babbitt, Lewis determined to remove that weakness.[30]

There is no better analysis of Babbitt's character than Lewis' own, which appeared in his letter to his friend and pub-

lisher Harcourt, from Washington, Dec. 28, 1920. This letter also recorded Lewis' hopes and aspirations for the book, which were fully realized, for "Babbitt" became almost immediately a permanent part of America's language and literature:[31]

> It isn't the ambitiousness of Babbitt which is emphasized. He is ambitious, very much so, but "ambition" gives an idea of a man who climbs very high, whereas Babbitt never becomes more than a $10,000-a-year real estate man. He is the typical T.B.M., the man you hear drooling in the Pullman smoker; but having once so seen him, I want utterly to develope him so that he will seem not just typical but an individual. I want the novel to be the G.A.M. in so far as it crystallizes and makes real the Average Capable American. No one has done it, I think; no one has even touched it except Booth Tarkington in Turmoil and Magnificent Ambersons, and he romanticizes away all bigness. Babbitt is a little like Will Kennicott but bigger, with a bigger field to work on, more sensations, more perceptions... . He is all of us Americans at 46, prosperous but worried, wanting-passionately-to seize something more than motor cars and a house before it's too late. Yet, utterly unlike Carol, it never occurs to him that he might live in Europe, might like poetry, might be a senator. He is utterly content to live in and work in the city of Zenith, which is, as everybody knows, the best little ole city in the world. But he would like for once the flare of romantic love, the satisfaction of having left a mark on the city, and a let-up in his constant warring on competitors, and when his beloved friend Riesling commits suicide, [which does not occur in the final version of the book] he suddenly says, "Oh hell, what's the use of the cautious labor to which I've given everything" - only for a little while is he discontented, though... . I want to make Babbitt big in his real-ness, in his relation to all of us, not in the least exceptional, yet dramatic, passionate, struggling.[32]

A further insight into the genesis of Babbitt is revealed in an introduction which Lewis planned for the book but never published. At that stage in the writing, the hero's

name was G. T. Pumphrey, not Babbitt, and the locale was Monarch, not Zenith. More important, however, was Lewis' statement in this introduction that the real location of the story could be any city in the United States except New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, New Orleans, Charleston, Victoria, or San Francisco. The story of Babbitt, Lewis wrote, "is the story of the Ruler of America," or, in other words, the average business man, and yet Lewis claimed that he did not intend the book as a satire or caricature. He wrote: "Distinctly, however, Pumphrey is not a satiric figure nor a type. He is too tragic a tyrant for the puerilities of deliberate satire. And he is an individual." The rest of the introduction was given over to a summary of all that the book attacked: the standardization of American life, America's feeble attempts at culture, its praise for men like Babbitt, the pioneering myth that the nation used to excuse its crudeness, and above all, the terrible sameness and complacency of the American people.[33]

The plot of the novel was simple but effective. As the book opens, Babbitt is a middle-aged real-estate broker, prosperous, confident in his business success, domesticated, and apparently happy with his social life of dull dinner parties, poker games with "the boys," lunch at the Athletic Club, and membership in the Boosters Club. He is proud to live in the fast-growing city of Zenith, the "Zip City," and he delights in the material things with which he can afford to surround

himself, his home, his car, his office. He feels vague symptoms of discontent and he suffers a hidden longing for love, adventure, romance, but he represses all this except in his sleep, when he dreams of a "fairy girl," with whom he undergoes strange and beautiful adventures. This recurrent dream, and his friendship with Paul Riesling, a sensitive and aesthetically inclined man, are the only symbols of romance in Babbitt's life.

After returning with Paul from a summer vacation in Maine, Babbitt begins to achieve recognition as a business man and orator. At the same time he becomes more energetic in religious and civic activities, and he has his finest hour when he is elected vice-president of the Booster's Club. But at the height of his triumph, Babbitt is shocked to learn that Paul Riesling has shot his wife and is in jail, an incident that disturbs Babbitt deeply. Soon after Paul is sentenced to prison, Mrs. Babbitt goes away on a visit, and Babbitt, alone and unhappy, tries unsuccessfully and humiliatingly to flirt with younger girls, affairs which damage his sagging morale even more. When Mrs. Babbitt returns, he tries to find himself by going on another vacation to Maine, only to realize that escape is no solution.

On the train back from Maine, Babbitt meets Seneca Doane, Zenith's "radical" lawyer and defender of the underdog, who inspires Babbitt with a new spirit of liberalism and individuality. But Babbitt finds that his newly acquired non-conformity is irritating to his friends and business associates, and

he suffers a sudden drop in popularity and prestige. Nor does Babbitt help the situation by indulging in an extra-marital romance with an attractive widow, an affair that causes tension between Babbitt and his wife for the first time in their marriage. Babbitt soon begins to be unhappy in his little revolt and wishes he was back in public favor, but at the same time is determined not to yield to social pressure upon him, which has been growing stronger and stronger.

The whole conflict is resolved by the sudden illness of Babbitt's wife. His spirit of rebellion vanishes before his affection and fear for his endangered mate, and he soon finds himself restored to the full esteem of his world. His last act of rebellion is to urge his son, who has just eloped, not to fear public disfavor or be bound by convention, but to do what he wants, as Babbitt himself had never done. And on this optimistic note, the book ends.

Babbitt is introduced to the reader as an example of that characteristic non-productive product of a highly specialized competitive economy, the middleman. His very occupation, in Lewis' opinion, robs him of potential greatness:

> There was nothing of the giant in the aspect of the man who was beginning to awaken on the sleeping porch of a Dutch Colonial house in that residential district of Zenith known as Floral Heights.
> His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forty-six years old now, in April, 1920, and he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay.[34]

But despite this, Babbitt is also a real human being, and Lewis could not help feeling a great deal of affection for him, which becomes more and more evident throughout the novel, especially to the reader of today. However, in its own time, the book was held by critics and public alike to be savage and unrelieved satire.

Like all other humans, Babbitt has his dreams. In them, like all other humans, he finds a release from actuality by projecting himself into a situation containing everything lacking in his real life, love, romance, adventure, freedom:

> For years the fairy child had come to him. Where others saw but Georgie Babbitt, she discovered gallant youth. She waited for him, in the darkness beyond mysterious groves. When at last he could slip away from the crowded house he darted to her. His wife, his clamoring friends sought to follow, but he escaped, the girl fleet beside him; and they crouched together on a shadowy hillside. She was so slim, so white, so eager! She cried that he was gay and valiant, that she would wait for him, that they would sail —
>
> (pp. 2-3)

But in real life, Babbitt has to have recourse to other things for the missing romance, and like so many other Americans, he finds some of that romance in his car:

> To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. The office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion ashore.
>
> (p. 24)

Lewis' more serious concern, however, was with Babbitt as a citizen and business man, for despite the community's recognition of Babbitt as an honest and able real-estate brok-

er, Lewis pointed out that Babbitt's business philosophy, consisting of the belief that "the one purpose of the real-estate business was to make money for George F. Babbitt," (p.42) is somewhat dubious. Moreover, Babbitt, who knows the land-values of almost every part of Zenith, does not know and is not especially interested in architecture, landscaping, or such vital social conditions as police protection, vice control, fire protection, school conditions, sanitation, or the situation in the city's jails. Nor is Babbitt above making money in certain shady deals which are universally accepted as "smart business."

Equally stupid is Babbitt's attitude toward Labor, while his code of social behavior, that of every "good citizen," also leaves much to be desired:

> He advocated, though he did not practise, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised, though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; he paid his debts, he contributed to the church, the Red Cross, and the YMCA; he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only if it was sanctified by precedent.
> (p. 46)

Yet, despite Babbitt's conformity, he often feels a sense of loss, of lack of fulfillment, which he dares admit only to his friend, Paul Riesling:

> "Here I've pretty much done all the things I ought to; supported my family, and got a good house and a six-cylinder car, and built up a nice little business, and I haven't any vices 'specially, except smoking - and I'm practically cutting that out, by the way. And I belong to the church, and play enough golf to keep in trim, and I only associate with good decent fellows. And yet, even so, I don't know that I'm entirely satisfied!
> (pp. 60-61)

er, Lewis pointed out that Babbitt's business philosophy, consisting of the belief that "the one ourpose of the real-estate business was to make money for George F. Babbitt," (p.42) is somewhat dubious. Moreover, Babbitt, who knows the land-values of almost every part of Zenith, does not know and is not especially interested in architecture, landscaping, or such vital social conditions as police protection, vice control, fire protection, school conditions, sanitation, or the situation in the city's jails. Nor is Babbitt above making money in certain shady deals which are universally accepted as "smart business."

Equally stupid is Babbitt's attitude toward Labor, while his code of social behavior, that of every "good citizen," also leaves much to be desired:

> He advocated, though he did not practise, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised, though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; he paid his debts, he contributed to the church, the Red Cross, and the YMCA; he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only if it was sanctified by precedent.
> (p. 46)

Yet, despite Babbitt's conformity, he often feels a sense of loss, of lack of fulfillment, which he dares admit only to his friend, Paul Riesling:

> "Here I've pretty much done all the things I ought to; supoorted my family, and got a good house and a six-cylinder car, and built up a nice little business, and I haven't any vices 'specially, except smoking - and I'm practically cutting that out, by the way. And I belong to the church, and play enough golf to keep in trim, and I only associate with good decent fellows. And yet, even so, I don't know that I'm entirely satisfied!
> (pp. 60-61)

But at this point in the novel, although Babbitt has taken the first step toward revolt by admitting his dissatisfaction, he is too strongly enmeshed in smugness and standardization to make any sudden leap over the wall of convention and respectability. There are too many things holding him down and he has been too long under the influence of conformity to suddenly break loose.

Of all the influences that contribute to rob Babbitt of his individuality, and Lewis meant Babbitt here to represent America, one of the most evil and insidious is the standardizing influence of American advertising:

> Just as he was an Elk, a booster, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce, just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief and the senators who controlled the Republican Party decided in little smoky rooms in Washington what he should think about disarmament, tariff, and Germany, so did the large national advertised wares - toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters - were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.
> (p. 95)

If this last seems a bit extreme, it is interesting to note that American advertising and publicity were two of Sinclair Lewis' pet peeves. He was disgusted by the excesses in these fields and shocked by the vulgarity and blatancy of publicity methods. He saw as a shocking invasion of privacy the device of using the endorsement of prominent people to sell products, a device which he believed led to the encouragement of caste pretensions in a nation already too class-conscious. Lewis also believed, as the above quotation indicates, that advert-

ising had become for Americans a substitute for the missing glamour in their mechanized lives. All these things came into Lewis' novels on many occasions, but were perhaps best summarized in two articles he wrote in 1929: "Publicity Gone Mad," Nation, CXXVIII (March 6, 1929), 278-9; and "Sinclair Lewis Looks at Advertising," Advertising and Selling, XIII (May 15, 1929), 17ff.

Just as typical of modern American life as advertising, Sinclair Lewis saw the element of Speed, Speed that has more than anything else probably resulted in the psychoanalyst's couch replacing the afternoon nap as a national pastime. Lewis chronicled this element in 1922, when it was still in its early stages, and although the reference in this particular instance was to Babbitt, it carried an implicit warning for all mankind:

> As he approached the office he walked faster and faster, muttering, "Guess better hustle." All about him the city was hustling, for hustling's sake. Men in motors were hustling to pass one another in the hustling traffic. Men were hustling to catch trolleys, with another trolley a minute behind, and to leap from the trolleys, to gallop across the sidewalk, to hurl themselves into buildings, into hustling express elevators. Men in dairy lunches were hustling to gulp down the food which cooks had hustled to fry. Men in barber shops were snapping, "Jus' shave me once over. Gotta hustle." Men were feverishly getting rid of visitors in offices adorned with the signs, "This Is My Busy Day" and "The Lord Created the World in Six Days - You Can Spiel All You Got to Say in Six Minutes." Men who had made five thousand, year before last, and ten thousand last year, were urging on nerve-yelping bodies and parched brains so that they might make twenty thousand this year; and the men who had broken down immediately after making their twenty thousand dollars were hustling to catch trains, to

> hustle through the vacations which their hustling doctors had ordered.
> Among them Babbitt hustled back to his office, to sit down with nothing much to do except to see that the staff looked as though they were hustling.
> (pp. 154-5)

Babbitt's speech before the Real Estate Board of Zenith is probably the best summary of what Babbitt is and what he represents. In this classic satiric passage, Lewis summarized Babbitt's ideas and ideals, hopes and fears, prejudices and stupidities. The passage contained Babbitt's pride in his city, Zenith, his identification with the Ideal American Citizen, his complacent belief in America's superiority in everything, his contempt and ignorance of Europe, his fear of criticism and change, his fear of "intellectuals," including teachers, lecturers, and journalists. In short, Sinclair Lewis put everything into Babbitt's speech that he saw strangling American individuality, everything he fought to destroy. The speech was set forth, in the novel, in Lewis' delightfully accurate rendition of the style of the average American business man speaking before a group of his peers. A summary of its ideas follows:

1. Zenith will soon be the 10th largest city in the U.S.

2. Zenith is such a great city because it has so many "Ideal Citizens," all of whom make from $4,000 to $10,000 a year, have a car, and "a nice little family in a bungalow on the edge of town."

3. The Ideal Citizen is a man who wastes no time in idle thinking, but smokes a cigar and lives a nice quiet life with his family. He is invariably right about matters of taste in the arts, and the U.S.A. is, of course, preeminent in the arts.

4. In other countries art and literature are produced by garret-dwellers, but in America the successful artist is like any other business man and has the chance to make $50,000 a year. He should always remember, however, that his success is due to the Regular Guy (the Ideal Citizen).

5. Ideal Citizens all love children.

6. The main difference between business in America and business in Europe is that in Europe the business man is willing to listen to "snobs, journalists, and politicians," while in America the business man is unquestioned ruler.

7. All American cities are magnificent and represent the contrast between American purity and power and foreign ideas and communism. Zenith is the greatest of all American cities because of its zip.

8. The increasing standardization of American life is a wonderful thing because it shows the enduring strength and influence of the Ideal Citizen.

9. Zenith has many notable features, but the real measure of its greatness is the fact that there is one automobile for each five and seven-eigths persons.

10. However, American life faces a dangerous threat from certain people who call themselves "liberals," "radicals," "non-partisan," and "intelligentsia." Teachers and professors form the majority of these snakes and they must be rooted out, because if we pay our teachers, we must demand that they also sell our brand of ideals. We must also fire all the crank professors. Not until we get rid of all such cranks will America be safe.

(pp. 180-8).

It is obvious that Babbitt's speech contained the seeds of the native fascism that Lewis was to describe taking over the country in <u>It Can't Happen Here</u>. And the conclusion to that speech, quoted below, summed up all the forces of reaction which paraded then, and still parade, as patriotism:

> "The ideal of American manhood and culture isn't a lot of cranks sitting around and chewing the rag about their Rights and their Wrongs, but a God-fearing, hustling, successful, two-fisted Regular Guy, who belongs to some church with pep and piety to it, who belongs to the Boosters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or Red Men or Knights of Columbus or any of a score of organizations of good, jolly, kidding, laughing, swearing, upstanding, lend-a-handing Royal Good Fellows, who plays hard and works hard, whose answer to his critics is a square-toed boot that'll teach the grouches and smart-alecs to respect the He-Man and get out and root for Uncle Samuel, U.S.A.!
>
> (p. 188)

As in Main Street Lewis reached a certain height of indignation here in Babbitt which is never again equalled in novel. From this point on, the forces of rebellion which have been quietly gathering in Babbitt for half his lifetime begin to show signs of erupting, as Babbitt begins to become more conscious of the sterility of his life. He examines his religion, his social life, his friendship, and his business, and finds all of them wanting, in his new critical spirit:

> He lay on the sleeping porch and watched the winter sun slide along the taut curtains, turning their ruddy khaki to pale blood red. The shadow of the draw-rope was dense black, in an enticing ripple on the canvas. He found pleasure in the curve of it, sighed as the fading light blurred it. He was conscious of life, and a little sad. With no Vergil Gunches before whom to set his face in resolute optimism, he beheld, and half admitted that he beheld, his way of life as incredibly mechanical. Mechanical religion - a dry, hard church, shut off from the real life of the streets, inhumanly respectable as a top hat. Mechanical golf and dinner-

> parties and bridge and conversation. Save with Paul Riesling, mechanical friendships - back-slapping and jocular, never daring to essay the test of quietness.
> He turned uneasily in bed.
> He saw the years, the brilliant winter days and all the long sweet afternoons which were meant for summery meadows lost in such brittle pretentiousness. He thought of telephoning about leases, of cajoling men he hated, of making business calls and waiting in dirty anterooms - hat on knee, yawning at fly-specked calendars, being polite to office-boys.
> "I don't hardly want to go back to work," he prayed. "I'd like to - I don't know."
> But he was back next day, busy and of doubtful temper.
>
> (p. 234)

Babbitt's actual rebellion seems mild enough. It consists of a flirtation with an attractive widow (the kind of flirtation typical of middle-aged men who become conscious of their waning potency and seek reassurance in extra-marital romance), which Babbitt soon realizes is folly and terminates. His rebellion also consists of certain "liberal" remarks on such touchy subjects as labor unions and religion. These remarks, in combination with Babbitt's irregular behavior, lead his friends to believe that he is heading in a dangerous direction. Like riders whos sense the danger to the herd if too many strays wander away from it, they seek to drive Babbitt back to the group by exerting various business and social pressures on him. In particular, they demand that he join the newly formed "Good Citizen's League," which Babbitt immediately recognizes as a kind of business man's Klu Klux Klan. Babbitt has already been frightened by the repercussions of

his little revolt and wishes he could regain his former good standing, but he has enough courage to resent the attempt to force him into the Good Citizen's League:

> "I know what the League stands for! It stands for the suppression of free speech and free thought and everything else! I don't propose to be bullied and rushed into joining anything, and it isn't a question of whether it's a good league or a bad league or what the hell kind of a league it is; it's just a question of my refusing to be told I got to -"
> (p. 374)

Babbitt, of course, eventually does join the League and does return to all those observances and rituals and opinions that insure his position in the community. But his rebellion has not been in vain, because for the first time in his life he is able to recognize his slavery. Also, for the first time, he is able to look to the future with a vision of freedom rather than that of a larger income; and, like Carol Kennicott, he sees in his child the hope of victory, where he had been defeated:

> "I've never - now for heaven's sake, don't repeat this to your mother, or she'd remove what little hair I've got left, but practically, I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods. Well, maybe you'll carry things on further. I don't know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil! I'll back you. Take your factory job, if you want to. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours!"
> Arms about each other's shoulders, the Babbitt men marched out into the living-room and faced the swooping family. (Babbitt--concluding paragraphs)

Babbitt's brief revolt ended with no material achievement, yet it did not fail because it finally opened Babbitt's eyes to the full realization that he was a slave. Like Carol, like all human beings, Babbitt found the forces of love, habit, family and society too strong to be suddenly overthrown. Finally, like all human beings, he saw his son accomplishing what he had failed to do, assert his individuality and independence. But at least in his revolt Babbitt had learned several important lessons, lessons that Sinclair Lewis wanted to teach all America, and these lessons were:

1. Individualism, once surrendered in exchange for a life of materialistic success in the modern business world, cannot be regained without a complete sacrifice of all the benefits of that success, including wealth, prestige, social position.

2. A life of conformity can be followed only at the cost of repressing all dreams, all visions of freedom, all thoughts of independence. Each man must decide whether conformity's benefits are worth social slavery.

3. The first step toward freedom is the realization of present bondage. If, as for Babbitt, the price of freedom is too high, then the legacy must fall to the young, who can and will redress their fathers' errors.

Babbitt did for the American business man and the American city what Main Street had done for the American small town. That is, it aroused a national uproar only slightly less clamorous than that caused by Main Street. Five cities, Cincinnati, Duluth, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee, announced that they were the originals of Sinclair Lewis' Zenith and proceeded to attack Lewis in their newspapers for his distorted pic-

ture of American life. The amusing part of the situation was that in reality not one of these cities had materially contributed to Lewis' visualization of Zenith.[35] As for Babbitt being distorted, how distorted could it have been if five cities recognized their own images in it? One critical source has neatly summarized the whole matter of Babbitt's impact on the public:

> Babbitt ... was hailed by the Young Intellectuals as their answer to the demands of an older generation for patriotism, business success, and social respectability. Its sales were tremendous; it became a national issue.[36]

By 1920 there were 1800 Kiwanis Clubs in America and 1200 Lions Clubs, and by 1930, Rotary had more than 150,000 members. It was the kind of man that belonged to these groups, the kind of man who preached and practiced blatant, smug, American patriotism-boosterism that Lewis and his fellow intellectuals sought to bring to self-realization,[37] and it was such organizations as Rotary and Kiwanis that raised the loudest cries or indignation.[38] As a whole, the nation appeared to be happy and contented. Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover reigned, and with them mediocrity ruled supreme. The election of Coolidge over LaFollette, symbolizing the triumph of reaction over liberalism, proved that the supremacy of the middle-class business man was no less complete than Lewis chronicled in Babbitt, and Lewis realized that the evil forces that he had attacked in Main Street were creeping malignantly through the streets of America's cities.[39]

Lewis' function in Main Street and Babbitt was not primarily that of a pioneer. Others had said the same things before him, perhaps not as well and not at the right time, but they had been said. Lewis' real importance was to consolidate the gains already made and to serve as a rallying-point for all the liberals and intellectuals who saw the same things he did but lacked his gift of expressing them in such a way that they would be heard by all.[40] In Main Street Lewis had lanced the cyst of the small town for all to see the infection within, and in Zenith, which had progressed materially at least a generation beyond Gopher Prairie, he cut through the veneer of tall buildings, paved streets, and homes equipped with the latest conveniences, to reveal to the nation that neither the quality of human happiness nor the extent of human freedom had advanced one whit.[41] The lessons of Babbitt were written clearly for all: liberalism was not possible for such men as Babbitt who lived in a world in which the Industrial Revolution had utterly replaced the Age of Enlightenment; happiness was possible only through the exercise of the free will of the individual in choosing his own way of life; the materialism of the age was a trap from which there was no escape, once entered, for it demanded the spiritual acquiescence of those who yielded to its temptations.[42] It was the classic fable of King Midas in modern form.

Like Main Street, Babbitt was born of the marriage of Lewis' love for his country and his unquenchable idealism. It

was also Lewis' love for Babbitt and wish to help him save his soul that inspired the book. True, the love was disguised with a cover of satire because Lewis knew that only with satire could he arouse the public's ire and thus their interest, but the love was there, nevertheless.[43] The critics who wrote that Babbitt was unreal, that no such person existed or could exist, would seem to be wrong, considering that the word "Babbitt" immediately became a synonym for just the kind of self-satisfied, middle-class business-man that Lewis portrayed. Moreover, the term is still in current use, more than twenty years after its inception.[44]

Many of Lewis' contemporaries, at any rate, felt the basic reality of Babbitt, whether they admitted it or not. What gave the book and the character its intensity was the hint of the spiritual emptiness in Babbitt's life beneath his bluster and the routine of his daily grind. This sense of lurking tragedy amid the glories of the machine age, this loneliness so common to Lewis' characters and to the human race was an artistic achievement of the highest order.[45] The tragedy and the emptiness were what gave Babbitt his relationship to every American of his time and of today, although it is now becoming obvious that Babbitt was as much a victim as a symbol of Babbittry and that Lewis' picture of Babbittry was more typical of 1922 than it is of the present.[46] In any case, Babbitt was even more necessary to America than Main Street, and it became as firmly a part of the 1920's as the Harding scandals, the Dayton trial, or Calvin Coolidge.[47]

Whatever else Babbitt may have been, he was also Lewis' greatest characterization, for he was one of those rare fictional characters who have such reality that their existence is timeless and universal.[48] For this alone Babbitt deserves and will be awarded a permanent place in American literature. Europeans saw in Babbitt "the representative average American," and were delighted to accept him as such.[49] He has been indispensable as a name, as a symbol, and as a target. He was the best-known fictional character of his time and is still one of the best-known today, and in comparison with some of the other characters who have dominated much of the world in the last twenty-five years, Babbitt does not seem such a bad fellow after all.[50]

There is little doubt that Babbitt was probably the outstanding American social satire of its generation, if not of all American literature.[51] It will continue to be read as literature, and future historians will turn to it for a record of a phase of America in the third decade of this century.

3. Arrowsmith: 1925

Main Street had been a study of rebellion and Babbitt had been a study of conformity. Both books had been consciously satiric in method and evangelistic in purpose, and although at the same time they had been stories of the lives of two people in twentieth century America, they were essentially social documents with the intent of criticism and reform of existing evils. Such was Lewis' mission and as such were the books received by critics and public. At the root of both books was Lewis' idealism, an idealism that refused to tolerate blemishes on his vision of a beautiful, free, progressive America, but where this idealism had been expressed in Main Street and Babbitt in the form of satire and criticism, it appeared once again in pure form in Sinclair Lewis' third consecutive masterpiece, Arrowsmith.

On December 13, 1921, even before the publication of Babbitt, Lewis had written to Harcourt from Rome of his intention to make his next book different. The letter appears in full on page ninety of Smith's edition of Lewis' letters. It is quoted in part here:

> I think I shall make my next novel after Babbitt not satiric at all; rebellious as ever, perhaps, but the central character heroic. I'm already getting gleams for it, I see it as the biggest thing I've tackled.

Lewis was a better prophet than he realized. The novel he planned at this particular time was not at all like Arrowsmith, it was something entirely different, a topic that Lewis was to

attempt again and again for most of his life, with no success. The topic was American labor and the hero of the book, although the initial concept of him was often to be altered, was to be a great labor leader like Eugene Debs.[53]

There are varying accounts of the genesis of Arrowsmith. One source has it that Lewis had gone to Chicago early in 1923 to gather material for his labor novel, where he had met Dr. Paul De Kruif, who was writing some articles on medical topics for Hearsts' Magazine. Lewis and De Kruif were supposed to have met in the office of Dr. Morris Fishbein, then editor of Hygeia, and the two men became friendly at once. Soon after this, De Kruif, Lewis, and Fishbein went out to Elmhurst to see Eugene Debs, who was at a sanatorium there, and the idea for Arrowsmith grew out of the conversation on the long ride back. Then and there Lewis decided to do a medical novel instead of the labor book, and with the promise of De Kruif's collaboration, immediately made plans to go abroad to get the background for the book.[54]

Another version of the same story differs in detail but is essentially similar. In this version, the idea for Arrowsmith is supposed to have grown from a conversation Lewis had one night at the home of one of the editors of the Journal of the American Medical Association. De Kruif was there, and he and the editor were discussing their experiences in some of the medical institutions in the country, showing how difficult it was for a young man to devote himself to pure research

because of petty rivalries, jealousies, politics, and other cheapening influences. Lewis is supposed to have been inspired by this conversation with the idea for a book like Arrowsmith, and to have sketched the preliminary scenario of the novel that same night, again with the promise of De Kruif's help.[55]

Perhaps the most reliable account of how Arrowsmith originated, however, is that of Harrison Smith, in his volume of Lewis' letters. Smith states that it was Lewis' meeting with De Kruif in New York in December, 1922, that stimulated his old idea of a novel with a doctor hero, and that within twenty-four hours of the meeting Lewis had planned a rough outline for the book. Very soon after, in January, 1923, Lewis and De Kruif left for Barbadoes by boat to start the research and background for the plague episode.[56]

In any case, Lewis and De Kruif traveled by boat for several months, visiting many islands in the Caribbean, one of which, San Lucia, they utilized as the scene of the plague. They also found the perfect resemblance for the hero, Martin Arrowsmith, in a dark, serious young man whom they saw in the ship's smoking room.[57] By the time Lewis got to London in April, 1923, he had visited leper asylums, hospitals, dispensaries, and laboratories in the Caribbean, on the Continent, and in England, and he was ready to synthesize the materials he had so painstakingly assembled.[58] De Kruif was the ideal collaborator for Lewis, for he not only understood and appreciated

literary work himself, but was also eminently equipped to supply the scientific and medical background for the book. Like Arrowsmith, De Kruif had studied medicine at a large midwestern university, the University of Michigan, where he later became a member of the faculty. He had served with the U.S. Army as a gangrene expert and had distinguished himself in research in bacteriology and immunology. For two years he had been on the staff of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in New York City, where he had been the associate of such men as Loeb, Carrel, and Northrup, working under the direction of Dr. Simon Flexner.[59] De Kruif was also soon to become known as an author with his Microbe Hunters.

Lewis himself had the perfect environment for a book about medicine, for he was the son of a country doctor in a family in which that profession was almost hereditary. Lewis once did express directly the influence of this factor in his life in the writing of Arrowsmith:

> A small boy whose memory is of being awakened by his father's talking to a patient, down at the door; of catching 3 A.M. phrases: "Where is the pain? Eh? Well, all right, but you ought to have called me earlier, Peritonitis may have set in." A small boy who was permitted to peep at anatomical charts and ponderous medical books in The Office. Then his brother going off to medical school - gossip of classes, of a summer's interneship, of surgery vs. general practice. And behind father and brother, a grandfather and uncle who were also doctors.
> With such a background, the work and ideas of doctors have always been more familiar to me than any others, and when I began to write novels . . . I thought of some day having a doctor hero. Part of

> that ambition was satisfied in Dr. Kennicott of "Main Street," but he was not the chief character, and furthermore I desired to portray a more significant medico than Kennicott - one who could get beneath routine practice into the scientific foundation of medicine - one who should immensely affect all life.[60]

With such a background, it is small wonder that Arrowsmith was such a detailed, authentic book in its portrayal of the medical and scientific career of Dr. Martin Arrowsmith.

Arrowsmith is a book crowded with incident, much more so than either Main Street or Babbitt, and this stemmed from the fact that in it Lewis was more story-teller than social critic. It is the social criticism that gives the book its flavor, but it is the tale of the world of Martin Arrowsmith, a student at the University of Winnemac, who has no ambition other than becoming a doctor, until, in medical school, he meets Professor Max Gottlieb, the brilliant but rather terrifying professor of bacteriology and world-famed scientist. Martin soon falls under the influence of Gottlieb who gives him a vision of the beauty of scientific research and the quest for truth, which becomes for Martin his Holy Grail. But his work suffers when he falls in love with Leora, a student nurse, and when she is called home to North Dakota, Arrowsmith's morale and grades slump badly, causing first his alienation from Gottlieb, and second, his suspension from the university. Not until he marries Leora, despite the objections of her family, and brings her back with him, does Martin graduate from medical school. After his gradua-

tion, he has an exciting year of intern work and then returns to Wheatsylvania, N.D., Leora's home town, as a general practitioner.

In the meantime, Gottlieb has been discharged from the university for his overly progressive ideas and ambitions. He is reduced to accepting a position with a large commercial drug company for awhile, but just as he is on the verge of an important new discovery and is being pressured by his employers to let them monopolize his discovery, he is offered, and gratefully accepts, a position in the McGurk Institute of Biology in New York City, an independent, privately endowed research organization.

Martin, in the interim, has found life in Wheatsylvania, a town even worse than Gopher Prairie, rather trying. Disgusted with the narrow-mindedness of the place, he leaves to take the job of assistant director of public health in the city of Nautilus, Iowa, which is a smaller version of Babbitt's Zenith. His superior there is Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, a flamboyant character who aspires to be the Billy Sunday of public health and who sells public health using the best principles of American salesmanship and promotional advertising. In short, Pickerbaugh is a medical Babbitt, and his popularity leads him to run for Congress and win. Thus, Arrowsmith becomes director of public health and it is not long before his zeal and uncompromising, untactful integrity make him so unpopular that he is forced to resign. His next stop is the

Rouncefield Clinic in Chicago, an expensive medical factory, but he is able to leave when he publishes an important research paper and is invited to join Gottlieb at the McGurk Institute.

McGurk is paradise for Martin, who for the first time in his life is able to devote himself wholly to research. Under the influence of Gottlieb and Terry Wickett, another non-conformist at McGurk, Arrowsmith buries himself in his work and in new fields of study. He soon realizes, however, that even at McGurk there exists cliques and quiet struggles for power which affect him directly when he is urged by Dr. Tubbs, the director, to publish an important new discovery in immunology he has made before it is perfected. Martin refuses and continues his experiments, and just before he is ready to announce his discovery, a foreign scientist publishes the same thing. But Martin continues at his work, the developement of an anti-plague serum, and when the Caribbean island of St. Hubert is beseiged by a plague epidemic, Martin, in company with Leora and Sondelius, a sort of medical crusader, is sent there to test his serum. It is to be a vital experiment, for he is to use his serum on only half of those stricken with plague, so that the efficacy of his discovery can be fully established. But Martin fails to live up to the conditions of the experiment, and when both Leora and Sondelius die of plague, his morale disintegrates. The notes of the experiment are kept by another doctor, but it is Martin who

gets the credit when the plague suddenly ends, and it is he who returns to America to find himself a hero.

On his return Arrowsmith finds that his spiritual guide, Gottlieb, has suffered a complete collapse. It is Terry Wickett who now becomes his conscience and who drives him back to his work. In the meantime Martin has fallen in love with the wealthy Joyce Lanyon, whom he had met on St. Hubert, and they marry. For awhile he is seduced away from research by a life of luxury, but science again begins to claim his time and his marriage is subjected, accordingly, to more and more strain. Arrowsmith finally makes his decision, and he leaves Joyce to go with Terry Wickett to the Vermont Woods in order to completely devote himself to his work. Together, Martin and Terry work and find happiness in the complete abandonment of their personal lives to the quest for truth, as they let the rest of the world go by. So the book ends.

Martin Arrowsmith was more than a fictional character to Lewis. He was the affirmation of an ideal, anda vital part of that ideal was the pioneer tradition reincarnated in the twentieth century version of that tradition, the research scientist. Appropriately, Arrowsmith is a descendent of pioneer stock, and the opening paragraph of the novel contains that spirit of fearlessness that chracterizes Arrowsmith's quest for truth, for his grandmother's courageous rejection of the immediate and practical in order to seek the distant and unknown is exactly parallel with Arrowsmith's own career:[61]

> The driver of the wagon swaying through forest and swamp of the Ohio Wilderness was a ragged girl of fourteen. Her mother they had buried near the Monongahela - the girl herself had heaped with torn sods the grave beside the river of the beautiful name. Her father lay shrinking with fever on the floor of the wagon-box, and about him played her brothers and sisters, dirty brats, tattered brats, hilarious brats.
>
> She halted at the fork in the grassy road, and the sick man quavered, "Emmy, ye better turn down towards Cincinnati. If we could find your Uncle Ed, I guess he'd take us in."
>
> "Nobody ain't going to take us in," she said. "We're going on jus' long as we can. Going West! They's a whole lot of new things I aim to be seeing!" She Cooked the supper, she put the children to bed, and sat by the fire, alone.
>
> That was the great-grandmother of Martin Arrowsmith.[62]

The first important influence on Arrowsmith is Professor Max Gottlieb, a scientific genius, who opens to him the doors of the tortuous and mysterious but thrilling corridor to scientific research. It is in Gottlieb's classes in bacteriology in medical school that Martin first imbibes the heady wine of Gottleb's scientific artistry and cynical philosophy, for Gottlieb is cool and skillful in the presence of death, and his words, as he injects anthrax germs into a guinea pig in a laboratory demonstration, make a profound impression on Arrowsmith:

> "This poor animal will now soon be as dead as Moses . . . Some of you think that it does not matter; some of you will think, like Bernard Shaw, that I am an executioner and the more monstrous because I am cool about it; and some of you will not think at all. This difference in philosophy iss what makes life interesting."
>
> (p. 37)

In sharp contrast to Gottlieb's ruthless scientific objectivity, Arrowsmith perceived the materialism of almost all of the medical school faculty and his fellow students. Compare, for example, this advice from one of the other professors with the Hippocratic Oath:

> "Knowledge is the greatest thing in the medical world but it's no good whatever unless you can sell it, and to do this you must first impress your personality on the people who have the dollars. Whether a patient is a new or an old friend, you must always use salesmanship on him. Explain to him, also to his stricken and anxious family, the hard work and thought you are giving to his case, and so make him feel the good you have done him, or intend to do him, is even greater than the fee you plan to charge. Then, when he gets your bill, he will not misunderstand or kick."
> (p. 87)

But Arrowsmith finds that this sort of philistinism is not confined to medical school, for when he comes to Nautilus, Iowa, he finds that Babbittry rules supreme in the hands of Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, the director of public health, a Dickensian character whose antics border on the incredible.[63] Pickerbaugh's specialty is warring against disease not by clearing out slums but by circulating cute little jingles and slogans which he himself composes; for instance:

> You can't get health,
> By a pussyfoot stealth,
> So let's every health-booster
> Crow just like a rooster.

and:

> Boil the milk bottles or by gum
> You better buy your ticket to Kingdom Come. (p. 204)

Lewis' hatred for this kind of thing was so evident that it assumed what was almost a physical presence in the book. Lewis saw science catering to Babbitt and being degraded by him, and thus Pickerbaugh became a symbol to Arrowsmith and to Lewis of something more than Babbittry in medicine and science. What Pickerbaugh did represent appeared in this passage:

> Gradually Martin's contemplation moved beyond Almus Pickerbaugh to all leaders, of armies or empires, of universities or churches, and he saw that most of them were Pickerbaughs. He preached to himself, as Max Gottlieb had once preached to him, the loyalty of dissent, the faith of being very doubtful, the gospel of not bawling gospels, the wisdom of admitting the probable ignorance of one's self and of everybody else, and the energetic acceleration of a Movement for going very slow.
>
> (p. 237)

In other words what Lewis was trying to say here was that science must not be measured in terms of material success nor should it be left in the hands of the Pickerbaughs. The passage also suggests a justification for dissent, one of the many such scattered all through Sinclair Lewis' work.

It is not until Arrowsmith comes to the McGurk Institute that he finds his true religion, the religion that embodies the idealism at the root of the book and that is the most important element in it. This religion is revealed in its entirety to Martin by Gottlieb, and it represented not only everything that Gottlieb symbolized, but also everything that Lewis visualized as good, noble, and true in science (which, in the writing of <u>Arrowsmith</u>, he made synonymous with

his own ideals). The critics who have called Sinclair Lewis a pessimist could not have read this vital passage in Arrowsmith, for it contains some of the most optimistic and idealistic utterances ever made by an American writer on what has been in this century mankind's greatest benefactor, the scientist. Lewis spoke here in the person of Max Gottlieb, the character who was the example of his own words:

> "To be a scientist - it is not just a different job . . . It is a tangle of very obscure emotions, like mysticism, or wanting to write poetry; it makes its victim all different from the good normal man. The normal man, he does not care what he does except that he should eat and sleep and make love. But the scientist is intensely religious - he is so religious that he will not accept quarter-truths, because they are an insult to his faith.
>
> "He wants that everything should be subject to inexorable laws. He is equally opposed to the capitalists who t'ink their silly money-grubbing is a system, and to liberals who t'ink man is not a fighting animal; he takes both the American booster and the European aristocrat, and he ignores all their blithering. Ignores it! All of it! He hates the preachers who talk their fables, but he iss not too kindly to the anthropologists and historians who can only make guesses, yet they have the nerf to call themselves scientists! Oh, yes, he is a man that all nice good-natured people should naturally hate!
>
> "He speaks no meaner of the ridiculous faith-healers and chiropractors than he does of the doctors that want to snatch our science before it is tested and rush around hoping they heal people, and spoiling all the clues with their footsteps; and worse than the men like hogs, worse than the imbeciles who have not even heard of science, he hates pseudo-scientists, guess-scientists - like these psycho-analysts; and worse than those comic dream-scientists he hates the men that are allowed in a clean kingdom like biology but know only one text-book and how to lecture to nincompoops all so popular! He is the only real revolutionary, the authentic scientist, because he alone knows how liddle he knows.

"He must be heartless. He lives in a cold, clear light. Yet dis is a funny t'ing: really, in private, he is not cold nor heartless - so much less cold than the Professional Optimists. The world has always been ruled by the Philanthropists: by the doctors that want to use the therapeutic methods they do not understand, by the soldiers that want something to defend their country against, by the preachers that try to make everybody listen to them, by the kind manufacturers that love their workers, by the eloquent statesmen and soft-hearted authors - and see what a fine mess of hell they haf made of the world! Maybe now it is time for the scientist, who works and searches and never goes around howling how he loves everybody!

"But once again always remember that not all the men who work at science are scientists. So few! The rest- secretaries, press-agents, camp-followers! To be a scientist is like being a Goethe: it is born in you. Sometimes I t'ink you have a little of it born in you. If you haf, there is only one t'ing - no, there is two t'ings you must do: work twice as hard as you can, and keep people from using you. I will try to protect you from Success. It is all I can do. So...I should wish, Martin, that you will be very happy here. May Koch bless you!"

And Arrowsmith, to whom all this is addressed, is moved to utter this prayer, the prayer of the scientist:

"God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness whereby I may neither sleep nor accept praise till my observed results equal my calculated results or in pious glee I discover and assault my error. God give me strength not to trust to God!"

(p. 291)

But even the McGurk Institute is not free from the materialism that has haunted Arrowsmith from the beginning of his career. Martin finds, as he is about to make a really big discovery, that the spectre of success also invades the laboratory, for the Director of the Institute would have him

publish his findings so as to bring fame to the organization, even though the results of the experiment are not yet complete:

> "Now, Martin, you must hasten and publish your results. Get right to it. In fact you should have done it before this. Throw your material together as rapidly as possible . . . ."
> "But I'm not ready to publish! I want to have every loophole plugged up before I announce anything whatever!"
> "Nonsense! That attitude is old-fashioned. This is no longer an age of parochialism but of competition, in art and science just as much as in commerce - cooperation with your own group, but with those outside it, competition to the death! Plug up the holes thoroughly, later, but we can't have somebody else stealing a march on us. Remember you have your name to make."
> (p. 335)

The great trial of Arrowsmith's life is the episode of the plague on St. Hubert's Island. He is sent by Gottlieb to try his new serum on the plague there, and before he goes, Gottlieb warns him to beware of the temptation of humanitarianism. Martin must reain aloof and objective, and if necessary, sacrifice the lives of thousands now so as to save the lives of millions in the future (almost a prophecy of the Atom Bomb). Once again the issue of the pioneer arises: the immediate versus the eternal, the practical versus the idealistic. Lewis summarized the whole matter in Gottlieb's parting words to Arrowsmith:

> "Be sure you do not let anything, not even your own good kind heart, spoil your experiment at St. Hubert. I do not make funnies about humanitarism as I used to; sometimes now I t'ink the vulgar

> and contentious human race may yet have as much grace and good taste as the cats. But if this is to be, there must be knowledge. So many men, Martin, are kind and neighborly; so few have added to the knowledge. You have the chance!"

But the death of his wife Leora and his friend Sondelius break Martin down, and he fails to carry out the strict conditions of the experiment. Yet, ironically, he is hailed as a hero.

There is one more temptation left to Arrowsmith's lot, and this is his marriage with the alluring and wealthy Joyce Lanyon. For awhile he succumbs to luxury, but soon the call of science claims him again, and in a last, complete gesture of defiance, Arrowsmith leaves his palatial home, his beautiful wife, and his young son to go off to the woods with Terry Wickett for a monkish life of research, away from civilization's temptations. In the last few paragraph of the book Lewis clearly contrasted "success" and "failure," rebellion and conformity, showing how the pseudo-scientists prosper and concluding, it seems, that the true scientists must work alone and in isolation from the world:

> On a certain evening of May, Congressman Almus Pickerbaugh was dining with the President of the United States.
>
> "When the campaign is over, Doctor," said the President, "I hope we shall see you a cabinet-member - the first Secretary of Health and Eugenics in the Country!"
>
> That evening, Dr. Rippleton Holabird was addressing a meeting of celebrated thinkers, assembled by the League of Cultural Agencies. Among the Men of Measured Merriment on the platform were Dr. Aaron Sholtheis, the new Director

> of McGurk Institute, and Dr. Angus Duer, head of the Duer Clinic and professor of surgery in Fort Dear born Medical College.
>
> Dr. Holabird's epochal address was being broadcast by radio to a million ardently listening lovers of science .....
>
> That evening, Martin Arrowsmith and Terry Wickett lolled in a clumsy boat, an extraordinarily uncomfortable boat, far out on the water.
>
> "I feel as if I were really beginning to work now," said Martin. "This new quinine stuff may prove pretty good. We'll plug along on it for two or three years, and maybe we'll get something permanent - and probably we'll fail!"
>
> (pp. 463-4)

Despite this seemingly pessimistic conclusion, Arrowsmith represented the first complete victory of a Lewis hero over the Village Virus and the materialism, conformity, and philistinism that had threatened to enslave all of those other heroes and heroines beginning with Mr. Wrenn.[64] As one critic has pointed out, it is partially true that Arrowsmith's failure in Wheatsylvania and Nautilus does not lead him to an examination of the causes of that failure, but rather into a rejection of the cause of public welfare.[65] However, that critic fails to note that Arrowsmith is neither discouraged nor defeated by his failure, and his preference for research is neither an admission of his own weakness nor of his inability to cope with the hostility of the very people he tries to help, but is rather a return to the deeper causes of all disease everywhere, unhindered by society's interference. Thus, Arrowsmith gives up his public health work more from a love of mankind and a want to help it rather than from a hatred of its opposition to him. The blame for his

failure to reform and improve public health in Wheatsylvania and Nautilus falls not upon him but on a public too stupid to realize where its own good lies and too blind to distinguish a crusade from an inconvenience. This was Lewis' indictment in Arrowsmith, as it had been in Main Street.

In any case, Martin's refusal to succumb to the temptations of success and luxury mark him as a true crusading hero. Like all of Sinclair Lewis' other heroes, he seeks for a complete life in a barbarous America[66] and can find it, ironically, only in a return to those same conditions of removal from civilization that the Transcendentalists had urged as the milieu for accomplishment and contemplation almost a century before.[67] Again, ironically, what is success to Arrowsmith? A shack in the woods for the pursuit of science, considered failure by the rest of the world, including the scientific and medical world, who measure success in terms of money, acclaim, position. This is but one of the morals that Lewis made in the novel,[68] and a part of the one great moral and criticism that he intended: that the Golden Calf has been established as a false god even in the halls of science and learning in America: that the Golden Calf is a jealous god, exiling those who do not worship it: that the priests of the Golden Calf are the Men of Measured Merriment, the materialistic doctors, the medical and scientific

Babbitts, the pseudo-scientists: that the only escape from the worship of the Golden Calf is a complete withdrawal from the demands of fame, success, and financial reward.

Arrowsmith's triumph over the Golden Calf follows the classic solution of all of Lewis' successful rebels, escape. Many critics have noted, with some justification, that Arrowsmith's solution may be suitable for him but impracticable for the rest of society, who are unable to go off to the woods to declare their independence.[69] However, such an interpretation is valid only on the literal level and precludes any symbolic interpretation of Arrowsmith's escape. What Lewis suggested by Arrowsmith's withdrawal from civilization was simply a refusal by the individual to be bound by conventional social codes, mores, or patterns of behavior. It parallels Lewis' own constant traveling back and forth from Europe and in America all through his life, and, on another level, it is the close parallel of the characters in the novels of such "Lost Generation" writers as Fitzgerald and Hemingway, who found their escape in good times, food, sex, drink, travel. Finally, Arrowsmith's escape is related to the two week summer vacation of the humblest clerk, or any other person who changes his environment in an attempt to "get away from it all." Arrowsmith's escape was the supreme proof of Lewis' idealism and optimism - it demonstrated for once and for all that a man, had he sufficient strength of will and devotion to an ideal, could find happiness. This

assumption, that an ideal could be attained, that happiness could be found, is as typical of the nation as its Declaration of Independence in which that ideal was stated. It was irrevocable proof that in this way the book Arrowsmith, and its author Sinclair Lewis, represented the very essence of American idealism.[70]

Lewis' social criticism and satire in Arrowsmith was only a continuation of what he had already said in Main Street and Babbitt. There were no new indictments, since exactly the same forces that sought to oppress Carol Kennicott and Babbitt are encountered by Martin Arrowsmith. There was, however, one new criticism in Arrowsmith, and this was the criticsm which implied that American medicine and science was so dominated by materialism, pseudo-scientists, and charlatans seeking success before truth that the quest for pure science and the search for truth could be carried on only if they were removed from society's corrupting influence. It was perhaps this implicit conclusion, interpreted literally, that led hostile critics to call Lewis a pessimist.[71]

Despite the importance of its message, Arrowsmith will live as a great novel rather than as a tract for the times. With that book, Lewis proved that he could attain financial success and keep working.[72] The significance of this fact is obvious, for of all his heroes thus far, Lewis identified himself most closely with Arrowsmith. That he pictured himself as a crusading literary truth-seeker, just as Arrowsmith was

pictured as a crusading scientific truth-seeker is an assumption needing little proof. With Arrowsmith, Lewis also proved that his vogue as a novelist was not due entirely to a "success de scandal," as many had claimed, nor entirely to the factor of timeliness, for the novel, as timely as it was, did not have the peculiarly explosive effect of Main Street or Babbitt.[73]

A great part of the merit of Arrowsmith as a work of fiction were the characters of Leora and Max Gottlieb.[74] What these characters represented to Lewis is best expressed in his own words:

> There is really no Sinclair Lewis about whom even that diligent scribbler himself could write, outside of what appears in his characters. All of his respect for learning, for integrity, for accuracy, and for the possiblities of human achievement are to be found not in the rather hectic and exaggerated man as his intimates see him, but in his portrait of Professor Max Gottlieb in Arrowsmith. Most of the fellow's capacity for loyalty to love and friendship has gone into Leora in the same novel.[75]

Leora, then, was a descendant of such a classic literary character as the Constant Wife, and in Lewis' work she was related to all of his faithful, loving, long-suffering, quietly enduring wives. Almost every reviewer of the novel praised her and admired Lewis' characterization of her.

What Max Gottlieb represented has already been suggested. He, Arrowsmith, and Terry Wickett are a trio of the strongest and most successful rebels in all of Lewis' writing. As one scholar noted, Gottlieb exemplified the pervading faith

of the novel, and he stands as a worthy antagonist indeed to the scientific Babbitts.[76] For Lewis, then, Max Gottlieb represented pure science and pure truth in an age in which he saw very little of anything that was pure.[77]

The idealism of Arrowsmith came like a refreshing breeze after the heavy weight of the satire and social criticism in Main Street and Babbitt. However, Lewis was soon to return to satire in another novel, Elmer Gantry, which stands alone in his writing as the only completely pessimistic book he ever wrote. But before that, he was to engage himself in a literary controversy, a political campaign, and a novel which returned to the theme and style of the popular-fiction romance typical of his early work.

4. Politics and the Artist in America: 1924-25

Lewis returned to America in the spring of 1924 after a year and a half in Europe (where he had written Arrowsmith), and immediately entered the presidential campaign between Coolidge and La Follette as a strong supporter of La Follette. In a series of articles written for the Nation in the summer and fall of 1924, Lewis not only warmly defended La Follette's candidacy but also issued a great many pronouncements about America which were of considerable interest.

In his first article for the Nation, "I Return to America," Lewis declared his antipathy to Coolidge and everything he represented, and also attacked America for its lack of curiosity in one of its most vital areas, politics.[78] The main theme of this article was the protest that only two groups in America displayed an active political concern:

1. The "professionals," such as office seekers, journalists, reformers, bankers, and manufacturers, who want to dominate politics.

2. The "hot-stove" group arguers (or club-table arguers) who do not have any real interest or influence but discuss politics under the rule of never saying anything new or anything that does not have a standard, pointless answer.

Lewis went on to declare that he had heard so much about American politics in his stay in Europe that he had returned expecting to find everyone here deeply attentive to the matter of their own political welfare, but instead had found the main topic of conversation to be the procurement of "bootleg" liquor.

Sinclair Lewis' own reflections on returning to America were on a more serious level, however. In his own words, this is what he rediscovered in coming back home:

> Just how appallingly high the high buildings are. In Paris or Rome or Madrid, the buildings are forgotten in the liveliness of the human stream; in New York the streets are deep and intimidating grooves in which the people are vermin; in the department stores a shopper is but an animal in the cattle-pen, insufferably robbed of dignity ... . The young women, so pretty, so well-dressed, so hard of eye ... . The men, everywhere, who speak in unchanging voices of heavy and pompous brassiness, and contemptuously roll in the corners of their mouths cigars of a curious ugliness ... . But also the friendliness, the hope, and the quicker minds ... . A group at lunch - Mencken, Hergesheimer, De Kruif, Nathan: as distinguished as any group of writers under the age of fifty-five to be found in Europe, as scholarly and deft, and beyond belief more vigouous, direct, merry, free from attitudinizing.
> Everywhere, indeed, a battle - except in politics![79]

In contrast to this last, Lewis noted, was the situation in England, where there was a lively interest in politics on all social levels to the extent that not even friendly gatherings were complete without a spirited political discussion.

All of Lewis' hopes and fears for the coming years in America were summed up in the conclusion to his article. This section, quoted below, is one more evidence of Lewis' love for his native land and further testimony that Sinclair Lewis could be an eloquent and far-sighted social critic outside the pages of his novels:

> Here in this world-dominating United States, to which all of Europe is looking with wistfulness or with fear, in this country which unquestionably can do what it likes with all other nations, we do

> not rule ourselves. We, the plain people ... have not only handed the mastery over to a group of inconceivably unintelligent salesmen, but decline even to care how they control us. We like it! We say, "Well, he may not be anything at all, but at least he isn't a radical!"
> And to the returned and melancholy pilgrim comes a growing fear which he cannot define. If this year again the delegates in the conventions and the voters back home let themselves be swallowed in mush (but the mush is not ladled out by mushy men; their jaws are hard and their eyes cold); if this year again the few persons who protest against our drifting into supreme mediocrity are dismissed as cranks and parlor socialists and answered only, "Ah, gwan back to Europe," then he will see no reason to hope that anything save a monstrous calamity will lift us out of our fat and cigar-chewing indifference.[80]

After vacationing in Canada for the summer, Lewis returned to his political campaigning and in his next article for the Nation, in the early fall of 1924, he revisited the fictional scene of his first literary triumph, Gopher Prairie. The article was written as a series of interviews with characters made famous in Main Street, primarily Will Kennicott, for Carol was depicted as tired and no longer interested in reform. As might be expected, Kennicott is for Coolidge, but not blindly so. He admits La Follette's virtues and value as a man of action but opposes him for exactly that reason. The time is not ripe for a doer, Kennicott claims, but for a safe, tried, true, dumb president - Coolidge. Thus, as in Main Street, Will represents the town, and as wrong as Lewis shows both Kennicott and Gopher Prairie to be, they are also a force not to be underestimated.

When Lewis has left Will he goes to interview Guy Pollock, who is now the only rebel left in town. Pollock has gained in stature considerably since Main Street, and it is he, not Carol, who expresses in the article Lewis' continuing dissatisfaction with Gopher Prairie. The rebels, Guy states, have either gone away or grown staid. There are no more pioneers and pettiness is creeping over Gopher Prairie like a disease.[81] But, as always, Lewis' rebels conclude on a note of expectancy, just as Guy did in the article: "We've been bullied too long by the Doc Kennicotts and by the beautiful big ballon tires that roll over the new pavement on Main Street - and over our souls!"[82] The conclusion is, of course, that Guy Pollock will vote for La Follette, even if he is the only one in Gopher Prairie to do so.

Lewis' next three articles, the last of which was written almost on the eve of the election, were set in Zenith, and were again devoted to interviews with fictional characters, this time those created in Babbitt. These articles summarized the basic principles at stake in the campaign and, like the Main Street essay, revealed that Babbitt and his kind had not yet changed for the better. Lewis' first interview was, as might be expected, with George F. Babbitt, who was, as might be expected, an ardent Coolidge supporter. Babbitt's reasons for his choice are exactly those of all the other Coolidge boosters interviewed in all these articles, for Babbitt, like the others, defends Coolidge as a "man who takes his time to

make up his mind to weigh all sides of the question and not go off half-cocked." This remark of Babbitt's is typical of him and of the broad satire Lewis used whenever anything was said about Coolidge. Not once, in all the mythical interviews of Coolidge backers, was anything added to this statement of Babbitt's.

However, Lewis' interview with Babbitt is not confined to politics, for Babbitt has traveled to Europe and has quite a bit to say about his trip, all nonsense. His complaints about Europe were intended by Lewis to symbolize the stupidity of the mass of American tourists whom Lewis had observed abroad, as is apparent from this summary of Babbitt's remarks:

1. Europeans don't understand Americans because they are all jealous of Americans and don't keep an open mind like Americans do.

2. Europe is old-fashioned and conservative, has no sky-scrapers, is unfriendly, doesn't understand good American speech of jokes, and has inferior food.

3. "Europe is picturesque and quaint and historical and all that, but it's a gone goose; it hasn't got any pep."[84]

The article ended with a long speech by Babbitt praising Coolidge and attacking La Follette as a dangerous man who associates with foreigners, who, as everyone knows, are all roues and radicals - a speech which would have been amusing had Lewis not indicated that this was the opinion of America's business men and bourgeois, of whom Babbitt is representative.

In contrast to Babbitt's stupidity were the opinions of Paul Riesling, Babbitt's liberal friend, in the second of this series of essays. It is Riesling who keenly analyzes Babbitt and suggests Lewis' mingled feelings about him:

> "He has all the reasoning of a child of eight. He is the real majority-rule Democrat - he repeats whatever he hears the majority of his friends in the Zenith Athletic Club and the Boosters Club saying. And at the same time he's one of the kindest, most loyal, most trustworthy friends a man could have."[85]

And it is Paul who expresses Lewis' own feelings in regard to La Follette:

> "It seems to me La Follette is almost the first presidential candidate since Lincoln (the first with a chance to win - that's why I leave out Debs) who has had greatness, who has combined a desire to let human life be free and happy with a hard, solid, practical, food-raising competence."[86]

Paul ends the interview by reviewing Babbitt's recent trip to Europe, on which he accompanied Babbitt, but his conclusions are the opposite of Babbitt's and again an exact parallel of Lewis', for Paul found peace in Europe and discovered it to be a place "where people would rather have ease and laughter than facilities for parking flivvers."[87]

Lewis' last political article consisted of interviews both with minor characters from Babbitt (e.g., Virgil Gunch, Seneca Doane) and with several new characters. Some are for Coolidge but of course the really admirable and intelligent ones support La Follette. In general, however, this concluding article in Lewis'campaign series for the Nation was little more than a summary of what had already been written.

It is not surprising that Sinclair Lewis devoted so much energy to these political essays, because to Lewis, Coolidge represented the lust for dull, conservative security and preservation of the status quo that he saw threatening to destroy every progressive impulse in America. Lewis saw La Follette, on the other hand, as a man who smybolized the saving forces in the nation - not nihilistic radicalism - but intelligent reform, individualism, progress. It is notable in these articles and typical of Lewis' satiric technique that most of Coolidge's strength was in the support of such slave-men as Babbitt, while the intelligentsia like Pollock and Riesling were for La Follette.

But the sad fact was that Coolidge won the election, a fact which is enough to justify most of Lewis' attack on America and its Babbitts in these articles. The Crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930's were logical outcomes of America's dominance in the 1920's by the Babbitts and the Coolidges. Here, as in other cases, history proved Sinclair Lewis to be a profound social commentator and prophet.

Lewis' comments on America did not cease with his articles on the presidential campaign, for it was about this time that he began to appear more and more in the public eye as a celebrity and social critic outside the pages of his books. Not only did his articles and essays in newspapers and periodicals attract attention, but also his words and deeds, reported by men who sensed that Sinclair Lewis was very often

"hot copy." For example, in another article written for the Nation the year after the election, Lewis turned to examine the anti-German attitude still existing in America, an attitude which Lewis saw still maintained the senseless, undiscrimminating hatred of everything German which had arisen during World War I.[88] Nor was this the first time that he had attacked this prejudice, for he had already noted it in Arrowsmith, as it affected the proud Max Gottlieb:

> What struck down this man to whom abstractions and scientific laws were more than kindly flesh was the mania of hate which overcame the unmilitaristic America to which he had migrated in protest against Junkerdom.
> Incredulously he perceived women asserting that all Germans were baby-killers, universities barring the language of Heine, orchestras outlawing the music of Beethoven.[89]

By far the most important article which Lewis wrote at this time, however, appeared in the American Mercury in 1925. It was titled "Self-Conscious America," and in it Lewis examined a vital and timely topic, the status of the artist in America.[90] The main theme of the article was that America imposed a self-consciousness upon its artists that had the effect of a civic duty, something unique in the civilized world. America does not let its artists be themselves as artists or human beings, Lewis stated, but insists that they play one role or another, and then, perversely, criticizes whatever role the artists may assume. From this point Lewis went on to

discuss America's expatriate artists, the matter of propaganda in literature, the contemporary literature of other nations, and concluded with an attack on America for its exaggeration in all things.

Lewis began by stating that the artist has always been a bit of a poseur, and added: "But nowhere save in America would it occur to the most pompous author or painter or musician that he must be self-conscious as a civic duty." American artists, Lewis maintained, know that they must yield to public approval in everything they do and that the public expects this obeisance: "In America alone does the fiction-writer or the sculptor or anyone else have a duty - a Duty - of being naughty or austere, documentary or frivolous."[91] Lewis also asserted that American writers must write as a civic duty, and not because they enjoy it:

> He may not write a flippant chronicle of a village, a church, or the diabetic institution of matrimony because it interests him to write thus, but only because he is Revealing Conditions and Making People Stop and Think. . . . Whatever he does, he must be original, forceful, and defiant of criticism, and with these bold virtues he must combine a willingness to heed every warning from each . . . who by their residence in the United States are automatically constituted the equals not only of kings but of William Lyon Phelps.[92]

After an attack on various unnamed critics for judging by arbitrary and uncoordinated standards, Lewis turned his satiric pen to the expatriates and their hangers-on who frequented the Paris Cafes, especially the Dome. Essentially, this part of the article was another indication of Lewis' antipathy for

"Hobohemians," a factor which had been frequent in Lewis' early work. However, he was able to show that the Parisian expatriate coteries were more than just a personal grudge but were further evidence of his thesis, the self-consciousness of the American artist:

> Nowhere in America itself is this duty-ridden earnestness of the artist and his disciples so well shown as at that Brevoort and cathedral of American sophistication, the Cafe Dome in Paris. It is, in fact, the perfectly standardized place to which standardized rebels flee from the crushing standardization of America.[93]

Nor was Lewis content in the article until he had, in his best satiric manner, completely defamed and ridiculed these expatriates.

The next group to feel the whip were the popular writers, Babbitts all, interested only in money, fame, and luxury - according to Sinclair Lewis. In his opinion, the popular writers were equally as self-conscious and egocentric as the coterie writers, perhaps even more. Unfortunately, he concluded, Americans were the only folk who had the unhappy task of choosing between the ridiculous extreme of coterie and popular literature, with no happy medium.

At this point, Lewis considered literature as a whole. His first premise was that the entire American concept of what is permissible in literature could have no solid foundation because of the lack of an official critical authority here which would dictate literary standards. In relation to this Lewis went on to discuss the issue of propaganda in

literature, and concluded that all literature contained propaganda, consciously or unconsciously (it is obvious how this belief bears on Lewis' own career). Yet, he conceded that even such conscious propagandists as Upton Sinclair in The Jungle, and himself, in Main Street, were ineffectual against the "mass of smug human stupidity which keeps the world uncivilized."[94] Furthermore, Lewis declared, there is no literature of any kind which does not deserve creation, providing the author enjoys creating it. As proof, he offered the names of some of the world's greatest writers who at one time or another had produced works of a "disreputable" literary genre, for example: Homer, Cervantes, Virgil, Swift, Twain, Melville, Kipling, Stevenson, Hardy, Wells, and others, had written adventure stories, while Balzac, Zola, Fielding, Bennet, etc., had written of common life. Finally, one of the best-known characters in all literature, Sherlock Holmes, was a product of the detective story. "Write what you want," was Lewis' moral, even in America, the land where the most difficult thing to do is what a person wants:

> Solemnly to counsel authors that they write as they wish seems as puerile and platitudinous and absurd as to quote "Honesty is the best policy." Anywhere in Europe it would be absurd. But in a country where everyone from the newest reporter on the Kalamazoo newspaper to the most venerable professors at Harvard, from the Oklahoma clergy to the more scholarly movie actors, is replete with holy alarms for all contemporary authors, there is no gospel more novel - or more repulsive to Americans, the most self-conscious and exaggerated people in the world.[95]

In the concluding section of the article, Lewis returned to his most abiding interest, the American national character, and proceeded to psychoanalyze that character (whose inconsistencies Lewis found as baffling as those in his own nature). He first examined the aspect of American self-consciousness that so fascinated him and made some conclusions about its sources:

> Americans are the most self-conscious, the most neurotic, the most aesthetic, the most stubbornly unaesthetic, and incomparably the most interesting tribe living, and next to them come the Britishers and Germans.
>
> Our self-consciousness proceeds from the most important of all American traits: the tendency to exaggerate in every department of thought and conduct, which in turn comes from our hot-house growth, our lack of slowly matured traditions, partly from our hybrid and contradictory stocks, and partly from the sentimentality which afflicts all Northern people as weather drives them from the reality of out-doors to the brooding unrealities of the hearth and candlelight.[96]

After a brief discussion of the exaggerations in the British, French, German, Italian, and Russian national characters, Lewis returned to his main assertion that Americans are the most exaggerated of all and documented it by references to American life, whose phases listed below he found particularly revealing of exaggeration:

1. The frantic pursuit and spending of money.

2. The fight of Prohibitionists against whiskey, and the resulting onslaught of the multitudes on that very forbidden whiskey.

3. The extreme conservatism of American Tories.

4. The expression of American equalitarian democracy through a national rudeness of manners, which immigrants here learn instead of self-respect.

5. The odd tastes and desires, subject to frequent change, of American youth.

6. The love of Americans for fast cars which they will never drive fast.

7. Poker games which must last all night.

8. American philosophy.

9. American mail-order education.

But despite this apparent ridicule of his country, Lewis ended his article on a typically hopeful note and a declaration of pride in America, with all its faults:

> And there are idiots who will consider this philosophic inquiry an attack on our fair land! Actually, to say that we are the most neurotic, most self-conscious folk in the world is to say that our provincial days of sockless statesmen, merchant princes pompous in broadcloth, and oratorical second-rate lawyers are over; that we are feverish with the pursuit of every wisdom and every agreeable silliness; and that overnight without even perceiving it, we are changing from the world's dusty wheatfield to the world's hectic but incomparably fascinating capitol.[97]

One other article written by Lewis before his next novel, Mantrap, deserves brief mention. It appeared in the Nation late in 1925, and it was concerned with a subject already mentioned in "Self-Conscious America." The title of this essay, "Can An Artist Live in America," was also its entire topic, and Lewis' conclusion was that it is unimportant to a writer where he lives, so long as he is free to write as he wishes.[98] His conclusion was certainly true for

himself, at least, for his career shows that he could write in almost any locale, either in America or abroad.

Taken as a whole, Sinclair Lewis' articles in this period were another battle in his life-long campaign for individualism in America. In the political articles he attacked Coolidge because he saw him as a living example of Babbittry and as one more threat to the already dangerous reactionary forces in this country. Nor was Lewis without foundation for his fears about Coolidge, for under the satiric tone there was apparent a real fear for America's future and a firm grasp of the issues involved in the presidential campaign. In an age when many of America's best writers chose to remove themselves completely from the issues and events in the national scene, Lewis chose to involve himself in them and take an active part in fighting for what he believed. He had returned to America with a fresh objectivity and a new insight into the factors that were shaping the country's destiny in those years, and, as ever, he was not afraid to speak his mind in America's behalf.

"Self-Conscious America" was proof of Sinclair Lewis' recognition of the vital matter of the relationship of the artist to his native land. His complaint, that America coerced its artists into leading unnatural lives should not have been surprising to anyone who knew the facts of Lewis' own Minnesota boyhood, where Lewis first developed the feeling common to our artists that they are not appreciated or

understood. Also, he broadened his attack in this essay to include not only the public but the critics, whom Lewis condemned for their arbitrary and frivolous standards. There was only one way for the artist to find fulfilment, Lewis declared, and that was to ignore the critics, ignore the public, ignore the coterie writers and ignore the popular writers, and do what he alone wanted to do. It was a lesson Lewis had learned himself, and it was a code of conduct that he himself followed with conspicuous success.

In short, the essay was a demand for the artist to seek his own happiness, and as such it was an extension of Sinclair Lewis' classic plea; in this case, of special significance to the artist because of all Americans he was the most subject to the public will and thus needed more strength to declare his independence from that will. Five years later in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Lewis was to draw worldwide attention to many of the same statements he had already made in "Self-Conscious America," statements in a different context and form perhaps, but containing essentially the same elements of wisdom.

5. Mantrap: 1926

As if to demonstrate that he practiced what he preached, Lewis returned, in the novel Mantrap published in 1926, to the themes of romance and adventure of his early work. He had spent the summer of 1924 with his brother Claude vacationing in the woods of northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and Mantrap was based on some of Lewis' experiences on that trip.[99]

The story concerns a New York lawyer, Ralph Prescott, who goes to Canada on a camping trip to escape from the pressures of city and business. In the Canadian wilds he becomes friendly with a trader, Joe Easter, and with the trader's wife, Alverna. Alverna follows Prescott when he leaves to rejoin his camping expedition and persuades him to take her with him to the city. They are marooned by their Indian guide and together avert such disasters as starvation and forest fire, only to have Alverna's husband catch up with them. He is quite calm about the whole affair and accompanies them to Winnipeg. There, Alverna is put on a train and sent back to her home town, while Ralph tries to persuade Joe to go with him to New York. But, at the last minute, Joe decides to remain in Canada and live his rustic way of life, as in the past.

The book is actually a little better than it sounds, and at its best is about on the level of a good Saturday Evening Post story. It is almost entirely romance and adventure,

with an occasional flash of Lewisian satire. As social criticism it has small importance, and its entire serious content may be summarized thus:

1. It pokes mild fun at the behavior of the American businessman in the woods, his "roughing it," etc.

2. It shows just how dull life in the wilderness can be, especially to people like Alverna and Ralph, who have lived in the city.

3. It mocks the traditional legend of the tenderfoot who becomes superman after a week on the trail, although the hero, Ralph Prescott, does become much more sturdy a character by the end of the novel.

However, Mantrap is interesting from another point of view, for it is only the first of several such books which Lewis wrote at various times in his career books which at first seemed to be a complete, unhappy departure from the main line of his work. The answer, of course, is that these books were only a re-manifestation of the early Lewis, the romantic story-teller. Thus, Mantrap, as an adventure yarn, was exactly in the same genre of most of Lewis' short stories, his early novels such as Free Air and Trail of the Hawk, and his later books such as Work of Art and Bethel Merriday. All of these books had one thing in common, they all featured some current interest of Lewis' (e.g., aviation, motoring, the great outdoors, the theater), or something that intrigued him all his life (e.g., hotels, the pioneer). As regards the possible damage to his reputation from a book like Mantrap, following Main Street, Babbitt, and Arrowsmith, he did not

seem to care, for, as he once said: "The writing itself has been as important to me as the product, and I have always been somewhat indifferent as to whether I have been working on a solemn novel or an impertinent paragraph for the New Yorker."[100] Also, he appeared to regard the writing of such books as Mantrap an exercise of his freedom to write what he wished, as he said in a letter to Harcourt in 1925.

> I still don't see why we shouldn't publish Mantrap as a book. Looking back at it I recall nothing shoddy in it, and as for the critics who insist that I have no right to do anything but social documents, they may all go to hell. I have pretty much worked on that theory with them anyway and I have seen no evil results.[101]

It may be, as one critic suggested, that Lewis wrote the book as a sort of trial of skill, a literary experiment to discover how he could handle one of his own early themes bringing to it the skill and assurance gained from success. In any case, this particular reviewer concluded, Mantrap was an adventure story very superior in its field.[102] Another reviewer praised the book as an attack on the camping cult,[103] while a third suggested that Lewis may have had the movies in mind in writing it.[104] Of Lewis' practical reasons for writing the book, this last critic suggested what was probably the bitter truth, that Lewis wrote the novel to capitalize on his fame and earn some extra money. There is some proof of this from a reliable source, to quote George Jean Nathan, a close friend of Lewis' at this time:

> Always forthright and completely honest with himself . . . he made no bones of what he was doing, but frankly announced to anyone who would listen that he was, to use his own locution, turning out a swell piece of cheese to grab off some easy gravy.[105]

If Mantrap was a stain on Lewis' reputation, it was a small one, in view of the integrity he displayed all through his career and in his personal life. This integrity was evident in a gesture made in the same year as Mantrap's publication, 1926, when Sinclair Lewis rejected the Pulitzer Prize, a gesture showing the disdain of public and critical opinion that was characteristic of the man and his work.

6. The Pulitzer Prize: 1926

In 1926 the Pulitzer Prize, which was awarded for "The American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood," was nine years old.[106] Even in its short history the prize had raised considerable controversy by its rather arbitrary administration, for, to give only one example, it had not been awarded in the year when James Branch Cabell's famous Jurgen appeared. Also, in 1920, after the committee had chosen Main Street for the award, the trustees had passed over this selection and given the prize instead to Edith Wharton's Age of Innocence, certainly a much less important book. Later, Babbitt was ignored, and Lewis never forgot these incidents. Thus, when Arrowsmith was picked for the prize in 1926, Sinclair Lewis saw a chance for not only personal revenge, but also to strike a blow at the vested interests in America's intellectual life that the prize represented.

In a letter to Harcourt in the spring of 1926, Lewis declared that he had planned to reject the Pulitzer Prize if it was ever awarded to him ever since the Main Street incident, and, accordingly, he planned to reject it for Arrowsmith. He listed three reasons for his action, reasons that indicate the personal factor was only a small part of the matter. These reasons are here summarized:

1. Lewis felt he had been cheated in regard to Main Street and Babbitt.

2. He was disturbed that the Pulitzer Prize novel had become advertised as the best novel of the year, rather than the best about American life, as the award stated.

3. He hated the idea of any group giving itself the right to choose any one best novel.[107]

Soon after this Lewis addressed a letter to the Pulitzer Committee in which he developed his objections to the prize in detail (this letter was also intended as an open letter to the public). Here, the personal element was almost entirely omitted and was replaced by a full exposition of Lewis' attitude toward the Pulitzer Prize and literary prizes in general. The letter was a unique document in American literary history and as such it received its full share of public attention. Its main points in summary form follow below:

1. All literary prizes are dangerous, especially the Pulitzer because its original terms have been misrepresented and abused.

2. The terms of the award indicate that novels are not to be judged on their merit as works of art but on their conformity to whatever code of good form is currently in vogue.

3. The prize has become a sacred tradition and its administrators all-powerful to the extent that they are approaching the status of the sole literary authority in America.

4. "Only by regularly refusing the Pulitzer Prize can novelists keep such a power from being permanently set up over them."

5. The Pulitzer Prize is one of those agencies seeking to make American literature safe, polite, and sterile.

6. Writers, by accepting such prizes, admit and confirm these false standards.[108]

What Sinclair Lewis did in thus openly rejecting the Pulitzer Prize was to make it a national issue and to turn it into a weapon for his war against conformity in America, in this case, conformity in literature. It is debatable whether Lewis was justified in his alarm as to the possible danger of the prize, but he did manage to weaken its force. After Lewis' attack, and after the other mistakes and omissions which the Pulitzer Prize Committees made in later years (e.g., overlooking Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls in 1940) the prize has today become limited in its effect. It is also debatable whether the prize would have gained the evil power Lewis prophecied, but in any case if the Pulitzer Prizes are now accepted as honors, they are not accepted as gospel.

The rejection of the prize once more brought Sinclair Lewis back into the midst of hot public controversy.[109] If he was discomfited by the publicity he received, he did not show it, for in the next year he published a new book which brought down upon him a storm of abuse probably never again equalled in American literature in this century. This book was a daring examination by Lewis of that most sensitive area of American life, religion, and its title was Elmer Gantry.

7. Sinclair Lewis and Religion, Elmer Gantry: 1927

Sinclair Lewis' attack on the clergy, the Christian Church in America, and religion in general in Elmer Gantry was but the next logical step in his indictment of native materialism, conformity, and hypocrisy. In this way the book was one more in the series of red flags which Lewis had been waving before an enraged public since 1920, and, like Main Street, Babbitt, and Arrowsmith, he dissected in Elmer Gantry a subject hitherto sacred and largely unexplored in American literature.[110]

Lewis seems to have grown up with little appreciation for religion or belief in it. Even as a boy in Sauk Center he had questioned his Sunday School teacher about doctrines which no one had ever challenged, and this youthful skepticism, whose sources defy exact determination, increased with the passing years. By the time Lewis reached Yale, he had developed a strong dislike for religious conformity and especially for the human representatives of that conformity, the clergy, which appears to have intensified during his college years.[111]

The next expression of Lewis' anti-clerical feelings did not come until after his graduation from Yale, when he was employed by the Waterloo, Iowa, Daily Courier. In one of his editorials, "The Deadshots," Lewis broadened his favorite religious theme, false ministers, to include evangelists, spiritualists, and others whom he considered impostors.[112] As

might be expected of a young newspaperman on his first job, Lewis did not attack the regular clergy, but confined his remarks to the types noted above, concluding with an exhortation to the genuine clergy to destroy their false brethren before the cause of true religion was harmed. Yet, even in its mildness, this editorial was a prophecy of things to come.

The early novels were written as popular fiction, and Lewis knew that there was no place in them for satire on such cherished institutions as religion and the ministry. Consequently, there is only one brief passage in these novels before 1920 which indicates that Lewis' religious antipathies were still alive.[113] In only one other instance did Lewis express himself on a religious subject at this time, and in this case his expression took the form of crusading journalism, an expose of spiritualists and their "racket."[114]

Lewis opened his campaign against religion in earnest in Main Street, and there are sections in that novel which contain a hint of the hatred that prompted Elmer Gantry. Will Kennicott, for example, considers himself a good Christian without either understanding his religion or really practicing it. Still, hypocritically, he is shocked by Carol's lack of faith.[115] Carol, on the other hand, is a non-conformist in religion as in other matters, and her attitude was unquestionably similar to Lewis', except that he was not an "uneasy and dodging agnostic," but a resolute and confirmed agnostic:

> Carol herself was an uneasy and dodging agnostic. When she ventured to Sunday School and heard the teachers droning that the genealogy of Shamsherai was a valuable ethical problem for children to think about; when she experimented with Wednesday prayer-meeting and listened to . . . such gory Chaldean phrases as "washed in the blood of the lamb" and "a vengeful God". . . then Carol was dismayed to find the Christian religion, in America, in the twentieth century, as abnormal as Zoroastrianism - without the splendor. . . . Always she perceived that the churches - Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Catholic, all of them . . . were still, in Gopher Prairie, the strongest of the forces compelling respectability.[116]

This last statement was the essence of Lewis' attack on religion in Main Street and for much of it in Elmer Gantry, for what made him especially bitter was that the church, founded to help man find happiness, had become in Lewis' opinion instead a corrupt institution which added to man's bondage. The clergy also came in for its share of punishment in Main Street in Lewis' satiric portrait of the Reverend Edmund Zitterel, a predecessor to those pompous, misdirected ministers who throng the pages of Elmer Gantry. In the earlier book as well as the later one Lewis' clergy use their pulpits to fight their own battles with the world, rather than for humanity's common cause, and Reverend Zitterel is no exception.[117] In short, Lewis' indictment of religion and the clergy in Main Street led directly into one of the main themes of Elmer Gantry: the conviction that a minister is not necessarily better, holier, or wiser, than the people around him.

Babbitt, even more than Main Street, set the stage for Elmer Gantry, because it was there that Lewis first created the mythical state of Winnemac and the city of Zenith, the locale of many of Elmer's triumphs. Moreover, Babbitt contained in intensified form Lewis' earlier charges against the clergy, and showed how religion could be not only a bulwark of village conformity but also how it could be injected with the Wall Street spirit for everyday service in the business world.

As if to flex his satiric muscles, Lewis first introduces in Babbitt the "distinguished evangelist," Mike Monday (whose similarity to a real person needs little elaboration). Monday has no importance in the novel except to give Lewis a chance to show that the vested interests in America could use even the evangelist for their purposes,[118] and to offer him the opportunity to do one of his favorite impersonations, the speech of a bible-thumping, hell-fire-and-damnation evangelistic preacher in all his verbal glory.[119] Lewis was to return to such as Mike Monday in Elmer Gantry, and in that book to give this type full and loving treatment.

Babbitt's own church, luxurious, richly furnished, equipped with every convenience, is a typical of his world as his own home, while Babbitt's minister, the Reverend Dr. Drew, is appropriate to his church. Dr. Drew is depicted by Lewis as a new type, the modern "liberal" minister, the perfect representative of a church with everything but holiness and

of a religion with everything but the worship of God. Typical of Dr. Drew's inspirational spiritual leadership are his multifarious activities, including the writing of editorials on "The Manly Man's Religion," and "The Dollar and Sense Value of Christianity." Dr. Drew proclaims himself as "proud to be known as a business man,"[120] and his sermons are masterpieces of prose composition, as this sample will attest:

> "At this abundant harvest-time of all the year . . . when, though stormy the sky and laborious the path of the drudging wayfarer, yet the hovering and bodiless spirit swoops back o'er all the labors and desires of the past twelve months, oh, then it seems to me there sounds behind all our apparent failures the golden chorus of greeting from those passed happily on; and lo! on the dim horizon we see behind the dolorous clouds the mighty mass of mountains of melody . . . mountains of might!"
> "I certainly do like a sermon with culture and thought in it," meditated Babbitt.[121]

The satire in all this and Lewis' real intent is too obvious to be labored, but there is more at stake than just amusement, because Babbitt's world takes their Dr. Drews seriously, even on such matters as labor and strikes.[122]

Mrs. Babbitt, too, has her religious uplift, although she favors spiritualism, which Babbitt, to his credit, finds utterly ridiculous.[123] However, when he does need spiritual help in a time of distress and goes to his church and his minister to get this help, Babbitt finds himself hustled into Dr. Drew's chamber for exactly five minutes of consolation, and is then ushered out, feeling worse than when he entered.[124] In short, he finds that his own religion is no

more help to him than his wife's silly spiritualism. Lewis' indictment in this episode was very clear; he damned in Babbitt all the brisk and modern Dr. Drews, who are not only incapable of public leadership, but also indapable of their most sacred trust, the ministration to the sick, individual soul. And yet, Babbitt himself created Dr. Drew, one more business machine in a world of business machines. There could be no more harsh or righteous justice.

If religion played an important part in Babbitt's world, it had no role at all in Arrowsmith's. The pursuit of truth, which was the theme of the novel, was measurable, determinable truth, or, in other words, scientific truth. In Lewis' concept of this scientific truth there was no room left for religious truth, because to him there could be no other kind of truth. Gottlieb and Arrowsmith pray to no other gods than those of the laboratory. Moreover, Gottlieb, in his speech "To Be A Scientist," sets the scientist in direct conflict to the preachers. He points out that the scientist must seek to destroy man's innate faith in inexorable laws (which is the basis of all religion) and he concludes that the task of the scientist is always to question, to doubt, to seek - all this the opposite of religious faith. As for Arrowsmith, he concludes his scientists's prayer with the words "God give me strength not to trust to God."[125] To Sinclair Lewis, this faith in science and in man's perfectibility through his own efforts come closest to taking the place of

the religion so conspicuously omitted from his own life and work.

The idea for Elmer Gantry did not come upon Sinclair Lewis suddenly; he had been planning such a book even before the completion of Arrowsmith, as his letter to Harcourt from London, December 27, 1923, reveals:

> [I think I will do] the big religious novel I've planned so long - paying my compliments to the Methodist cardinals, the Lord's Day Alliance, the S.P.V., and all the rest - not slightly and meekly as in Main Street and Babbitt but at full length, and very, very lovingly. I think it'll be just the right time for this novel, and I think I can do it con amore.[126]

Accordingly, in another letter to Harcourt on February 9, 1924, Lewis asked him to send various religious periodicals.[127] However, the completion of Arrowsmith and the writing of Mantrap intervened in the plans for the religious book so that it was almost a year before Lewis did resume his work on Elmer Gantry, and when he did, it was with a fervor and thoroughness that probably surpassed his earlier research efforts.

In the winter of 1926 Lewis went to Kansas City to start gathering material for the book. He befriended several ministers there and found conditions so favorable that he planned to return after a brief trip West and begin the actual outline of the book.[128] When Lewis returned to Kansas City he threw himself into his work with characteristic intensity, residing there from April 1 to May 17, all the while immersing himself in religion. He preached, he organized a "Sunday School Class" of ministers which met weekly in his

hotel suite, he read religious material of all types, he went to tent revival meetings, he even took a trip through Iowa and Minnesota, posing as a book agent in order to get the opinions of country preachers. In his "Sunday School Class" he turned preacher himself and attacked the assembled clergymen for their faults and failures, for not telling their congregations that the conventional concept of Jesus was a myth, and for not publically admitting that Christianity had failed in its two-thousand-year attempt to conquer the human mind. He exhorted them to face their dilemma and solve it, meeting it like Luthers and Wesleys. At the end of the "Sunday School Class" every man there had been stirred and awakened to new realizations by Lewis, and he parted from them with these remarks: "Boys, I'm going up to Minnesota, and write a novel about you. I'm going to give you hell, but I love every one of you." And as the "class" disbanded, Lewis, the self-styled atheist, embraced each man in turn, saying, "Good-bye, old man; God bless you!"[129]

Despite Lewis' avowed intention of writing a book hostile to religion and the clergy, he was still so popular in Kansas City that the town's most important ministers thronged to his gatherings. Perhaps it was his fame, or perhaps it was because they recognized a kindred spirit, a fellow saver-of-souls.[130] In any case Lewis got what he came for, the background for much of Elmer Gantry, as well as considerable notoriety, for one of the many sermons which Lewis preached

in the churches of Kansas City to give him "a real feeling of the church from the inside,"[131] was the famous sermon in which he defied God to strike him dead.[132]

After Kansas City, Lewis spent the summer of 1926 in a lakeshore cottage in Minnesota, writing Elmer Gantry. He continued to surround himself with a religion-charged environment, including visiting clergymen and living quarters buried under a mass of religious books, papers, and magazines. He read the newspapers only for the religious items, while even his conversation was full of references to clergymen he knew. Once, he visited Dr. Riley, then Minnesota's leading fundamentalist and anti-evolutionist, and typical of the contradictions in his personality, Lewis returned from his call liking Dr. Riley very much.[133]

From all this Elmer Gantry was formed. If the book's hero and the other clergymen portrayed in it were any sample of Lewis' true feelings, then his stay in Kansas City and his friendships with the ministers there could not have been very inspiring to him, for Elmer Gantry proved to be the most savagely satiric and unrelievedly bitter book Sinclair Lewis ever wrote. For years Lewis had been collecting news items about clergymen gone wrong and stories of religious fanaticism and he seems to have packed most of this material into the novel, especially in its hero, Elmer Gantry. He had a purpose in doing this, of course, a purpose which he himself noted:

> A fundamental factor in the book is that preachers being just men cannot be sacred; that they are not teaching the art of life but an artificial standard.[134]

But before proceeding to an examination of Lewis' motives and ideas in writing the novel, it is necessary to summarize the plot of the book and introduce some of its themes, as follows here.

Elmer Gantry is, until he is converted to religion in college by a virile YMCA man, a boisterous, lecherous, ex-football-hero. Inspired by the importance his conversion has given him, he plans a career in the ministry after graduation. At the Mizpah Theological Seminary he attains social polish, gets one of his professors fired, and bolsters his own morale with frequent visits to the saloons and girls of a nearby town. He also meets at the seminary the idealistic Frank Shallard (whose career Lewis used as a contrast to Elmer's throughout the novel). In his last year of school, Elmer is appointed part-time preacher in a neighboring town, where he adds a little spice to his work by seducing Lulu Bains, daughter of one of the deacons, only narrowly escaping a shotgun wedding. But justice, heretofore lagging behind Elmer, catches up with him when he is expelled from the seminary for getting drunk and missing an appointment to preach at one of the local churches.

Undaunted by his expulsion, Elmer becomes a successful traveling salesman (perhaps his true vocation) and in his travels meets the beautiful lady evangelist, Sharon Faloner.

He joins her troupe and soon becomes leading man in her organization and in her affections. They prosper together, and with her money Sharon builds a huge tabernacle in New Jersey, but both it and Sharon are destroyed by fire. Elmer escapes, although he realizes that one great part of his life has ended.

After Sharon's death Elmer tries evangelical preaching and spiritualism, but fails in both because of lack of talent and dishonesty. At this point the story returns to Frank Shallard and chronicles his struggles to reconcile his faith with his skepticism. He is tempted to leave the church but dares not, fearing he will fail in the business world.

Elmer, in the meantime, meets an influential Methodist bishop, joins his sect, and is given a small pastorate. By living what is for him an exemplary life, he becomes successful enough to marry Cleo Benham, the daughter of his wealthiest parishioner. This is just the beginning for Elmer, and he soon works himself into a large but dilapidated church in the city of Zenith. He injects his church with new life and soon establishes himself in a prominent position in the city by being active in civic affairs, by hobnobbing with the country club set, by crusading against "vice," and by lecturing on the Chautaqua circuit. One of those he tramples on his way up is Frank Shallard, whom Elmer forces to leave his pulpit so as to win over to his own church one of Frank's

wealthiest parishioners. Another of Elmer's victims is his old flame Lulu, whom he meets in Zenith, seduces again, and casts aside as before.

Gantry's success is crowned by the award of a new, larger church, an honorary D.D. degree (which he himself negotiates), and a trip to Europe. On this trip he meets the chairman of the "NAPAP," a powerful anti-vice organization, and this meeting gives Elmer the idea of eventually controlling all moral agencies in America. On his return from Europe he goes on a lecture tour and becomes so famous that he is mentioned as the next head of NAPAP and also as the new pastor of one of the wealthiest churches in New York City.

Parallel with Elmer's meteoric rise is the tragic downfall of Frank Shallard, who is horribly beaten and blinded by religious fanatics when he tries to lecture against the fundamentalist attempt to suppress science which took place at the time of the Dayton "Monkey Trial." The episode is one of the most shocking things in the book and is intended as an ironic footnote to Elmer's career. Meanwhile, Elmer's dreams are almost exploded when he is caught in a blackmail scheme arranged by his own beautiful secretary, with whom he had been having an affair. News of it gets into the papers and Elmer faces ruin until he is rescued by a friend, a shrewd criminal lawyer who foils the blackmailers and arranges for Elmer's complete exoneration.

As the book ends, Elmer, with reputation restored, is received in triumph by his congregation, while he plans great things for the future, including the potential position of moral dictator of the United States.

From this narration of the plot of the novel, two things should be evident:

1. That the book was a lively a story as Lewis had ever written.

2. That Elmer Gantry was an incredible evil character as a minister, if not as a human being.

Most of the critics who commented about the book noted, with more than a little justice, that Elmer is closer to being a caricature than a credible human type.[135] Lewis' purpose, however, in portraying Elmer as he did is fairly obvious. He was using what had been for centuries a favorite technique of the devout against the unbeliever, the technique of defamation of character, and by showing Elmer as both a monster and a clergyman, Lewis hoped to discredit all clergymen and the religion in which such men could flourish.[136] In one sense Lewis was trying to hit off in Elmer Gantry a perfect average, a symbol, as he had done in his previous books (e.g., Babbitt), but in this case he made the mistake of letting his anger and his satiric impulse overcome his art.[137]

Yet, in many ways, Elmer Gantry is a Babbitt of religion, for he is an utter materialist who enters the church as a business and governs himself accordingly. Worse still, he succeeds so well because this is what the people seem to want and he gives it to them. Gantry leads a squad of police into a

speakeasy, and the next Sunday his church attendance doubles. He announces a sermon on the perils of sex, and his church is crowded to the doors. He says that he will expose vice in Zenith, and they stand in the aisles. Here, at least, it is not easy to shrug off what the book implies.

If Elmer was the only corrupt clergyman in the novel, it might have more validity, but there is another clerical scoundrel, fool, or fraud on every other page. According to Lewis in Elmer Gantry there were only three kinds of ministers: despicable grubs, shrewd materialists, and agnostics of various degree who persist in remaining in the church. Incidentally, it is those in the last catagory, the doubters, whom Lewis portrayed as the only admirable characters in the book. Actually, these doubters, like Frank Shallard and Professor Zechlin are the religious counterparts of Lewis' rebel type, only in Elmer Gantry their timid rebellion against religious orthodoxy fails utterly, in keeping with the tone of the book. However, there is one admirable and successful character who emerges unbesmirched from the story, and that is the gentle, mystical, saintly Reverand Andrew Pengilly, who is also probably the most imperfectly realized and hazy character of all. It is impossible to determine exactly what Lewis intended him to represent, but whatever it is, it fails to come alive.[138]

Lewis' attack on the ministry began on the academic level, for he depicted the ministers who comprised the fac-

ulties of Terwilliger College (Elmer's Alma Mater) and Mizpah Seminary, as pious-faced frauds who harbor secret doubts behind their holy appearance. Old and tired, many of them, they spend their declining years pondering the validity of the faith to which they have given their lives. As the wife of one of these men expresses it: "Why is it that it's only in religion that the things you got to believe are agin all experience?"[139] Even at the seminary Elmer finds that his fellow students are either cynical materialists, weak fools who would starve in any profession other than the ministry, or infant agnostics, while the professors also are either fools or skeptics.

One of the few admirable men at the seminary is Professor Bruno Zechlin, another one of Lewis' rebels, but by far the weakest of the lot.[140] It is Zechlin who is largely responsible for Frank Shallard's free-thinking, for he gives him forbidden books to read, books (which Lewis probably read himself) such as:

> Davenport's "Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals," which asserted that the shoutings and foamings and twitchings at revival meetings were no more sanctified than any other barbaric religious frenzies; Dods and Sutherland on the origin of the Bible, which indicated that the Bible was no more holy and infallible than Homer; Nathaniel Schmidt's revolutionary life of Jesus, "The Prophet of Nazareth," and White's "History of the Warfare of Science with Theology," which painted religion as the enemy, not the promoter of human progress.
>
> (Elmer Gantry, p. 123)

Zechlin also tells Shallard that "The teachings of Jesus were contradictory and borrowed from earlier rabbis," (p. 122) and inspires in Frank the beginnings of a profound contempt for a ministry which accepted these teachings at face value. Zechlin, of course, in this case was another way for Lewis himself to preach to the reader.

The part of Elmer Gantry which was the work of Lewis the novelist rather than the critic of religion is that section which chronicles the career of Sharon Falconer, the lady evangelist. Yet, even in this part of the novel there was a great deal of satire on evangelism and evangelists, as for example: Lewis' demonstration that an evangelist troupe could be just as hard-drinking, fun-loving, and immoral as any other group of traveling performers.[142] As a matter of fact, by the time the reader finishes reading the section in which Sharon is the protagonist, he is quite convinced that the whole business of evangelism and "conversions" is as carefully planned, staged, and calculated as a Broadway show, and just about as business like. The character of Sharon, however, is one of Lewis' most inspired creations. She is a combination of temptress, mystic, and professional woman, and she is also the only woman whom Elmer Gantry ever really loves. Her death by fire concludes one entire phase of the novel and is one of its few permanently memorable scenes.

The character of Frank Shallard was intended by Sinclair Lewis as a foil and contrast to Elmer Gantry. While Elmer

tries to relocate himself after Sharon's death, the story returns to Frank, and he is pictured as a minister beloved by his congregation for his gentle goodness but tormented in his own mind by his skepticism (an echo of Lewis' own). Another of Frank's roles in the novel is to serve as spokesman for Lewis, and it is Frank who most often serves as the medium for Lewis' attacks on religion and the ministry; for example as in the passage below:

> Of what value were doggerel hymns raggedly sung? What value in sermons, when the people seemed not at all different from people who had never heard sermons? Were all ministers and all churches, merely fire-insurance?
>
> He was supposed to cure an affliction called vice. But he had never encountered vice; he didn't know just what interesting things people did when they were being vicious. How long would a drunkard listen to the counsel of one who had never been inside a saloon?
>
> He was supposed to bring peace to mankind. But what did he know of the forces which cause wars . . . what of drugs, passion, criminal desire; of capitalism, banking, labor . . . international struggles for trade, munitions trusts, ambitious soldiers?
>
> He was supposed to comfort the sick. But what did he know of sickness? . . .
>
> He was supposed to explain to troubled mankind the purposes of God Almighty . . . But which God Almighty? Professor Bruno Zechlin had introduced Frank to one hundred gods besides the Jewish Jehovah, or Yahveh, who had been but a poor and rather surly relation of such serene aristocrats as Zeus.
>
> (pp. 234-5).

The passage just about sums up what Lewis felt about the spiritual power of clergymen, and in the novel it concluded with the thought that the seminaries taught a man nothing

to qualify him as God's earthly representative.

Sinclair Lewis' main attack on Christianity was directed at one major point which he saw as the keystone of the entire religion, the divinity and teachings of Jesus. Although there is continuous sniping at other aspects of Christianity all through the novel, the crucial battle takes place about three-fourths of the way through the book in a scene which is ostensibly a debate between Frank Shallard and a "liberal" preacher-friend of his, Philip McGarry. McGarry defends the existence of the ministry and the church by maintaining that they are necessary to interpret the personality and teachings of Jesus. This is just the chance Frank (and Sinclair Lewis) has been waiting for and he leaps into the fray with an argument of his own which goes on for several pages. This section of Elmer Gantry, of which some of the most important passages are quoted below, was probably the most complete, detailed, logical exposition of his religious opinions that Sinclair Lewis ever wrote:

> "But just what were the personality and teachings of Jesus? I'll admit it's the heart of the controversy over the Christian religion: - aside from the fact that . . . most people believe in a church because they were born to it. But the essential query is: Did Jesus - if the Biblical accounts of him are even half accurate - have a particularly noble personality, and were his teachings particularly original and profound? You know it's almost impossible to get people to read the Bible honestly. They've been so brought up to take the church interpretation of every word that they read into it what ever they've been taught to find there. . . . But now I'm becoming one-quarter free, and I'm appalled to see that I don't find Jesus an especially admirable character!

"He is picturesque. He tells splendid stories. He's a good fellow, fond of low company . . . But he's vain, he praises himself outrageously, he's fond of astonishing people by little magical tricks which we've been taught to revere as 'miracles.' He is furious as a child in a tantrum when people don't recognize him as a great leader . . . What minds people have! They hear preachers proving by the Bible the exact opposites . . . and it never occurs to them that far from the Christian religion - or any other religion - being a blessing to humanity, it's produced such confusion in all thinking, such second hand viewing of actualities, that only now are we beginning to ask what and why we are, and what we can do with life!

"Just what are the teachings of Christ? Did he come to bring peace or more war? He says both. Did he approve earthly monarchies or rebel against them? he says both. Did he ever - think of it, God himself, taking on human form to help the earth - did he ever suggest sanitation, which would have saved millions from plagues?

"What did he teach? One place in the Sermon on the Mount he advises . . . 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven,' and then five minutes later he's saying, 'Take that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.' That's an absolute contradiction, in the one document which is the charter of the whole Christian Church.

"There's just one thing that does stand out clearly and uncontradicted in Jesus' teaching. He advocated a system of ecomomics whereby no one saved money or stored up wheat or did anything but live like a tramp. If this teaching of his had been accepted, the world would have starved in twenty years after his death!

"My objection to the church isn't that the preachers are cruel, hypocritical, actually wicked, though some of them are that, too - think of how, many of them are arrested for selling fake stock, for seducing fourteen-year-old girls in orphanages under their care, for arson, for murder - and it isn't so much that the church is in bondage to Big Business and doctrines as laid down by millionaires - though a lot of churches are that, too. My chief objection is that ninety-nine percent of sermons and Sunday School Teachings are so agonizingly dull!"

(pp. 377-8).

Before proceeding, a summary of the main points in the passage above will serve to focus Lewis' indictment of Christianity more sharply. His argument centered around these conclusions:

1. According to Biblical accounts, Jesus is not an especially admirable character.

2. The Christian religion has been more of a hindrance than a help to mankind.

3. The teachings of Jesus are confusing, self-contradictory, and utterly impracticable.

4. Worse than the fact that many ministers are corrupt and that many churches are the pawns of vested interests is the fact that religion is dull.

It would seem from all this that Frank Shallard is depicted in Elmer Gantry as a confirmed agnostic and enemy of religion. Not so. Although he is a doubter he stays in the church because he believes that there could be a church free from superstition which would serve the people's spiritual needs, and because he believes that there are people who need such an institution. But Frank is finally forced to resign (mainly through Elmer's skulduggery), and his farewell speech to his congregation is reminiscent of what Lewis himself had said to his "Sunday School Class." Franks speech, quoted below, also repeated Lewis' classic charge against American hypocrisy, in this case hypocrisy in religion:

> "I have decided that no one in this room, including your pastor, believes in the Christian religion. Not one of us would turn the other cheek. Not one of us would sell all that he has and give to the poor. Not one of us would give his coat to some

> man who took his overcoat. Every one of us lays up all the treasure he can. We don't practice the Christian religion. We don't intend to practice it. Therefore, we don't believe in it. Therefore I resign, and I advise you to quit lying and disband."
>
> (p. 385).

and Frank also finds, after visiting a Catholic church and talking to the priest, that Catholicism is worse than Protestantism in its falseness. Lewis devoted all of Elmer Gantry except one page to an attack on the Protestant denominations, but in the one instance in which he turned to Catholicism, he demolished it with one vicious satiric swipe, which concluded as follows:

> "The Roman Catholic Church is superior to the militant Protestant Church. It does not compel you to give up your sense of beauty, your sense of humor, or your pleasant vices. It merely requires you to give up your honesty, your reason, your heart and soul."
>
> (p. 388).

It must be remembered in judging Elmer Gantry that Lewis was writing in the atmosphere of the time just following the trial of Scopes, a schoolteacher, for teaching evolution in his classes in Dayton, Tennessee. The trial only served to climax the issues basic to the whole conflict between Fundamentalism and Modernism which had been brewing for years. The entire matter had direct influence on Elmer Gantry because Lewis, with his usual sensitivity to the climate of opinion, took advantage of the novel to champion the cause of Modernism before the American reading public. Thus, the heat of his anger and the subsequent loss of his objectivity was

probably a result of his concern for what he considered a serious new danger to American freedom.[143] In Elmer Gantry the reader meets the issue face to face, and Lewis intended to leave no room for objectivity or impartiality, as this excerpt from the novel indicates:

> It was at this time that the brisker conservative clergymen saw that their influence and oratory and incomes were threatened by any authentic learning. A few of them were so intelligent as to know that not only was biology dangerous to their positions, but also history - which gave no very sanctified reputation to the Christian church; astronomy - which found no convenient Heaven in the skies and snickered politely at the notion of making the sun stand still in order to win a Jewish border skirmish; psychology - which doubted the superiority of a Baptist preacher fresh from the farm to trained laboratory researchers; and all the other sciences of the modern university. They saw that a proper school should teach nothing but bookkeeping, agriculture, geometry, dead languages made deader by leaving out all the amusing literature, and the Hebrew Bible as interpreted by men superbly trained to ignore contradictions, men technically called "Fundamentalists."
>
> (p. 389).

In Elmer Gantry it is Frank Shallard who takes up the Modernist banner, but his fight against the Fundamentalist dictatorship of the nation ends bitterly when he is maimed and blinded. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that this cruel conclusion to the struggle of the book's only real opponent against the evil forces symbolized by Elmer Gantry has more than a literal meaning, for it also suggested to the reader a grim parallel to the future of free thought in America. With the destruction of Frank the story leaves him,

the only Lewis rebel ever to be defeated completely. This in itself is the key to the mood behind Lewis' writing.

And so the "good," the church, the clergy, and the religion represented by Elmer Gantry prevail. By the end of the novel, Gantry has conquered all. He stands to become head of the "National Association for the Purification of Art and the Press" (NAPAP), and he is ready to move to a huge, powerful church in New York from which his voice will reach millions through radio, press, and lecture. As the book ends, Elmer kneels before his congregation in Zenith, and while he eyes the legs of a pretty new choir-member, he chants this prayer, a prayer that bodes ill for America:

> "Let me count this day, Lord, as the beginning of a new and more vigorous life, as the beginning of a crusade for complete morality and the domination of the Christian church through all the land. Dear Lord, thy work is but begun! We shall yet make these United States a moral nation!
>
> (p. 432).

Sinclair Lewis wrote Elmer Gantry as a panorama of religion and as a statement in different terms of the same dangers to the country he had tried to impress upon the national consciousness in Main Street and Babbitt. A few critics saw what he had tried to do and felt that he had succeeded, but in the main he was attacked by both the church and the literary critics.[144] Some notion of the impact that Elmer Gantry had can be gotten from a brief review of a few typical incidents. For example, two Kansas City ministers announced from their pulpits that they were the originals of Elmer and reviled Lewis

accordingly. When each realized that there was a rival claimant, they stopped their attack on Lewis only long enough to denounce each other as an imposter and liar. Actually, Lewis had been unaware of the existence of either of them in writing the book. A Mid-Western evangelist told his audiences how he had shamed Lewis by refusing to shake hands with him. In reality, he and Lewis had never met. A prominent Los Angeles clergyman invited Lewis to visit that city, promising that he personally would lead a lynch party with Lewis as the guest of honor, while at the same time a minister in New Hampshire started proceedings to jail Lewis for writing the book.[145] Nor was the public indifferent to the novel either, for it sold over two hundred thousand copies in the first ten weeks after its publication.[146] In one thing, at least, Lewis was justified in writing the way he had, because he realized that to attack Babbitt's religion he must stoop to Babbitt's level. If he had depicted Elmer as a more virtuous soul, and if he had written more gently, it is likely that the book would not have aroused the furor that it did. Sinclair Lewis, always an accurate barometer of the public's taste, was probably wiser than he was credited by the critics of the day. Their reviews have been forgotten. Elmer Gantry has not.

Of all of Sinclair Lewis' writing after 1920, Elmer Gantry shows the greatest influence of one man, the man to whom Lewis dedicated the book, H. L. Mencken.[147] For years, one of Mencken's favorite subjects for ridicule had been

religion and everything connected with it, and in one way Elmer Gantry was the culmination of Mencken's cynicism and the cynicism of that part of the generation which dethroned God and established Mencken in his place.[148] But the novel was more than this, it was the product of an intelligent skeptic, and as such it deserves serious consideration, for many of the questions that Lewis asked in this book have never been satisfactorily answered. Whether or not the book will stand as one of those great documents of skepticism is something only time can decide, but in its own day, and in this day, as the symbol of the struggle between rationality and faith, between science and religion, between Modernist and Fundamentalist, Elmer Gantry is not a book to be dismissed lightly.[149]

In any case, the novel leaves no doubt as to Lewis' own religious beliefs. He was a complete and confirmed agnostic all his life. As further proof of this there is a letter which Lewis wrote to Will Durant in 1932, which was printed in Durant's On the Meaning of Life (New York, 1932), pp. 37-8. It is here reproduced in its entirety:

> It is, I think, an error to believe that there is any need of religion to make life seem worth living, or to give consolation in sorrow, except in the case of people who have been reared to religion so that should they lose it in their adult years, they would miss it, their whole thinking having been conditioned by it. I know several young people who have been reared entirely without thought of churches, of formal theology, or any other aspect of religion, who have learned ethics not as a divine commandment

> but as a matter of social convenience. They seem to me quite as happy, quite as filled with purpose and with eagerness about life as any one trained to pass all his troubles on to the Lord, or the Lord's local agent, the pastor.
>
> Their satisfaction comes from functioning healthily, from physical and mental exercise, whether it be playing tennis or tackling an astronomical problem.
>
> Nor do I believe that most of them will even in old age feel any need of religious consolation, because I know also a few old people who have been thus reared all their lives and who are perfectly serene just to be living. A seventy-four year old agnostic like Clarence Darrow is not less but more cheerful and excited about life's adventure - yes, and "spiritual minded" - than an aged bishop whose bright hopes of Heaven are often overbalanced by his fear of Hell.
>
> If I go to a play I do not enjoy it less because I do not believe that it is divinely created and divinely conducted, that it will last forever instead of stopping at eleven, that many details of it will remain in my memory after a few months, or that it will have any particular moral effect upon me. And I enjoy life as I enjoy that play.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> Sinclair Lewis

But religion had the last laugh many years later, for although Lewis specifically asked that when he died he should be buried with no religious service whatsoever, his neighbors in his home town of Sauk Center chanted the Lord's Prayer as his ashes, brought home from Rome, were laid to rest. Perhaps they felt that they knew what was best for him after all.[150] However, Sinclair Lewis did not die until more than twenty years after Elmer Gantry, evidence, perhaps, that he had not angered God too much. In the meantime, he did not stop writing, and his next book was one of those interludes that occurred

from time to time in his career. On this occasion it was a return visit to Lewis' old friend Babbitt, but a Babbitt who had lost his soul.

8. Lewis' Satire: The Man Who Knew Coolidge: 1928

In The Man Who Knew Coolidge, 1928, Sinclair Lewis returned to his best-known character creation, Babbitt, and dealt him his coup de grace. As Lewis himself put it in a letter to Harcourt from Berlin, October 25, 1927, it was his "swan song to Babbittism."[151] In the same letter Lewis neatly summarized the plot of the book:

> It's the account by a Babbitt, entirely in his own words, without any comment by the author, as to how he called on Coolidge in the White House - and not till the last page do we find that he never really saw Coolidge. Of course I love this sort of drool.

At the source of the book, and at the source of Lewis' own personality and satiric technique, was his amazing talent for mimicry. When Lewis was writing a book, he virtually transformed himself into the fictional hero of the work. For example, before Elmer Gantry was published, Lewis nearly drove his friends insane with his continuous impersonation of a pulpit-thumping preacher, and the same thing was true of almost everything else he wrote. He would launch unexpectedly, at the oddest moments, into one long mimic speech after another, only to have those around him realize later that he had delivered word for word a passage from a book being either planned or written. This was exactly the case with The Man Who Knew Coolidge, for, as George Jean Nathan recorded:

> "Coolidge" was nothing more than a series of such orations gathered together, with not a word changed. They had been delivered in a variety of places and at a variety of times, including the corner of

> Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Sixth Street at high noon, a beer-house in Hoboken at eleven o'clock at night, another beer-house in Union Hill, N.J., at two in the morning, the bathroom of my apartment, the men's lavatory at the Rennert Hotel in Baltimore, a publisher's tea at the Sherry Netherland, several taxis, two New York theatre lobbies on opening nights, and the steps of St. Ignatius' Church.[152]

Lewis could impersonate almost anyone and often did, for at various times in his life, he passed himself off as a traveling salesman or businessman (perhaps his favorite role), a policeman, a country doctor, a samll-town politician, President Coolidge, and on one occasion, his own father. His talent extended into the writing of poetry and once, on a wager, he composed a sonnet in less than four minutes and then went on to rattle off stanza after stanza of balladry in the style of Kipling, concluding with Miltonic blank verse on the same theme.[153]

The Man Who Knew Coolidge was thus in one way merely another exercise of Lewis' mimic virtuosity. The book is composed of one long dialogue divided into six sections of uninterrupted speech which occupies two hundred seventy-five printed pages. It takes place on the club car of a train, in a hotel room, and in a private home. The speaker is the "average" American citizen Lowell Schmaltz. This is a sample of his dialogue, representative of his profound views on two of Lewis' favorite topics of the time, Coolidge and prohibition:

> "Yes sir, Cal is the President for real honest-to-God Americans like us.

> There's a lot of folks that pan him, but what are they? You can bet your sweet life he isn't popular with the bums or yeggs or anarchists or highbrows or cynics —
>
> I remember our pastor saying one time, 'A cynic is a man who sneers, and a man who sneers is setting himself up to tell God that he doesn't approve of God's handiwork!' No sir! You can bet Coolidge ain't popular with the Bolsheviks or the lazy boob of a workman that wants fifteen bucks a day for doing nothing! No sir, nor with the cocaine fiends or the drunkards or the fellows that don't want the prohibition law enforced —
>
> Not that I never take a drink. What I say about prohibition is:
>
> Once a law has been passed by the duly elected and qualified representatives of the people of these United States, in fact once it's on the statute books, it's there, and it's there to be enforced. There hadn't ought to be any blind pigs or illegal stills. But at the same time, that don't mean you got to be a fanatic.
>
> If a fellow feels like making some good home-brewed beer or wine, of if you go to a fellow's house and he brings out some hootch or gin that you don't know where he got it and it isn't any of your business, or if you have a business acquaintance coming to your house and you figure he won't loosen up and talk turkey without a little spot and you know a good dependable bootlegger that you can depend on, why, then that's a different matter, and there ain't any reason on God's green earth that I can see why you shouldn't take advantage of it, always providing you aren't setting somebody a bad example or making it look like you sympathized with law-breaking.
>
> No, sir![154]

and when the reader considers that Lewis maintained this kind of thing for nearly three hundred pages, he cannot help but be amazed by the man's skill.

What the book was, in essence, was an overflow of Lewis' tremendous artistic energy directed to the exorcism of his favorite spectre, the American business man.[155] Lowell Schmaltz

was Babbitt, 1928 model, without a soul and without a brain. He was the symbol of the mediocrity Lewis hated almost to the extent of mania.[156] As is obvious in the quotation above, Schmaltz utters not one word or sentiment which is not stereotyped, machine-made and patented. He was a summary of everything Lewis found hateful in the average citizen, and what makes him so terrifying is that Lewis makes the reader feel pity rather than disgust and affection rather than hate.[157] The truth was that Lowell Schmaltz, "monstrous incarnate average" that he was, had at least a superficial resemblance to every living American.[158]

The Man Who Knew Coolidge was "pure" Lewis, pure in the sense that in this one book Lewis combined all his mimic talent, his ear for American speech, and his satiric impulse.[159] Schmaltz was in many ways the sum total of what Mencken had been ridiculing for years in the American Mercury as the species "boobus Americanus," and like Mencken's ridicule, Lewis' Lowell Schmaltz was more than a little extreme and incredible.[160] His incredibility stemmed from the same source as Elmer Gantry's, Sinclair Lewis' inability to do things in moderation, a quality which is possibly the clue to his successes and his failures.[161] But this whole matter is directly related to Lewis' satiric method, as the discussion below will reveal.

In general, Sinclair Lewis' satiric method was to present to the reader a description of a character or a scene, or a

transcript of dialogue. This would be rendered in such a way that the basic components of Lewis' satire, mimicry, photography (i.e., "realism"), and emphasis (i.e., selectivity of detail) were so skilfully blended that they could not be distinguished one from the other, or separated, without destroying the whole structure of the passage. The scene or the speech was essentially realistic in that it was recognizable, familiar, typical, or seemed to be such to the reader, and it was adapted to a satiric purpose by Lewis <u>not by altering reality but by a selection of details</u> in order to suggest to the reader the negative, the ridiculous, the superficial, the mediocre, or whatever else Lewis wanted the reader to infer. In other words, it was the emphasis that was the vital, variable factor. Lewis was most often like a photographer in his satiric technique. His camera pictured reality, but with the use of selectivity and emphasis, just as a photographer uses light, shade, filters, lenses, etc., he could make the reader see the scene as he wanted him to see it. And those who shouted that Lewis lied did not understand his technique any more than does the man who leaves his smapshots to be developed at the corner drugstore understand the processes of developing, enlarging and printing.

But Sinclair Lewis was usually more than just a photographer. He was more like an artist who takes a picture of his subject and then paints a portrait from it. Thus, the difference between Lewis the satirist and Lewis the artist

was as great as that between the photographer and the painter. One pictured reality, the other interpreted it. Accordingly, at one moment Lewis might have been satirizing Babbitt, describing his dress, mannerisms, recording his speech, but at the next moment he was probing into Babbitt's soul, and in so doing he was rarely satiric. When Lewis searched his characters' souls, sympathy replaced satire, and he became artist, not satirist. When he was crusader or reformer, he was usually satirist at the same time, always best when attacking some hateful cause, opinion, or type, and always most impressive in describing some scene or reproducing some dialogue. At these moments, Lewis wanted only to convey an impression, to arouse a momentary response in his reader, and at this he was unsurpassed.

Not one of Sinclair Lewis' great books depended completely on satire, not even Babbitt. There were always other ingredients, the plot, the characterizations, etc., and in some (e.g., Arrowsmith, Dodsworth) satire was not a dominant factor at all. In others, however, satire predominated (e.g., Elmer Gantry, The Man Who Knew Coolidge) and in these cases Lewis lost sight of his art and allowed his savagery to replace his sympathetic insight. Photography, mimicry, and emphasis were still the vital components, but the quantities were changed. They were no longer in equilibrium. Just enough of the photography was retained to give the impression of reality, but whereas in Babbitt the reality had been one of three dimensions,

in The Man Who Knew Coolidge it becomes a one-dimensional surface reality. The mimicry here has also become predominant to the extent that it shuts out all overtones, all suggestion of joy or of tragedy, leaving only a curious flatness, a toneless unchanging babble, yet it grips the reader and leaves him wondering, "Do we really talk like this?" The emphasis still operates, but now the selectivity is a negative thing, omitting any mention of Schmaltz's soul or conscience.

Thus, Main Street, Babbitt, and Arrowsmith could be either wholly or in part satires, but still be true books, while Elmer Gantry and The Man Who Knew Coolidge were wholly satiric and superficially realistic, but true only in very small degree. Even Lewis' humor, always sharp, became in these latter books, too keen to be enjoyed. As for the matter of reality, always an important issue in regard to Lewis' writing, it too suffered from the surfeit of satire. The reader might admit that there were different clergymen that possessed some of Gantry's different traits. He might concede that there might be one or even a few more or less like Gantry. But he would find it inconceivable that most or many ministers are like Gantry or any of the others in the book, as Lewis implied. Not so with Gopher Prairie or Babbitt. The readers exclaimed, "I've driven through just such a town," or "I know that man." Similarly, Babbitt and Schmaltz looked the same and talked the same, but Babbitt was at least part gold while Schmaltz

is pure lead, and Lewis never let the reader forget it. Still a clever enough mimic to make him sound real, Lewis failed to convince the reader that anyone could be like Lowell Schmaltz and still be a real human being. As in all other instances where Lewis' satire failed, the selectivity in The Man Who Knew Coolidge went haywire. In attempting to get the essence of Babbitt, Sinclair Lewis over-refined.

However, in the sum total of Sinclair Lewis' career, the book was only an interlude. A few critics have stated that The Man Who Knew Coolidge is a book whose significance has been overlooked.[162] It is significant, yes, but much less so than Babbitt, to which Coolidge is really an appendix or footnote because in Babbitt Lewis displayed genius, while in Coolidge he showed talent. Time has proven the critics wrong and the book has been deservedly forgotten, except by such as students writing research papers about Sinclair Lewis. But this was not true of Lewis' last book of the decade, Dodsworth, published in 1930, which will be remembered both as a poignant love story and as the final summary in fictional form of Lewis' commentary on American life and society in the third decade of this century.

9. Dodsworth: 1929

In Dodsworth, 1929, Sinclair Lewis returned to that penetrating depiction of character and to that sympathethic portrayal of basic human emotions which are the fundamentals of great fiction. On its narrative level the novel was the tale of an American who goes to Europe to find culture, but instead loses his wife to another man. In this way Dodsworth was a poignant, memorable love story, while its protagonists, Sam Dodsworth and his wife Fran, emerged as two of Lewis' most fully realized character creations, deserving to rank with any in twentieth century American fiction.

On another level, however, the book fell into the genre formerly practiced by Cooper, Howells, and James, the genre of the "international" novel, in which a comparison is inevitably made between European and American civilization.[163] From this viewpoint Dodsworth is especially significant to an understanding of Lewis as a social critic, for it sums up many of his most important conclusions on American life and society; and with these conclusions was presented in complete form Lewis' concepts of Europe, gained in constant travel on the Continent during the years 1920-1930.

Yet, there is a new tone in Dodsworth. The book is almost entirely free of satire. On the narrative level it has instead a certain mellowness, a restraint, a dignity which had been largely absent from the satirical masterpieces of

the twenties. These qualities stemmed directly from the fact that in Dodsworth Sinclair Lewis was primarily a novelist telling the story of an automobile manufacturer from Zenith and his beautiful but immature wife, a story which was in reality the tale of Lewis' own marriage with Grace Livingstone Hegger which ended in divorce in 1927. Thus, the loneliness, the defeat, and the loss (all culminating in triumph) which Sam Dodsworth suffers in the novel were probably a parallel of what Lewis himself endured. It is not within the scope of this study to compare in detail the actual events of Lewis' life in this period with the fictional events in Dodsworth, but one thing is certain and it is that the novel offers a rich source of material for future biographers of Sinclair Lewis.[164]

As fiction the book is entirely concerned with the relationship of Sam and Fran Dodsworth. The story begins when Sam Dodsworth, head of a large automobile company, sells his interests and decides to travel abroad with his wife Fran to seek the culture and leisure he had always missed. On the boat to England Fran begins the first in the series of flirtations which is to eventually cause their separation, but at this point Sam does not realize their significance and is only annoyed by her actions. Also, from the very beginning of the trip Fran tries to dominate him by criticizing him for his supposed obtuseness of manners, and when this continues and threatens to mar his enjoyment of Europe, Sam begins to realize

for the first time just how weak, cruel, immature, and spoiled his lovely wife is. He is even forced to leave England and go to Paris in order to avert complications from one of Fran's flirtations. However, Fran soon gets so attached to Paris and so involved in its phony salon and party life that she refuses to leave, and Sam is forced to go back alone to America to attend his class reunion and visit home.

Dodsworth returns to America with a new objectivity. He realizes that he is no longer neededby his grown children, and he also sees for the first time the sterility and superficiality of American life, both in New York and in Zenith. But his stay is cut short by a letter from Fran which hints that she has gotten involved in a new, more serious amour. Back in Europe, Sam finds that his fears are true, that Fran has taken a lover in his absence. But once again he saves the situation by taking Fran to Spain, away from her lover.

From Spain, they wander all over Europe, finding again their affection for one another, until they come to rest in Berlin. There Fran is once more attracted by one of those continental gentlemen whose charms she cannot resist, this time a Count Kurt Von Obersdorf, and when Sam is called away for a week he finds, on his return, that Fran plans to divorce him and marry her new admirer. The parting is a painful one, especially for Dodsworth, who can do nothing but resume his wandering. A short love affair in Paris, a walking trip, and the companionship of Edith Cortright, an understanding widow

whom Dodsworth had met earlier, are the elements which gradually lift him out of his sadness. He is just beginning to find happiness in Italy with Edith when he receives a letter from Fran, begging for reconciliation.

Sam leaves Edith and goes back to Fran, but on the boat back to America he realizes both that Fran has not been changed by her experience and that he can never again be happy with her. So, leaving her in New York, he returns immediately to Edith and Italy. The book ends with the promise of happiness and a new life for Sam Dodsworth, and also the promise that he will be eternally haunted by the ghost of his love for Fran.

Samuel Dodsworth was in one sense another of Lewis' rebels. In his case he gives up the business world and refuses a vice-presidency in a huge corporation so that he can be free for the first time in his life, behavior which is certainly not conventional in his world. But, Dodsworth was also a new kind of hero in Lewis' work, as a good many critics have remarked. He was a Babbitt grown mature, a Babbitt with sensibility. He was a symbol to Lewis of American pioneer virtues, for he sought new horizons of the spirit as the older pioneers sought new horizons of the earth. He is one of Lewis' most sympathetic and fully-realized heroes and a forerunner of such later admirable characters as Cass Timberlane.[165]

Although there are certain similarities between George F. Babbitt and Samuel Dodsworth, they are more different than alike. Babbitt was created as a sociological symbol with

human qualities, while Sam Dodsworth was visualized as a human being with a certain symbolic importance, as Lewis indicated in his characterization of Dodsworth in the early pages of the novel:

> To define what Sam Dodsworth was, at fifty, it is easiest to state what he was not. He was none of the things which most Europeans and many Americans expect in a leader of American industry. He was not a Babbitt, not a Rotarian, not an Elk, not a deacon. He rarely shouted, never slapped people on the back, and he had attended only six baseball games since nineteen hundred. He knew, and thoroughly, the Babbitts and baseball fans, but only in business.
>
> While he was bored by free verse and Cubism, he thought rather well of Dreiser, Cabell, and . . . Proust . . . He played golf reasonably well . . . He liked fishing camps in Ontario, but never made himself believe that he preferred hemlock boughs to a mattress. He was common sense apotheosized, he had the energy and reliability of a dynamo, he liked whisky and poker and pâté de foie gras, and all the while he dreamed of motors like thunderbolts, as poets less modern than himself might dream of stars and roses and nymphs by a pool.[166]

Dodsworth was not a completely unique character creation to Lewis. He had been suggested earlier by such men as Charles McKelvey in Babbitt (whom Lewis later "interviewed" in his articles during the Coolidge-La Follette campaign), and he had more than a little in common with Will Kennicott of Main Street and the tycoon Ross McGurk, sketchily portrayed in Arrowsmith. He was, however, the first full-length representative in Lewis' fiction of a peculiarly American type which Lewis had already recognized, a type based on sound scientific evidence.[167] This type might be called "the American Aristocrat," and as such Dodsworth was well-equipped as an observer of both Europe and

America. In short, Lewis the social critic and commentator spoke through Samuel Dodsworth in the novel and through him summed up his findings.

Dodsworth's international education begins early in the novel when Lockert, a clever Englishman, points out to him an American foible, while they are enroute to England:

> "And why is it that you Americans, the nice ones, are so much more snobbish than the English? . . . . I know of only two classes of people who hate their own race . . . who travel principally to get away from their own people, who never speak of them except with loathing, who are pleased to be taken as not belonging to them. That is, the Americans and the Jews!"
>
> (p. 41).

And Dodsworth is further surprised, on arriving in England and being entertained by a group of expatriate American businessmen to find that although they love their country and are proud to be Americans, they have deliberately chosen to live in Europe because of the privacy, sanity, and ease of life there. It is not long before Dodsworth himself begins to appreciate the leisurely pace of English life, just as Lewis appreciated it.[168] However, just as Sam was beginning to feel at home in England, he is forced to take Fran off to Paris to save her the humiliation of a poorly-advised flirtation.

Dodsworth is fascinated by Paris, and while Fran spends all her time in a whirl of parties, appointments, and salon gatherings, he wanders through the city absorbing its atmosphere. But Sam grows tired of Fran's endless pursuit of plea-

sure and their bickering, and he returns to America to attend his class reunion. It is in Sam's return to New York, a city which he finds hot, dirty, noisy, lonely, and a little frightening (as Sinclair Lewis always found it) after the cool charm of Europe, that Lewis realized another opportunity to point out one more flaw in America's fabric:

> Why, he wondered, was it that the immensity of Notre Dame or St. Paul's did not dwarf and make ridiculous the figures of the worshippers as this vastness [Grand Central Station] did the figures of travellers galloping to train-gates? Was it because the little people, dark and insignificant in the cathedrals, were yet dignified, self-possessed, seeking the ways of God, whereas here they were busy with the ludicrous activity of insects?
>
> He fancied that this was veritably the temple of a new divinity, the God of Speed.
>
> Of its adherents it demanded as much superstitious credulity as any of the outworn deities - demanded a belief that Going Somewhere, Going Quickly, Going Often, were in themselves holy and greatly to be striven for. A demanding God, this Speed.
>
> (pp. 163-4).

and the assault continues, this time delivered by Dodsworth's friend Ross Ireland, a roving correspondent (and another of Lewis' megaphones), who comments on one of Lewis' favorite topics, the Great American Paradox, the difference between preaching and practice, between principle and actuality:

> "Honestly, Sam, I don't get these here United States. We let librarians censor all the books, and yet we have musical comedies . . . just as raw as Paris. We go around hollering that we're the only <u>bona fide</u> friends of democracy and self-determination, and yet with Haiti and Nicaragua we're doing everything we accused Germany of doing in Belgium, and . . . within a year we'll be starting a Big Navy campaign for the purpose of bullying the world as Great Britain never thought of doing. We boast of scientific investigation, and yet we're

> the only supposedly civilized country where thousands of supposedly sane citizens will listen to an illiterate clodhopping preacher or politician setting himself up as an authority on biology and attacking evolution . . . .
> "Yes, and to have a little more of our American paradox, we have more sentimental sobbing over poor de-uh mother in the movies, and more lynching of negroes, than would be possible anywhere else in the world! More space, and more crowded tenements; more hardboiled pioneers, and more sickly discontented wives; more Nancies among young men; more highbrow lectures, and more laughing-hyena comic strips and more slang.[169]

When Dodsworth visits his home in Zenith after the reunion the sad realization comes to him that he is no longer needed by either family or friends. With this feeling there also comes to Sam a new clear-sightedness toward Zenith and toward the middle-class world it represents; and he makes three important discoveries:

1. He finds that there is too much drinking and too much talk about it. "Prohibition had turned drinking from an agreeable, not very important accompaniment to gossip into a craze."

   (p. 191).

2. He finds that the conversation of his friends, once prized as cordial and clever is now empty.

3. Above all and most tragic he finds that no one is really interested in anything. In Lewis' own words, this last discovery became another summary of his indictment against middle-class American society:

> He saw, slowly, that none of his prosperous industrialized friends in Zenith were very much interested in anything whatever. They had cultivated caution until they had lost the power to be interested . . . . The things over which they were most exclamatory - money, golf, drinking . . . these diversions were to the lords of Zenith not pleasures but ways of keeping so busy that they would not admit how bored they

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> were . . . They had as their politics only a testy fear of the working class. . . . To them, women were only bedmates, housekeepers, producers of heirs, and a home audience that could not escape and had to listen . . . The arts, to them, consisted only of jazz conducive to dancing with young girls, pictures which made a house look rich, and stories which were narcotics to make them forget the tedium of existence.
> They did things, they rushed, they supervised, they contended - but they were not interested.
> (pp. 192-3).

The last notable critical passage in the novel is to be found in that section which relates the life of the Dodsworths in Berlin. Here, Lewis used the device of conversation at a party to express his conclusions about Europe, conclusions never previously recorded. In this instance, Lewis spoke through the character of a Professor Brant, a profoundly intellectual man intended to symbolize the height of European culture, and although the Professor addresses his remarks to Dodsworth (whom Lewis perhaps meant to represent the nadir of American culture), his remarks are for all America. His speech is too long to be reproduced here, but a summary of it follows below. It states everything that Sinclair Lewis found admirable about Europe:

1. Educated Europeans think of themselves as one group, one culture.

2. European culture is aristocratic in the sense that it believes that the best nation is that which has the greatest number of great men, as distinguished by ability not class.

3. This sense of aristocracy does not deal in hauteur but in a sense of tradition, responsibility to the past and to standards.

4. Knowledge of at least two languages is a requisite for any cultured European. He must also possess an understanding of art, music, literature, politics, manners, food, drink, women.

5. This training is the one bond that survives among Europeans, stronger even than wars. Individuality, leisure, privacy, quiet happiness, good conversation - all find their last refuge in Continental Europe.

6. America wants to standardize Europeans into Good Fellows. Russia wants to stamp out all individuality. Asia and Africa have no concept at all of the Good Life. Europe, however, believes in great men and people who understand them. "Europe! The last refuge, in this Fordized world, of personal dignity."

7. Europe will prevail over all, even Americanization.

8. "The European" is not everyone in Europe, but a small select group who represent a "definite aristocratic culture." Most Americans are unaware even of the existence of this group.

Professor Brant's remarks had taken as their basic assumption the concept that the American idea of Europe was entirely mistaken. Lewis, in the person of the Professor, was trying to correct this misconception and to present to the reader the true and enduring elements of European civilization which Lewis saw to be the spirit of "natural" aristocracy, individualism, culture. But Dodsworth, himself a natural aristocrat of the American breed, although he agrees with the Professor, maintains with equal justice that America is even more misunderstood and misrepresented in Europe. Here Lewis the patriot appeared, and in the character of Dodsworth, went on to assert that Americans come to Europe to admire and

learn, while Europeans go to America only to make money. He was indignant at the portrayal of all Americans as money-grubbers, rustics or gangsters (a portrayal orginated by such writers as Dickens in Martin Chuzzlewit) and he concluded that there was in America a class striving to attain just that aristocratic pride mentioned by Professor Brant.

At this point in Dodsworth Fran enters the conversation with her opinions on the status of women in America (one of the rare instances that Lewis spoke through her). Her views are summarized here:

1. The idea that America is a paradise for women is completely false.

2. The American wife has so much freedom because her husband doesn't care what she does. She is only a convenience to him.

3. In Europe, the wife is part of the man. European men like women.

4. There is no blame on either man or woman in America - it all falls upon the American industrial system with its ideal of forced selling.[170]

Of everything Fran Dodsworth has to say in the book this is perhaps the most sensible and admirable. She is portrayed as a selfish, cold, egocentric woman, proud of her beauty and vain of her talents. At the same time the reader is made to feel her charm and the power of Dodsworth's love for her. Fran, in her desire for culture and beauty, has more than a little resemblance to Carol Kennicott, but where Carol was a sincere rebel, Fran is a sham. Probably her nearest fictional

counterpart in Lewis' work is Istra Nash, of Lewis' first novel Our Mr. Wrenn, but she is also the epitome of the Eastern heroine type dominant in Lewis' first five novels. In Dodsworth, however, Lewis rejects her, or rather, rejects what she has become, for she is here a symbol of false and sterile culture. Moreover, the central story of th entire novel deals with Sam Dodsworth's increasing realization that Fran is small in soul, incapable of receiving that glittering European experience that had been her life long desire.[171] Her rebellion entitles her to none of the respect usually accorded to Lewis' rebels because she revolts not against society, but against time. Thus, her flight to Europe, her flirtations, and her final defeat are due not to her desire to find freedom of soul but to recapture her lost youth and preserve the illusion of her charm which her ego has elevated above all else.

A minor theme of Dodsworth, embodied in the relationship of Sam and Fran, is what has been called the "sex war in America." In the novel this theme is symbolized in Fran's constant belittling of Dodsworth's abilities outside the business world and in the never-ending quarrels in which she always seems to be at fault, as Lewis suggested here:

> She had a high art of deflating him, of enfeebling him, with one quick, innocent-sounding phrase. . . . She was, in fact, a genius at planting in him an assurance of his inferiority.
>
> (pp. 23-4).

and this factor becomes increasingly more important in the book as Fran's assumed superiority in matters of taste, culture, and manners becomes more and more oppressive, while the reader and Sam both become increasingly aware that it is Fran who is the fraud. What Fran wants is a kind of cultural triumph which can be measured in terms of concrete achievement, "success," while what Sam wants is to find the secret of leisure and that milieu in which he can release the inclination toward beauty so long repressed by the demands of the business world.[172] All this has a bearing on the "sex war" in that Lewis suggested the tragedy of the creative American Dodsworths letting their non-creative mates dictate to them in matters of culture, while they must be forever content with their poker games, golf, and offices.

The critics who were content to dismiss Lewis as a camera man, as a raging satirist, as a writer unable to portray love or any of the deeper human emotions could not have read Dodsworth very carefully.[173] Admittedly, Lewis the satirist had been responsible for the weaknesses in Elmer Gantry and The Man Who Knew Coolidge, but Dodsworth marked a return to that happy union of novelist and social critic that had produced the earlier great books.[174] The scattered bits of satire in it (on such familiar themes as "hobohemians" and the antics of an American business man on the loose) are insignificant in comparison to the importance of the book as a serious novel and as a review of many of Lewis' most basic conclusions about

American life. In Dodsworth, Sinclair Lewis attempted a great feat, the comparison of two civilizations, European and American, and if he did not equal the work of such masters in this area as Henry James, he did create a book which will stand the test of time as a novel and as a social document.

One final aspect of Dodsworth must be considered before the discussion is complete. It has been established that in Lewis' earlier work material success and the "good life" had been incompatible. In Dodsworth, however, Lewis for the first time portrayed a man who is both rich and noble, a man who uses his wealth as the foundation upon which he builds his good life, his search for fulfillment. On one level, perhaps, this shift might be traced directly to the autobiographical element in the novel. A parallel might be established between Lewis himself and his hero Dodsworth. Lewis had become successful and yet he had retained his integrity. He himself was proof, like Dodsworth, that success and integrity could co-exist. Furthermore, the entire tone of Dodsworth indicated that Lewis was becoming impatient with the dilettanti and their cries that money was vulgar, that only art was worth while, that America was inferior to Europe. Thus, in the novel Lewis showed that the making of good cars had a value and respectability of its own; he showed that a man like Dodsworth could rise above money; he showed that the snobbish worship of Europe was as stupid as the booster's pride in Zenith. In short, Sinclair Lewis concluded that

although the Babbitts were bad, their enemies were not always good.[175] It must never be forgotten that Lewis wrote from a love of America, a love so zealous and possessive that he could hear no "auslander" criticize it without immediately defending it, as Dodsworth does in the novel.

Dodsworth was a fitting conclusion to an entire decade of Lewis' work, a period in which seven novels had appeared in nine years, novels of which at least four, Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith and Dodsworth, are assured of permanence, and probably a fifth, Elmer Gantry, if only as a tract of the times. America, through the response of the reading public, had recognized the importance of Lewis' message, if not his greatness as a writer; but in the year following Dodsworth, 1930, it was the world, not America, who bestowed on Sinclair Lewis the greatest honor a writer can receive, the Nobel Prize. The discussion of the circumstances of the award and of Lewis' acceptance speech which follows in the pages below, will review the essential elements in Lewis' writing up to that time and will establish a foundation for the investigation of his work after 1930, a significant date in the literary career of Sinclair Lewis.

10. The Nobel Prize: 1930

The decision to award the Nobel Prize to Sinclair Lewis had been made so quietly that Lewis did not know about it until a Swedish news correspondent phoned him at Westport, Connecticut, and shouted excitedly into the telephone, "You haf de Nobel Brize!" Lewis, always quick on the trigger, thought one of his friends was playing a joke on him and decided to go along with it. He told the man that his Swedish accent was terrible, and proceeded to repeat the announcement back to him in a dialect that was more Swedish than the Swede's. When finally Lewis had heard from other sources that he really had won the prize, he called Mrs. Lewis (Dorothy Thompson) in New York to tell her the news. "Dorothy, oh Dorothy," he said, breathing heavily, "I've got the Nobel Prize." This time, she thought that he was joking, as usual, and so she replied, "Oh have you? How nice. Well, I have news for you, too. I've just been awarded the Order of the Garter."[176] But to Sinclair Lewis and to America there was nothing funny about the matter, for it was the first time that the Nobel Prize in Literature had been awarded to an American writer. The Prize was an appropriate symbol of recognition by the world of a great literary and social achievement, and it came at the half-way point in Lewis' career.

The official citation of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Sinclair Lewis was as follows: "The 1930 Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to Sinclair Lewis for his powerful and vivid art of description and his ability to use wit and humor in the creation of original characters."[177] But this was an understatement in comparison with the award speech made by Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Secretary of the Swedish Academy, which summed up Lewis' literary achievement and set forth fully the reasons for his being awarded the Prize.

Karlfeldt called Main Street one of the best descriptions of small-town life ever written. He stated that Babbitt probably approached the "ideal of an American popular hero of the middle class," and continued on to point out a fact that many American critics had overlooked, that Lewis had attacked false values not individuals in his work:

> "That it is institutions as representatives of false ideas that Mr. Lewis wants to get at with his satire and not individuals, he has indicated. It is then a triumph for his art, a triumph almost unique in literature, that he has been able to make this Babbitt, who fatalistically lives within the borders of an earthbound, but at the same time pompous utilitarianism, an almost lovable individual.
> "Babbitt is naive and a believer who speaks up for his faith. At bottom there is nothing wrong with the man and he is so festively refreshing that he almost serves as a recommendation for American snap and vitality. There are bounders and Philistines in all countries and one can only wish that they were half as amusing as Babbitt."

In reference to this, American critics have generally agreed that it was Babbitt more than any other book that won for Lewis the Prize.

Arrowsmith was praised by Karlfeldt in his speech as a learned and accurate book. He recognized the intensive preparation and research behind all of Lewis' books when he said: "Though master of light-winged words, Lewis is least of all superficial when it comes to the foundations of his art." Elmer Gantry, too, was lauded, for Karlfeldt remarked, "As description the book is a feat of strength, genuine and powerful, and its full flavored, sombre satire has a devastating effect." And the Secretary of the Swedish Academy ended his speech with this tribute:

> "Yes, Sinclair Lewis is an American. He writes in the new language - American - as one of the representatives of one hundred and ten million souls. He asks us to consider that his nation is not yet finished or melted down; that it is still in the turbulent years of adolescence.
> "The new great American literature has started with national self-criticism. It is a sign of health. Sinclair Lewis has the blessed gift of wielding his land-clearing implement, not only with a firm hand, but with a smile on his lips and youth in his heart.
> "He has the manners of a pioneer. He is a new builder."[178]

Karlfeldt's speech showed that the world had accepted Sinclair Lewis as the most representative and important living American man of letters. It showed that the world had read his books and found them meaningful documents. It showed, moreover, that the world had recognized that American literature had at last come of age and deserved ranking with the literature of the older nations. And finally, in honoring Lewis with the Nobel Prize, the world elected him into

the same company with such other literary giants as Kipling, Anatole France, and George Bernard Shaw.

Lewis' own address in Stockholm, December 13, 1930, on receiving the prize was an event of both great literary and social significance. It is probably the most famous and most widely publicized speech ever made by any American writer, and as such it deserves close examination here. The speech may be divided into three broad areas:

1. It was an attack on the remnants of the "Genteel Tradition" in America and the vestiges of that tradition, such as the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

2. It surveyed the contemporary American literary scene, criticism, and literature as taught in the colleges.

3. It analyzed the status of the writer in America and the future of literature in this country.

If the Genteel Tradition was not already dead by 1930 (and it was assumed in his speech that it was not), Lewis dealt the finishing blow.[179] He opened by remarking that he was satisfying no personal grudges, but stating the trends and facts in American literature as he saw them. He complained, he said, not for himself, but for all American literature, and then proceeded to attack Henry Van Dycke (whom Lewis established as a chief representative of the Genteel Tradition) for his remark that the awarding of the Prize to Lewis was an "insult to America." Such a remark, Lewis stated, was typical of America's fear of criticism:

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> "This criticism [Van Dycke's] does illustrate the fact that in America most of us, not the readers alone but even the writers, are still afraid of any literature which is not a glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults as well as our virtues."[180]

In this vein Lewis went on to defend his own work, saying that his "most anarchistic assertions have been that America with all her wealth and power has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deeper cries of human creatures."

But in 1930 Lewis felt that the job had still not been adequately done. He believed that he and his fellow reformers had not been taken seriously enough because they had not stooped to the level of the popular fiction America, an America which liked its own stereotyped, slick-magazine image. Lewis' bitterness at what he thought to be the lack of response of the American reading public is evident in these excerpts from his Nobel Speech:

> "To be really popular and beloved in America, a novel should assert that all American men are handsome, rich and honest . . . kind to one another; that although American girls may be wild they change always into perfect wives and mothers, and that geographically America is composed solely of New York, which is inhabited only by millionaires; of the West, which retains unchanged all the boisterous heroism of 1870, and of the South, where every one lives on a plantation perpetually glossy with moonlight and scented with magnolias."

However, his pessimism in this case was not fully justified because he himself was proof that America did take cognizance of its serious writers. It had bought his books by the mil-

lions of copies, and several of them had been probably the most discussed books of their time.

After this stage in his speech, Lewis turned to a consideration of actual literary trends in America. He praised such writers as Dreiser, Anderson, O'Neill, Cabell, Cather, Sinclair, Hergesheimer and Hemingway as all equally deserving of the Prize as himself, and then mourned that the arts, architecture, and literature were without standards and communication in a country where the most exacting standards exist in the fields of commerce and science. "The American novelist, poet, dramatist, sculptor, and painter must work alone," Lewis concluded, "in confusion and unassisted save by his own integrity." It is not that the artist in America suffers poverty, he continued, in fact he is too well paid. But worse than poverty the artist is oppressed by the feeling that his work is unimportant, that he is considered either a clown or a harmless scoffer, and above all that he, as an artist, does not matter in a land of skyscrapers and assembly lines. Finally, the artist has no institution from which he can derive inspiration, an institution with valid critical standards.

This led Lewis directly to his famous attack on the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and after condemning it for its sterility and omissions, he warned that he was not concerned so much with the group itself, but was using it as a symbol of "the divorce in America of intellectual life from all our standards of importance and reality." Here, Lewis

launched into his even more famous assault on American colleges and universities. "Our universities and colleges exhibit the same unfortunate divorce," he declared. With a few exceptions, Lewis stated, American schools have no interest in contemporary literature, and it is only in science that the lords of America, the business men, are willing to pay homage to learning:

> "But the paradox is that, in the arts, our universities are as far from reality and living creation as socially, athletically and scientifically they are close to us. To the true-blue professor of literature in an American university literature is not something that the plain human being living today painfully sits down to produce. . . . it is something magically produced by superhuman beings who must, if they are regarded as artists at all, have died a hundred years before this diabolical invention of the typewriter. . . . Our American professors like their literature clear, cold, pure and very dead."

After dismissing the "New Humanism" as "a doctrine of the blackest reaction introduced into a stirringly active world," Lewis once more attacked the critics and returned, at last, to the whipping of his favorite horse, already dead, the Genteel Tradition. The special target of Lewis' fire was William Dean Howells, whom he credited as being the originator of the "genteel" influence. Howells had ruined Twain and Garland (whose Main Traveled Roads Lewis said had given him the inspiration to write realistically of American life), and his influence still lurked in native criticism.

But despite the long list of indictments in his speech Sinclair Lewis, typically, ended optimistically, in this way:

> "I have, for the future of American literature, every hope and every eager belief. We are coming out, I believe, of the stuffiness of safe and sane incredibility and dull provincialism. There are young Americans doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see I am a little too old to be one of them."

and paying tribute to such promising writers as Hemingway, Wolfe, Wilder, Dos Passos,[181] Steven Vincent Benét, and the Paris expatriates, Lewis finished on an exultant note:

> "I salute them all with joy as being not yet too far removed from their unconquerable determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities and lost farm cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, the America that is as strange as Russia and as complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness."

As social criticism the Nobel Prize Speech had been spoken before by Sinclair Lewis in fuller and more detailed form in his novels and essays. What was outstanding were his happiness and pride at winning the award, more patriotic than personal, because it was proof to him that America had at last become recognized by the world as a great power in the field of culture as well as other areas.[182] But Lewis' pride was by no means universally shared, for although many American and European critics concurred with the choice of Lewis for the award, many others felt that in selecting him Europe had satisfied a desire for revenge on American self-assumed superiority. Moreover, these critics suggested, in choosing Lewis Europe had justified its own misconception of American life and character which Lewis' books had largely

created in the beginning.[183] As one writer put it: "When the Nobel Prize was given to the author of Babbitt Europe gave America the worst back-handed crack in the jaw she ever got, for Babbitt is America;"[184] while another article declared that Lewis in his work had given Europe the documents to confirm its suspicion that America was a land without a soul.[185] Even Sherwood Anderson, whom Lewis had praised in his speech, claimed that Lewis had gotten the Prize "because his sharp criticism of American life catered to the dislike, distrust, and envy which most Europeans feel toward the United States."[186]

It is difficult to estimate just what effect the Nobel Prize had on Sinclair Lewis' career. One critic has suggested that it had much influence on Lewis, that, in short, it went to his head.[187] In any case he did become quite self-conscious for a short time after he learned he had gotten the award, and in a series of interviews and lectures Lewis took the opportunity to issue numerous pronouncements on American life, society, and literature. In one interview he stated that while Main Street had changed but little since 1920, he still had hopes the industrial age would pass and that America would finally realize its great potential.[188] In a speech in New York City, November 25, 1930, Lewis again made the familiar charge that the nation does not take its literature seriously enough, but in this case he blamed the writers for not asserting the importance of their role in society.[189] After he received the prize Lewis declared from Berlin that

he was not a reformer but a critic, and that if he had his way, all the reformers would be exiled from America (Lewis' whole career, of course, contradicts his own statement that he was not a reformer).[190] In another interview in Berlin Lewis stated that America had improved since the writing of Main Street and Babbitt, and also voiced his affection for his country: "Intellectually I know America is no better than any other country; emotionally I know she is better."[191]

Shortly after this Lewis asserted that American colleges were not truly democratic and suggested a complete renovation of the entire system of higher education.[192] He maintained, in the same spirit of reform, in a speech given a few months later in New York City, that the new danger confronting America was not the Red menace but the conservative menace. "When America started," he said, "there were people like Washington, Adams, and Jefferson in this country. There aren't now . . . but we must find some way, somehow, of restoring greatness."[193]

Whatever effect the Nobel Prize had on Sinclair Lewis it certainly did not immediately weaken his reforming zeal, his idealism, or his faith in America's future, as his utterances at this time indicate. This same zeal, idealism and faith had characterized Lewis' work of the whole decade, and of all the writers working in those years Sinclair Lewis has given the imagination brooding over that period the most to feed upon. He may not have been entirely fair in his satire,

satirists are never entirely fair. But in his novels the Nobel jury found social and artistic significance, and in selecting Lewis they took cognizance of the fact that he had given in impressive form the best evidence of the new and great self-critical literary mood of postway America. If America was not sick of its own success, its writers were, and Sinclair Lewis, foremost of them all, did not hesitate to express his pain.

American energies had been chiefly directed into a dominant and oppressive materialism susceptible to ridicule, but apparently little else. Lewis was the angry gadfly who stirred the American bull from its brute complacency. He was the phenomenon of the angry man in a prosperous, supposedly idealistic and easy-going land, and Europe had recognized the justice of his anger in giving him the Nobel Prize, just as America had recognized it by buying his books. Finally, history proved that Sinclair Lewis was right, for the crash of 1929 and the depression that followed were nothing else than the eruption of a dormant malady whose symptoms Lewis had already diagnosed.

Sinclair Lewis had written the most timely and significant books of the twenties, and although he was never again to rise to those heights, he was not through yet, not at all, because in Ann Vickers and It Can't Happen Here he was to add, in the next decade, to the already impressive list of his great social documents in novel form.

Footnotes to Chapter II

1. Sinclair Lewis, Introduction to Limited Edition Club's edition of Main Street (N.Y., 1937). Reprinted in Harry Maule and Melville Cane, The Man From Main Street (N.Y., 1953), pp. 23-7.

2. Irene and Allen Cleaton, Books and Battles (Boston, 1937), p. 14.

3. Carl Van Doren, Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch (N.Y., 1933), p. 74. See also Lewis' letters to Alfred Harcourt from Washington, Dec. 15, 1919 and Feb. 8, 1920, in Harrison Smith's edition of Lewis' letters From Main Street to Stockholm (N.Y., 1952), pp. 20,25. The Dec. 15th letter reads, in part: "I'll never do a novel more carefully planned and thought out and more eagerly written than Main Street, and I hope to see it go for years." On Feb. 8, Lewis wrote: "I believe that it will be the real beginning of my writing. No book and no number of short stories I've ever done have meant a quarter of what this does to me. I'm working on it 24 hours a day - whether I'm writing or playing." It can also noted that such letters do not bear out the often-seen critical comment that Lewis wrote Main Street with no expectation of favorable public reception.

4. Maule and Cane, p. 214.

5. Cleaton, p. 15.

6. Lewis' authority in knowing his subject cannot be doubted. He was born and brought up in exactly such a town as he described in the book. In his constant traveling all through America from 1909-1919, Lewis had seen small towns in almost every state. He had already given indication of his knowledge of small towns and his coming attack on them in such books as Free Air and in the story "Detour - Roads Rough," published in Every Week, VI (March 30, 1918), 9-10. In this story an Eastern business man is marooned in a midwestern town until his damaged car is repaired, and emerges from his stay with a hatred of small-town smugness, hostility to strangers, dullness, inefficiency, etc. - definitely a prelude to Main Street.

7. Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (N.Y., 1950).

8. Lewis realized from the beginning that he would be identified with Carol Kennicott and so he hastened to contradict this supposition before it appeared. In a letter

to Harcourt from Washington, Nov. 13, 1920 (in Smith, p. 45), Lewis wrote this statement intended for the public: "Carol Kennicott distinctly is not Sinclair Lewis. She is, as Mr. Lewis specifically states, a small-town woman, differing from other small-town women only in being more sensitive and articulate." Despite this statement, Lewis' frequent self-identification with Carol is obvious, although his denial was to be expected.

9. One of the favorite attacks of hostile critics on Lewis is the claim that he was too severe in his satiric portraits, never telling the other side of the story. One of their typical arguments states that Lewis' work never reveals any deep emotion or lyrical feeling. Examples of such criticism are: V. F. Calverton, "Sinclair Lewis, The Last of the Literary Liberals," Modern Monthly, VIII (March, 1934), 77-86; Bernard DeVoto, The Literary Fallacy (Boston, 1944), pp. 95-123; Pelham Edgar, The Art of the Novel (N.Y., 1933), pp. 268-293; Thomas D. Horton, "Sinclair Lewis: The Symbol of an Era," North American Review, CCXLVIII (Winter, 1939), 374-93; Walter Lippmann, Men of Destiny (N.Y., 1927), pp. 71-92; Archibald Marshall, "Gopher Prairie," North American Review, CCXV (March, 1922), 394-402; and Meredith Nicholson, The Man in the Street (N.Y., 1921), pp. 1-25.

10. Examples of this interpretation are Calverton, Henry Seidel Canby, American Memoir (Boston, 1947), p. 307; Geismar, Last of the Provincials, p. 86; Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," Coll. Eng., 239-90; Hartwick, Foreground of American Fiction, p.263; Regis Michaud, The American Novel Today, (Boston, 1931), p. 137; and Raymond H. Palmer, "The Nobel Prize Jury Judges America," Christian Century, XLVIII (Nov. 26, 1930), 1448.

11. A few perceptive critics have recorded this fact. They are: Lewis Gannett, "Sinclair Lewis: Main Street," SRL, XXXII (Aug. 6, 1949), 31; Richard Hulsenbeck, "Sinclair Lewis," Living Age, CCCXXXIX (Jan., 1931), 481; Perry Miller, "The Incorruptable Sinclair Lewis," Atlantic, 34; and Robert E. Spiller, et. al., LHUS (N.Y., 1948), p. 1225.

12. One of Lewis' own clippings, Yale Collection.

13. This letter is an important document for any student of Lewis. It is printed in Carl Van Doren's Three Worlds (N.Y., 1936), pp. 153-9. In this letter Lewis revealed that his early work was, despite its popular-fiction surface, seriously conceived and executed. The letter also indicates Lewis' deep sense of his artistic respon-

sibility. Soon after the letter was written Van Doren became one of Lewis' closest friends and most sympathetic critics, a relationship which endured until Van Doren's death.

14. Anon., "Obituary," Pub. Weekly, CLIX (Jan. 27. 1951), 527.

15. The direct references used for this section are: Dorothy A. Dondore, The Prairie and the Making of Middle America (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1926); Hartwick, Foreground of American Fiction, pp. 257-8; Harlan Hatcher, Creating the Modern American Novel (N.Y., 1935), pp. 109-121; Herron, The Small Town in American Literature; Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature (N.Y., 1930), pp. 329-45; Louis Wann, "The Revolt from the Village in American Fiction," Overland Monthly, LXXXIII (Aug., 1925), 298-9, 324-5; and Stanley T. Williams, "The Founding of Main Street," No. Amer. Rev., CCXV (June-Sept., 1922), 775, 121, 248, 411.

16. Henry Seidel Canby, "Sinclair Lewis," American-Scandinavian Review, XIX (Feb., 1931), 75.

17. Perhaps the best analysis of Main Street's popularity and influence was that written by Lewis' friend andpublisher Ernest Brace in his article, "Cock Robin & Co., Publishers," Commonweal, XIII (Dec. 10, 1930), 147-9, who pointed out that the real reason for the books's huge sale was not advertising, but word-of-mouth recommendation.

18. Quoted in Heywood Broun, "Hewing to the Line," Woman's Home Companion, LVIII (Feb., 1931), 26.

19. For example, see S.A. Coblentz's review in Bookman, Jan., 1921, reprinted in Arno L. Bader and Carlton F. Wells, Essays of Three Decades (N.Y., 1939), pp. 459-61; Francis Hackett's review "God's Country," New Repub., XXV (Dec. 1, 1920), 20-1; and Carl Van Doren's "The Epic of Dulness," Nation, CXI (Nov. 10, 1920), 536-7.

20. John C. Farrar, ed., The Literary Spotlight (N.Y., 1924), p. 37.

21. Carl Eric Roberts, The Literary Renaissance in America (London, 1923, p. 110.

22. George E. O'Dell, "The American Mind and Main Street," Standard, IX (July, 1922), 17-8. One of the major reasons for Main Street's popularity and influence was its essential truth; Lewis, a writer of fiction, had grasped

sociological truth in his fiction. As Halford E. Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion (Chicago, 1934), p. 73, and Lloyd Morris, Postcript to Yesterday (N.Y., 1947), p. 141, have pointed out, such important sociological documents as the Lynds' Middletown and Middletown in Transition are gigantic footnotes to Main Street. See also Emory S. Bogardus, "Social Distances in Fiction: An Analysis of Main Street," Sociology and Social Research, XIV (1929), 174-80.

23. Charles L. Hind, Three Authors and I (N.Y., 1922), p. 186.

24. Lippmann, p. 71.

25. Constance Rourke, American Humor (N.Y., 1931), pp. 283-6.

26. For accounts of Lewis' ability to instantly make friends and pass himself off as almost any type of business or professional man, see W. R. Benét, "The Earlier Lewis," SRL, X (Jan. 20, 1934), 422; Clifton Fadiman, "Party of One," Holiday, XIII (March, 1953), 6-11; Sisley Huddleston, Paris Salons, Cafés, Studios (Phila., 1928), pp. 113-4; Benjamin Stolberg, "Sinclair Lewis," Amer. Merc., LIII (Oct., 1941), 450-2; Rebecca West, "The Man from Main Street," Cosmopolitan, (June, 1935), 55; and William J. McNally, "Americans We Like: Mr. Babbitt Meet Sinclair Lewis," Nation, CXXV (Sept. 21, 1927), 278-81. For stories about Lewis' mimetic ability, see Harrison Smith, "Sinclair Lewis: Remembrance of the Past," SRL, XXXIV (Jan. 27, 1951), 8; and George Jean Nathan, The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan (N.Y., 1932), pp. 9-21. Nathan is especially good in his reproduction of Lewis' character impersonations, which Lewis could do for hours. When Lewis was creating a character he was that character.

27. Early Lewis stories which showed an awareness of some of business' evil potentialities were: "If I Were Boss," SatEvePost, CLXXXVIII (Jan. 1, 8, 1916), 5ff., 14ff (about business' unceasing competition); "Honestly If Possible," SatEvePost, CLXXXIX (Oct. 14, 1916), 28 (about shady real-estate practices); and "For the Zelda Bunch," McClure's, XLIX (Oct., 1917), 27 (about the standardization of a once-good restaurant). Stories which had Lancelot Todd as their hero were: "Snappy Display," Metropolitan, XLVI (Aug., 1917), 7; "Getting His Bit," Metropolitan, XLVIII (Sept., 1918), 12; "Gladvertising," Popular Magazine, L (Oct. 7, 1918), 145; "Jazz," Metropolitan, XLVII (Oct., 1918), 23; "Night and Millions," Metropolitan, L (June, 1919), 30; and "Slip It To 'Em," Metropolitan, XLVII (March, 1918), 26.

28. Sinclair Lewis, "A Matter of Business," Harper's CXLII (March, 1921), 429.

29. Hatcher, p. 121.

30. Lewis' letter to Harcourt from Washington, Nov. 30, 1920, printed in Smith, p. 52.

31. In a letter to Harcourt from Washington, Dec. 17, 1920, Lewis predicted that within two years the country would be using "Babbittry" as a standard phrase. This letter is printed in Smith, p. 57.

32. Smith, p. 59.

33. Lewis originally wrote this introduction in his notebook for Babbitt, now in the Yale Collection. It was reprinted in Maule and Cane, pp. 21-9.

34. Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (N.Y., 1949), p. 2.

35. Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "The History of Their Books: Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXIX (March, 1929), 52.

36. Irene and Allen Cleaton, Books and Battles, p. 236.

37. Hartwick, p. 260.

38. Cleaton, p. 237.

39. Robert Cantwell, "Sinclair Lewis," in Malcolm Cowley, ed., After the Genteel Tradition (N.Y., 1936), P. 120. See also V.F. Calverton, Liberation of American Literature, p. 430.

40. Granville Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," English Journal, XXV (April, 1936), 266.

41. Stuart P. Sherman, The Significance of Sinclair Lewis, p. 16. See also Herron, p. 385.

42. Robert Littell, "Babbitt," New Repub., XXXII (Oct. 4, 1922), 152; Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890 (N.Y., 1925), p. 82; V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (N. Y., 1930), vol. III, p. 369; and Geismar, p.89.

43. For documentation of Lewis' affection toward Babbitt and for an interesting comparison of Lewis' own personality with Babbitt's, see McNally, p. 278. Both Perry Miller, "The Incorruptable Sinclair Lewis," p. 31, and Carl Van

Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 25, pointed out that Lewis' true feeling toward Babbitt was not realized and that Babbitt's revolt was generally overlooked. W. R. Benét, p. 422, related an incident which he considered typical of the "essential Lewis," in which Lewis engaged a traveling salesman in a long conversation that completely bored Benét. When the man had gone, Benét asked Lewis how he could even talk to such a person, and Lewis replied: "That's the trouble with you, Bill, you regard him as hoi polloi, he doesn't even represent the cause of labor or anything dramatic - but I understand that man - by God, I love him."

44. DeVoto, Literary Fallacy, p. 99, and Edgar, Art of the Novel, p. 298, deny the real existence of Babbitt, while Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven, 1950), p. 263, calls Babbitt "a caricature who came to life," and an inferior 20th century prototype of Howells' Silas Lapham. Lippmann, p. 75, believes that no such individual as Babbitt could exist, yet he was so skillfully portrayed he provided the perfect stereotype. However, most of the intellectuals of Lewis' own generation joyfully hailed Babbitt as a realistic portrait of a real person. The present writer, while he has some reservations as to Babbitt's being an actual individual, believes that he is essentially a true depiction of a type that existed and still exists to some degree.

45. Ludwig Lewisohn, "Babbitt," Nation, CXV (Sept. 20, 1922), 285.

46. Spiller, et. al., LHUS (N.Y., 1948), p. 1226.

47. Hatcher, p. 121.

48. Among those who have testified to his fact are: Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction, p. 174; James Branch Cabell, Some of Us, An Essay in Epitaphs (N.Y., 1930), pp. 70-2; Floyd Dell, Looking at Life (London, 1924), p. 294; Serge Hughes, "From Main Street to World So Wide," Commonweal, XLIII (April 6, 1951), 648; S. P. B. Mais, Some Modern Authors (N.Y., 1923), p. 103; and Milton Waldman, "Sinclair Lewis," in J. C. Squire et. al., eds., Contemporary American Authors (N.Y., 1928), p. 85. Cabell's analysis of Babbitt's characterization is especially good.

49. Regis Michaud, The American Novel To-Day (Boston, 1931), p. 144-7.

50. Roger Butterfield, "From Babbitt to the Bomb," SRL, XXXII (Aug. 6, 1949), 100.

51. Walter Fuller Taylor, A History of American Letters (N.Y., 1936) p. 384.

52. The idealism of Arrowsmith has been almost universally recognized by scholars and critics. For example, see: Louis Adamic, My America (N.Y., 1938), p. 96; J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come (N.Y., 1944), p. 160; Canby, "Sinclair Lewis," p. 75; Hatcher, p. 123; Geismar, p. 98; Michaud, p. 149; LHUS, p. 1227; Henry Longan Stuart, "Sinclair Lewis Assails Our Medicine Men," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXIV (March 8, 1925), Sec. iii, p. 1; and Taylor, p. 387.

53. For a more detailed discussion of Lewis' labor novel, see below, Chapter II, Section 1.

54. Anon., "Arrowsmith," Hygeia, X (March, 1932), 224-5.

55. Burton Rascoe, "Contemporary Reminiscences," Arts and Decoration, XXII (May, 1925), 86.

56. Smith, p. 120.

57. Barbara Grace Spayd, Introduction to Sinclair Lewis' Arrowsmith (N.Y. and Chi., 1945), p. xxii.

58. Grant Overton, "The Salvation of Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXI (April, 1925), 183. See also Lewis' letters in Smith, pp. 124-5, 131, testifying to his enthusiasm for his work on Arrowsmith and DeKruif's value as a collaborator, also in reference to his visits to various laboratories in England to make the book more factual.

59. Anon., "Arrowsmith," Hygeia, p. 225, and Spayd, p. xxi.

60. Quoted in Overton, P. 184.

61. The relationship of Arrowsmith to the American pioneer tradition has been suggested by Lucy L. Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature (N.Y., 1927), pp. 283-5.

62. Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (N.Y. and Chicago, 1945), p. 3.

63. Of all the critics who have compared Lewis to Dickens, James Branch Cabell was probably the most astute. In Some of Us, An Essay in Epitaphs, pp. 64-70, Cabell made as extended comparison of Lewis and Dickens, concluding that Lewis' world was an imaginary one, delightful

but incredible, populated by goblins like Gantry and Pickerbaugh who, like Dickens' characters in Martin Chuzzlewit, were a triumph of imagination over reality. Cabell believed, however, that Dickens and Lewis differed basically because Dickens was an optimist, Lewis a pessimist. Cabell's treatment is suggestive and original, but is certainly open to question in his conclusions.

64. Among the many scholars and critics who have noted this are: Hartwick, p. 63, Gurko, p. 290, Calverton, "Last of the Literary Liberals," p. 82, Lippmann, p. 81, and Joseph Wood Krutch, "A Genius on Main Street," Nation, CXX (April 1, 1925), 360.

65. Geismar, p. 100.

66. Krutch, p. 360.

67. Hazard, p. 285.

68. Henry Seidel Canby, "Arrowsmith," in Warner Taylor, ed., Essays of the Past and Present (N.Y., 1927), p. 422.

69. See, for example, Hughes, p. 649, Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," p. 267, and Taylor, p. 387.

70. Johnson, "Romance and Mr. Babbitt," p. 15.

71. Boynton, p. 178 and DeVoto, p. 99 were two critics who noted Lewis' supposed pessimism in Arrowsmith. It is interesting to compare their conclusions with those of a favorable review, for example, Robert Morss Lovett's "An Interpretor of American Life," Dial, LXXXVI (June, 1925), 515-8, reprinted in Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., Literary Opinion in America (N.Y., 1937), pp. 332-6. Lovett said of Arrowsmith: "Never before in fiction has the psychology of the scientist, the passion for research, been rendered with such penetration and justice." (Zabel, p. 335). In reference to Lewis' conclusion in Arrowsmith that scientists must be allowed to operate in an atmosphere free from pressures of any kind, see his speech "The Artist, the Scientist, and the Peace," broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House, Dec. 16, 1944, printed in American Scholar, XIV (July, 1945), 265-9. In this speech Lewis declared that knowledge, to be valuable, must work for the good of all mankind and not just a particular nation. This speech was directly in the finest tradition of Lewis' career.

72. Overton, p. 185.

73. Carl Van Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 43.

74. Adamic, p. 96, noted that the character of Leora was possibly based on an old friend of Lewis', Edith Sumner Kelley, whom he had met at Helicon Hall. Gottlieb, too, probably had a real counterpart, as did many others in the book, but it is impossible to trace them to their sources. David Dempsey, "In and Out of Books," N.Y. Times Book Rev., C (Jan. 21, 1951), sec. vii, p. 8, notes that in one copy of Arrowsmith Lewis inscribed the names of the people who inspired the fictional characters, most of them important men in the medical and scientific world. This copy is now in a safe in the New York Academy of Medicine, and will not be brought out until all the people involved are no longer living.

75. Sinclair Lewis, "Self-Portrait," written in Berlin, Aug., 1927, printed in Maule and Cane, pp. 45-51. Section quoted is p. 46. McNally, p. 280, also noted Lewis' special affection for Leora.

76. Geismar, p. 98.

77. Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition, p. 235. Gottlieb was also highly praised by German critics, who were impressed by the idealism he represented. See, for example, Anon., "Arrowsmith in Germany," Living Age, CCCXXIX (May 15, 1926), 381-2, and Hulsenbeck, pp. 479-82, who noted that Arrowsmith was an enormous influence in Germany in revealing the difference between American and European doctors. Both articles were translated from the Literarische Welt, Berlin literary weekly, where they originally appeared.

78. Sinclair Lewis, "I Return to America," Nation, CXVIII (June 4, 1924), 631-2.

79. Ibid., p. 632.

80. Ibid., p. 632.

81. Sinclair Lewis, "Main Street's Been Paved," Nation, CXIX (Sept. 10, 1924), 259.

82. Ibid., p. 259.

83. Sinclair Lewis, "Be Brisk With Babbitt," Nation, CXIX (Oct. 15, 1924), 409-11; (Oct. 22, 1924), 437-9; (Oct. 29, 1924), 463-4.

84. Ibid., Oct. 15, pp. 410-11.

85. Ibid., Oct. 22, p. 437.

86. Ibid., p. 437.

87. Ibid., p. 437.

88. Sinclair Lewis, "An American Views the Huns," Nation, CXXI (July 1, 1925), 19-20.

89. Arrowsmith, p. 315.

90. Sinclair Lewis, "Self-Conscious America," Amer. Merc., VI (Oct., 1925), 129-39.

91. Ibid., pp. 129, 130.

92. Ibid., p. 130.

93. Ibid., p. 130.

94. Ibid., p. 134.

95. Ibid., p. 135. Lewis had already excoriated the frivolity of American criticism in his essay "A Review of Reviewers," Literary Digest International Book Review, I (Dec., 1922), 9ff. In this essay Lewis paid tribute to such new critics as Mencken, Lewisohn, and Canby, concluding it would be men like these who would lift criticism in this country out of its mediocrity. This essay is also interesting as a preview of Lewis' remarks on American criticism in his Nobel Speech.

96. Ibid., p. 135-6.

97. Ibid., p. 139.

98. Sinclair Lewis, "Can An Artist Live in America?" Nation, CXXI (Dec. 9, 1925), 662-3.

99. Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap (N.Y., 1926).

100. Sinclair Lewis, "Breaking Into Print," Colophon, XI (Winter, 1937), p. 220.

101. Lewis' letter to Harcourt from Bermuda, Nov. 10, 1925. In Smith, p. 188.

102. Henry Longan Stuart, "Sinclair Lewis Hits the Trail," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXV (June 6, 1926), sec. iii, p. 1.

103. Joseph Wood Krutch, "Babbitt Returns to Nature," Nation, CXXII (June 16, 1926), 672.

104. Ernest S. Bates, "Mantrap," SRL, II (June 26, 1926), 887.

105. George Jean Nathan, The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan (N.Y., 1932), p. 16.

106. Carl Van Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 13.

107. Lewis' letter to Harcourt from Kansas City, April 4, 1926, in Smith, p. 203.

108. Lewis' letter rejecting the Pulitzer Prize is reprinted in Smith, pp. 212-3.

109. For samples of various reactions to Lewis' rejection of the Pulitzer Prize, see: Anon., "Sinclair Lewis' Gesture," New Repub., XLVI (May 19, 1926), 397; and Anon., "A Literary Main Street," Nation, CXXII (May 19, 1926), 546; both of which are sympathetic. Also see Anon., "Sinclair Lewis' Hornet's Nest," Literary Digest, LXXXIX (May 29, 1926), 27-8, which reviews the newspaper commentary on the matter and reprints many items, mostly unfavorable to Lewis.

110. Carl Van Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 26. Probably the only earlier book at all comparable to Elmer Gantry was Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware, 1896. Some critics have suggested Lewis' possible indebtedness to this novel for some scenes in Elmer Gantry, but in the opinion of the present writer there is no apparent influence worth serious consideration.

111. For examples of Lewis' attitude toward religion and the clergy while he was at Yale, see his poem "The Third Estate," Yale Lit. Mag., LXX (Dec. 1904), 98-9; and the stories "Concerning Psychology," Yale Courant, XLI (Feb. 11, 1905), 189ff.; "The Heart of Pope Innocent," Yale Lit. Mag., LXXI (Jan. 1906), 154-5.

112. Sinclair Lewis, "The Deadshots," Waterloo, Iowa Daily Courier, Aug. 8, 1908 (Yale Coll.).

113. Cf., Sinclair Lewis, Trail of the Hawk, p. 383.

114. Cf., Sinclair Lewis, "Spiritualist Vaudeville," Metropolitan, XLVII (Feb, 1918), 19.

115. Main Street, p. 328.

116. Ibid., p. 328.

117. For an example of this, see Reverend Zitterel's speech on "America's Problems," ibid., pp. 329-30.

118. Babbitt, pp. 98-9.

119. Ibid., p. 99.

120. Ibid., p. 204.

121. Ibid., p. 206.

122. See Dr. Drew's sermon "How the Saviour Would End Strikes," ibid., pp. 313-4.

123. Ibid., pp. 356-8.

124. Ibid., pp. 393-5.

125. Arrowsmith, p. 291.

126. Smith, p. 150.

127. Lewis' letter is printed in its entirety in Smith, p. 153.

128. Lewis' letter to Harcourt from Santa Fe, N.M., Feb. 3, 1926. In Smith, pp. 193-4.

129. Samuel Harkness, "Sinclair Lewis' Sunday School Class," Christian Century, XLIII (July 29, 1926), 938-9. The quotes are from p. 939. See also Anon., "Sinclair Lewis Holds Class for Preachers," N.Y. Times, LXXV (May 18, 1926), p. 1, col. 4. For additional information as to the actual personnel of the Sunday School Class see Lewis' letters in Smith, pp. 204, 206, 216.

130. Harkness, p. 938.

131. Lewis explained his reason for preaching in the Kansas City Churches in a letter to Harcourt from Kansas City, April 21, 1926, in Smith, p. 207.

132. The best report of this incident is in the N.Y. Times., LXXV (April 20, 1926), p. 2, col. 5. The sermon was preached in the Linwood Boulevard Church, Kansas City, April 18, 1926.

133. William J. McNally, "Americans We Like: Mr. Babbitt, Meet Sinclair Lewis," Nation., CXXV (Sept. 21, 1927), 281. This article is also an excellent and entertaining account

of Lewis' personality, written by a man who spent most of the summer of 1926 with Lewis, while Elmer Gantry was being written.

134. Much of this material referred to in the text has been preserved in one of Lewis' notebooks in the Yale Collection, item #155, which is also the source of the quoted excerpt.

135. Among those who found Elmer Gantry unbelievable, to list but a few, were: David S. Muzzey, "Sinclair Lewis' Attack on the Clergy," Standard, XIV (July, 1927), 7-10; Michael Williams, "The Sinclair Lewis Industry," Commonweal, V (March 30, 1927), 577-9; Edward Shillito, "Elmer Gantry and the Church in America," The Nineteenth Century and After, CI (May, 1927), 739-48; Robert Littell, "The Preacher Fried in Oil," New Repub., L (March 16, 1927), 108-9; Bernard DeVoto, Forays and Rebuttals (Boston, 1936), pp. 307-8; Rebecca West, The Strange Necessity (N.Y., 1928), pp. 295-309; and Irene and Allan Cleaton, Books and Battles, p. 238. Of these sources West is probably the best criticism of the book on the literary level, while Shillito offers the most outstanding, reasonable and scholarly refutation of the novel's subject matter that has yet been written.

136. West, Williams, Muzzey, and Lippmann all concurred in this view.

137. Taylor, p. 386, Geismar, p. 105, Luccock, p. 81, Littell, p. 109, Carl Van Doren, "St. George and the Parson," SRL, III (March 12, 1927), 639, and Camille J. McCole, "The Future Significance of Sinclair Lewis," Catholic World, CXXXII (Dec., 1930), 320, all agreed on this point.

138. West, p. 302, and Williams, p. 579, are two critics who have stated this judgement.

139. Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (N.Y., 1950), p. 71.

140. Geismar, p. 104.

141. McNally, p. 281, noted this and also that Lewis himself was happiest in writing the novel in creating the character of Sharon.

142. Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "The History of Their Books: Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXIX (March, 1929), 53, pointed out that much criticism was directed at Elmer Gantry because of this portrayal of the evangelist troupe, but that the portrayal was based on actual legal proceedings

which Lewis had examined. Maurice also declared that the character of Sharon Falconer was not based on Aimee Semple McPherson, as many readers thought.

143. Taylor, History of American Letters, p. 386.

144. Three of the more important reviews which praised Elmer Gantry were Carl Van Doren's "The Spring Lesson," reprinted in Kendall B. Taft, et. al., College Readings in Contemporary Thought (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 522-3; Joseph Wood Krutch's "Mr. Babbitt's Spiritual Guide," reprinted in Taft, pp. 524-5; and Elmer Davis' "Mr. Lewis Attacks the Clergy," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXVI (March 13, 1927), sec. iii, p. 1.

145. Maurice, p. 52. For other samples of the impact of Elmer Gantry see Anon., "Storm Over Elmer Gantry," Lit. Dig., XCIII (April 16, 1927), 28-9, which reprinted excerpts from newspapers, periodicals, and speeches, almost all unfavorable.

146. Anon., "Lewis' Obituary," Pub. Wkly., CLIX (Jan. 27, 1951), 527.

147. Many critics and scholars have noted Mencken's influence on Elmer Gantry, e.g., Lippmann, Pattee, The New American Literature, p. 343, Davis, Van Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 41, and Brooks, Confident Years, p. 507.

148. A good sampling of Mencken's opinions on religion, many of which were exactly parallel to Lewis', may be found in his Prejudices: Third Series (N.Y., 1922), pp. 131-2, 232-7; Prejudices: Fourth Series (N.Y., 1924), pp. 61-83; and Prejudices: Fifth Series (N.Y., 1926), pp. 104-119. This last reference, containing Mencken's views on Protestantism in America, is especially pertinent.

149. Another book that should be read in conjunction with Elmer Gantry is Joseph Wood Krutch's The Modern Temper (N.Y., 1929), one of the most thorough statements of the modern mind's struggle with religion yet written in this century from a layman's viewpoint.

150. Dorothy Thompson, "Sinclair Lewis: A Postcript," Atlantic, CLXXXVII (June, 1951), 74.

151. Smith, p. 255.

152. Nathan, The Intimate Notebooks, p. 19.

153. W. E. Woodward, "The World and Sauk Center," New Yorker, IX (Jan. 27, Feb. 3, 1934), 24-27, 24-27; Canby, American Memoir, pp. 306-9; McNally, pp. 278-81; Harrison Smith, "Sinclair Lewis, Remembrance of the Past," SRL, XXXIV (Jan. 27, 1951), 7-9, 36-8; and Clifton Fadiman, "Party of One," Holiday, XIII (March, 1953), 6-11, are the best sources for anecdotes about Lewis' mimic powers and some of the occasions on which he used them. The poetry incident was described in C. F. Crandall, "When Sinclair Lewis Wrote A Sonnet in 3 Minutes, 50 Seconds," N.Y. Her. Trib. Book Rev., XXVIII (Sept. 2, 1951), 4.

154. Sinclair Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, "Being the Soul of Lowell Schmaltz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen" (N.Y., 1928), pp. 19-21.

155. Henry Longan Stuart, "Mr. Lewis Goes Back to Babbitt," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXVII (April 8, 1928), sec. iii, p. 1. Lowell Schmaltz was the direct descendant of Eddie Schwirtz in The Job, 1917. Lewis also wrote a short story, "The Way I See It," SatEvePost, CXCII (May 29, 1920), 14-15, which used exactly the same technique as Coolidge, except that in it the speaker was a salesman telling how he had "quit" his job.

156. Henry Seidel Canby, "Schmaltz, Babbitt, and Co.," SRL, IV (March 24, 1928), 697-8.

157. Leo and Miriam Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," Coll. Eng., IV (Feb., 1943), 290.

158. Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (N.Y., 1942), p. 223.

159. Frederick J. Hoffman, The Modern Novel in America (Chicago, 1951), p. 113.

160. Coolidge, like Elmer Gantry, shows the heavy influence of Mencken, as Brooks, Confident Years, p. 507, has noted.

161. McNally, p. 280.

162. E.g., Geismar, p. 105, and Albert Jay Nock, The Book of Journeyman (N.Y., 1930), pp. 150-1.

163. Taylor, p. 388.

164. The main sources for the statements about the autobiographical nature of Dodsworth are Benjamin Stolberg, "Sinclair Lewis," Amer. Merc., LIII (Oct., 1941), 457 and Van Doren, Lewis Biography, p. 55. This factor was also noted by Grant C. Knight, American Literature and

Culture (N.Y., 1932), p. 449. A book that should be read in connection with Dodsworth is Grace Hegger Lewis' Half A Loaf (N.Y., 1931), written by Lewis' first wife in answer to Dodsworth and presenting her side of the story. In this novel Lewis is depicted as the character Timothy Hale, who is responsible for the crack-up of his own marriage because of these faults:

1. His refusal to settle down to his home and family.
2. His drinking.
3. His philandering.
4. His embarrassing behavior at social functions.
5. His cold view of life as material for a book.

Whether the novel was wrong or right, it at least offers an interesting sidelight on Lewis' first marriage and early career.

165. Among the critics who noticed Lewis' unique and sympathetic portrayal of Samuel Dodsworth were Geismar, p. 112, Hoffman, p. 112, Gurko, p. 291, J. Donald Adams, Shape of Books to Come (N.Y., 1944), p. 135; J. W. Krutch, "Dodsworth," Nation, CXXXVIII (March 14, 1934), 312; Carl Van Doren, "Zenith Meets Europe," Nation, CXXVIII (April 3, 1929), 400; Louis Kronenberger, "Sinclair Lewis Parts Company with Mr. Babbitt," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXXVIII (March 17, 1929), sec. iii, p. 2; Boynton, Literature and American Life, pp. 851-2; Cleaton, p. 238; Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," Eng. Journal, XXV (April, 1936), 268, Edgar, Art of the Novel, p. 299; Howard Mumford Jones, "Mr. Lewis' America," Va. Quar. Rev., VII (July, 1931), 429; and F. T. Russell, "The Growing Up of Sinclair Lewis," U. of Calf. Chronicle, XXXII (July, 1930), 319-23. Many of these critics, some of them hostile to Lewis' earlier books, also agreed that Dodsworth held promise of Lewis' future developement; e.g., Boynton, Edgar, Jones, Russell.

166. Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (N.Y., 1949), pp. 10-11.

167. See Sinclair Lewis' statement on American types, "Sinclair Lewis Surprised," N.Y. Times, LXXV (March 7, 1926), p. 25, col. 6. In this statement Lewis expressed his belief that a definite American aristocracy was being created, based on several generations of business-gained wealth which buys the cultural appointments of aristocracy. Lewis also stated that this new aristocrat, the prosperous business man, was the real ruler of America. However, Lewis concluded that America's future was promising. Lewis' remarks originated in Tucson, Ariz., and were in reference to the findings just published by Dr. Ales Hrdlicka of the Smithsonian Institute, who concluded, from research begun in 1910, that a new American type

was evolving. The full story of these findings may be found in the N.Y. Times, LXXV (March 7, 1926), p. 1, col. 1. It is interesting to note that Lewis' characterization of various American types in his books agreed almost perfectly with the results of the scientific research!

168. For a full account of Lewis' views on England and English life, see his series of twelve articles "Main Streets and Babbitts of Britain," published in the N.Y. Her. Trib. weekly from July 21 to Sept. 29, 1928. These articles are also in the Yale Coll. in typescript form. Lewis' conclusions in this series were not entirely favorable to England, for he noted many defects, e.g., England too has its Babbitts. On this same matter see also the report of an interview with Lewis in the N.Y. Times, LXXX (Feb. 7, 1931), p. 7, col. 6.

169. Dodsworth, pp. 164-5. In this passage the reference to America's actions in Haiti and Nicaragua was fully developed in Lewis' article "Devil-Dog Rule," Nation, CXXIX (Dec. 18, 1929), 751, in which he attacked the actions of U.S. M.C. General Smedley D. Butler, who had controlled the elections in Nicaragua and dissolved the Haitian Congress to prevent legislation unfavorable to U.S. interests. Lewis demanded a senate investigation of the matter and suggested that such an investigation would also reveal corruption in the Hoover administration. This article was one more example of Lewis' alertness as a public-spirited citizen.

170. This long passage, including the dialogue of Professor Brant, Sam, and Fran, extends from pp. 248-55 in the novel. The views of Professor Brant and Dodsworth were unquestionably those of Lewis himself, but Fran's statements about women in America, although apparently given by Lewis in all seriousness, were considerably in conflict with what he had to say in his article, "Is America a Paradise for Women?" Pictorial Rev., XXX (June, 1929), reprinted in Maule and Cane, pp. 299-309. In this article Lewis asserted that America was a paradise for women mainly because they have the freedom to do what they want and to struggle for their ideals. America is a paradise precisely because it offers women a hard, not an easy life, a chance to work and participate, Lewis concluded.

171. Both Geismar, pp. 112-4, and Gurko, p. 291, noted this turning against Fran by Lewis, although Gurko interpreted it as an indication of Lewis' dual feelings toward all his characters and as an example of his waning creative power.

172. Henry Seidel Canby, Seven Years Harvest (N.Y., 1936), pp. 135-7.

173. E. M. Forster, in his article, "A Camera Man," Life and Letters, II (May, 1929), 336-43, reprinted in Abinger Harvest (N.Y., 1936), pp. 129-36, in his description of Lewis as a skilled photographer and reproducer of surface reality but not as an artist, unfortunately had great influence on subsequent critics. There may have been some justification for Forster's conclusions in regard to Lewis' method in the satirical novels of the 1920's, but when Forster called Dodsworth an indication of Lewis' slackening powers, he was obviously wrong. Equally unobservant of Lewis' notable artistic achievement in Dodsworth were Calverton, "Sinclair Lewis, Last of the Literary Liberals," Modern Monthly, VIII (March, 1934), 77-86, who attacked Lewis for his supposed inability to portray deep emotion, and Robert Cantwell, "Sinclair Lewis," in Cowley, ed., After the Genteel Tradition, pp. 112-26, who criticized Dodsworth as an unreal character, an "Idealized Babbitt."

174. Canby, pp. 133-9.

175. Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," pp. 268-9.

176. W. E. Woodward, "The World and Sauk Center," New Yorker, IX (Jan. 27, 1934), 24.

177. Anon., "King Gustaf Fetes Nobel Prize Men," N.Y. Times, LXXX (Dec. 12, 1930), p. 13, col. 7.

178. Erik Axel Karlfeldt, "Sinclair Lewis and the Nobel Prize," SRL, VII (Jan. 10, 1931), 524-5. This is the complete transcription of the award speech to Lewis, made by the Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

179. Malcolm Cowley, in his After the Genteel Tradition, pp. 9-25, uses Lewis speech as the starting point for his discussion of the Genteel Tradition in American literature. He analyzes this tradition, charts its rise and fall, and sums up the significance of Lewis and other writers of his generation in causing its final collapse. Cowley's discussion is an excellent reference for the whole matter.

180. This quotation and the other excerpts following it in the text are taken from the complete transcript of Lewis' Nobel Prize Speech printed in the N.Y. Times, LXXX (Dec. 13, 1930), p. 12.

181. Lewis had earlier voiced his admiration for Dos Passos in an article "John Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer," reprinted as a pamphlet (N.Y. and London, 1926).

182. Stolberg, p. 458.

183. For a review of some of the comment about Lewis' selection for the Nobel Prize see: William Lyon Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribner's, LXXXIX (March, 1931), 325-8; Anon., "British View of Sinclair Lewis' Prize," Lit. Dig., CVII (Dec. 6, 1930), 19; Anon., "Skoal for Red Lewis," Lit. Dig., CVII (Nov. 22, 1930), 167: Anon., "Do We Love Shaw's Abuse," Lit. Dig., CVIII (Jan. 3, 1931), 17; Anon., "Sinclair Lewis," Nation, CXXXI (Nov. 19, 1930), 544; Raymond H. Palmer, "The Nobel Jury Judges America," Christian Century, XLVII (Nov. 26, 1930), 1448-50; and Anon., "Sinclair Lewis Struts His Stuff," Lit. Dig., CVII (Dec. 27, 1930), 13-15.

184. Benjamin De Casseres, "Portraits en Brochette: Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXXIII (July, 1931), 488.

185. H. L. Binsse and J. J. Trounstine, "Europe Looks at Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, LXXII (Jan., 1931), 453-7. This article is probably the best source for material about the bad influence Lewis' books may have had on the European conception of American character, although the present writer strongly disagrees with its conclusions.

186. Cleaton, p. 239.

187. Jack Alexamder, "Rover Girl in Europe," SatEvePost, CCXII (May 25, 1940), 115.

188. S. J. Woolf, "Back on Main Street with Mr. Lewis," N.Y. Times, LXXX (Nov. 16, 1930), sec. v, p. 3.

189. Anon., "Lewis Finds Irony in 'Serious' America," N.Y. Times, LXXX (Nov. 26, 1930), p. 2, Col. 7.

190. Anon., "Lewis Would Exile All Our Reformers," N.Y. Times, LXXX (Dec. 23, 1930), p. 3, col. 2.

191. Anon., "Lewis Holds Books Do Not Prevent War," N.Y. Times, LXXX (Dec. 30, 1930), p. 5, col. 2.

192. Anon., "Lewis Questions Keeping Colleges," N.Y. Times, LXXX (April 22, 1931), p. 30, col. 4.

193. Anon., "A Conservative Menace," N.Y. Times, LXXXI (Nov. 1, 1931), sec. ix., p. 2, col. 2.

III. The Affirmative Years

1. The Novel Lewis Never Wrote

Sinclair Lewis and his books had been headline news all through the 1920's, but in the decade that followed, Lewis yielded his preeminent place in America's national consciousness and retired to a relatively minor position. This is not to say that he stopped writing or that he had nothing more to say, because from 1930 to 1940 Lewis produced six more novels, one of which, It Can't Happen Here (1935), was one of the most significant books of the decade. It caused a stir reminiscent of Lewis' great novels of the 1920's, while two others, Ann Vickers (1933) and The Prodigal Parents (1938) had considerable importance in Lewis' career as a social critic.

Nor were the years immediately following the Nobel Prize completely placid, for Lewis continued to be the subject of considerable notoriety. On one occasion, for example, he was refused the use of Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. by the D.A.R. for a speech.[1] Soon after this Lewis was again in the news when he was slapped by Theodore Dreiser at a dinner during which Lewis had publically accused Dreiser of plagiarism.[2] In the fall of 1931 Lewis wrote an article attacking a critic for a shoddy book review,[3] and in an interview late the same year he praised the recent movie version of his Arrowsmith and stated that the movies were beginning

to show signs of maturity.[4] But these incidents had little importance in comparison to a project which had been in Lewis' mind for several years, one he attempted in earnest before giving it up to write Ann Vickers. This project was the writing of a great labor novel, and Lewis' inability to complete it may have marked a crucial point in his career.

Lewis had long been thinking about a novel on American labor, even before 1925.[5] The book was tentatively titled "Neighbor," and Lewis felt it would be his finest novel. There are references to it all through his letters to his publisher Harcourt from 1920-1930, references that reveal Lewis' burning ambition to write this novel and his high hopes for it. But always some other, more immediate project interfered, causing Lewis to put aside the idea while he wrote, successively, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and Dodsworth, although he never gave it up altogether. By the spring of 1927 he had formulated a plan for the book which was based on the life of Eugene Debs, while its title was to be "The Man Who Sought God." At the same time Lewis was stimulated in his planning for the book by the Saccho-Vanzetti case. A few months later the novel took even more definite shape on a walking trip through Alsace which Lewis took with Ramon Guthrie, and at that time he proposed to build the story around the theme "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." A character was evolved who symbolized cynicism. He was to be called "the international waiter,"

but later Lewis thought this character deserved a novel all his own. The hero of the novel was to be a worker who awakens to political awareness in his search for God, and who runs afoul of church and state in his quest for truth. The crisis of the story was to be this man's inner struggle against his own messiah complex that threatens his humility and integrity.

But Lewis gave up this particular idea soon after, for although he thought it would be his best work, he believed that he was not yet ready to write it and wanted the experience of doing one other novel before attempting the labor book. Thus, Lewis had the labor novel in mind while writing Dodsworth, and in 1929 he made his first real attempt to write it at the Vermont farm where he had settled with his second wife, Dorothy Thompson. However, Lewis could not make progress in his writing because he was disturbed by the crowd of experts and celebrities who were always to be found in Mrs. Lewis' presence. They not only disturbed him, but also discouraged him in every possible way about Debs as the hero of the book, the complexity of the labor situation, and Lewis' own lack of background for the task. With all these deterrents and with his own lack of confidence in his ability to tackle such a huge project, it is no wonder that Lewis once more put aside the plan and did Ann Vickers instead.[6]

For years Sinclair Lewis had been reading intensively about American idealism and labor. In 1931 he became so

enthusiastic regarding the proposed book that he planned to engage a collaborator to travel with him through industrial midwest to gather material and then to Europe to help in the writing, but the book never got beyond the planning stage.[7] It was not from a lack of interest on Lewis' part, for his sympathy with labor had been evident all through his career. For example, one of Carol Kennicott's greatest antipathies toward Gopher Prairie had been its reactionary attitude about labor and the farmer, while Babbitt in his brief revolt had most shocked his friends by defending the workers of Zenith in their strike for better conditions. Nor was Lewis' interest only literary, as is evidenced by his series of articles from Marion, North Carolina in 1929, where Lewis had brilliantly reported for the Scripps-Howard newspapers the textile workers strike, the clash between strikers and peace officers, and the deplorable conditions in Southern textile mills.[8] These articles of Lewis' were as partisan on the side of labor and as savage an attack on economic injustice as anything in the annals of modern American journalism. Thus, a labor novel would have been the logical outcome of opinions and attitudes which Sinclair Lewis had long maintained.

In 1936 after the publication of <u>It Can't Happen Here</u>, with confidence restored by the success of that book, Lewis was ready to start again on his labor novel. Its plot was still basically similar to that of the earlier plan. In June, 1936, in collaboration with Ramon Guthrie, Lewis started

practical research on the book. With his usual care for detail, he traveled all over New England, interviewing people of all social levels. From this research the idea emerged for a new hero, to be called "Roy," a man from a New England village who was really to be a prototype of Lewis himself. But once more the plans for the book were suddenly dropped, and by the end of the summer Lewis was writing Prodigal Parents in its place. In only one book, his next-to-last, the uneven The God-Seeker did Lewis' projected labor novel ever come to life, and in that case it was only a fragment of the original concept, as will be evident in later discussion.

Why did Sinclair Lewis never write his labor novel? There have been many answers. Louis Adamic who met Lewis when the idea was strongest in his mind and who was one of his intended collaborators believed that Lewis was afraid to risk doing a book on labor and idealism that might be unpopular. Despite his success, Lewis was bothered by a feeling of insecurity about himself and his relationship with his new publisher Doubleday Doran, Adamic stated. Also, Lewis' expenses were great, including the payment of alimony to his first wife, his incessant traveling, and the maintenance of his recently acquired Vermont estate. Moreover, his wife Dorothy was a rising literary figure in her own right and she challenged his masculine sense of pride as a writer. For all these reasons Lewis feared to do a book on such a dangerously controversial subject as labor in a time when Depression

gripped the land.[9]

Ben Stolberg, long a close friend of Lewis', stated that Lewis dropped the labor novel because he was intellectually and temperamentally unfitted for writing it, since he discovered a labor leader is inextricably connected with social movements and he realized he had no flair for social or economic theories. A labor leader, Stolberg believed, unlike a Babbitt, has to be judged in reference to a movement and its place in society:

> In short, a labor novel is an ideological as well as a literary enterprise, and Lewis is not an intellectual; his pet aversions are "highbrows". . . . He knows as no one else the detail of America life, but he cannot tell you what it all adds up to.[10]

All these statements have some truth and may have indeed had some influence on Lewis' unwritten labor novel, but by far the most perceptive comment and deepest insight into the matter (which also must be considered cum grano salis), has been demonstrated by Ramon Guthrie. Guthrie was one of the first to share Lewis' ideas for the labor book and also probably had the greatest share in its intermittent preparation. Guthrie concluded that it was Lewis' attitude toward his father which was a "mixture of awed reverence and rankling resentment" that was the determining factor in his inability to do the book. According to Guthrie, Lewis' relationship with his father was vital in his literary career, or, as Guthrie himself put the matter:

> All of his best books were an affirmation of his hard-won emancipation from being Harry Lewis of Main Street. Yet throughout his life, whenever Red stood on the verge of giving the true measure of himself and the forces that were in him, the shade of Dr. E. J., as Red always called him, snorted the phrase that never lost its power to bring him to heel: "Harry, why can't you do like any other boy ought to do!"[11]

In Guthrie's view of Lewis' career, Lewis hated to be called Harry, yet was sometimes compelled to be Harry. Thus, his worst books like Work of Art and Prodigal Parents were written to please his father, though they were actually at variance with his own spirit. In this way the labor novel would have been the most direct attack on everything old Dr. Lewis symbolized than anything Lewis had ever written. Lewis had won his success with books he felt he ought not to write. He had started his career with no intention of being "the bad boy of American letters," as Parrington called him, but he was a natural rebel who revolted even against himself. Perhaps it was this rebellion, this refusal to be coerced, that resulted in Lewis' revolt against his own compulsion to do the labor novel, a revolt that never let him do the book he most wanted to write. All this, according to Guthrie, was at the root of Lewis' failure to create the work that might have been his best.

To summarize the matter, it is probably not possible to determine exactly why the labor novel was never completed. As has been demonstrated, three men, all literary men and Lewis' friends, have recorded three entirely different view-

points on the subject. Guthrie suggested the psychological cause of Lewis' filial feelings towards his father (including also Lewis' boyhood in Minnesota and his self-identification with the America he satirized), yet all this did not stop him from writing Main Street. Stolberg concluded that Lewis' intellectual equipment was lacking for the task, yet this same equipment was enough to enable Lewis to probe into the complexity of the scientific world in Arrowsmith; while Adamic reasoned that Lewis was afraid to write an unpopular book, yet this hadn't stopped him doing Elmer Gantry, which dealt with the most controversial subject of all. Nor did Lewis ever shrink away from a battle, as his whole career testifies.

If any one factor must be chosen, it is that labor in America has been in such a state of flux, and is so gigantic and far-reaching a topic, that it defies definitive treatment by any novelist, although various aspects have been successfully handled in fiction by many American writers. Moreover, Lewis was a man who, in his major works, was unable to confine himself to particulars, but when he wrote, wrote in terms of the universal, as for example, the small town, the average American citizen, science, religion, the American abroad. To write such a book about labor was a task too great even for Lewis, but the creative impulse that inspired Lewis in the early 1930's did not go completely to waste, for it was channeled into Lewis' first book of the decade, Ann Vickers, which will be examined in the pages to follow.

2. Ann Vickers: 1933

Reading Ann Vickers after such books as Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, or even Elmer Gantry, is frankly a disappointment. The book has the same familiar Lewis satiric technique and social criticism, and both often seem to be as good as anything Lewis had done previously. The story, that of Ann Vickers a social worker and penologist, is also generally interesting, but the narrative, the satire, and the social criticism never quite come together into the satisfying blend typical of the earlier books. Furthermore, the episodic quality of the novel, evident in Lewis' work and especially in Arrowsmith, seems here to be a serious defect where before it had not mattered.[12]

Ann Vickers was another of Lewis' non-conformists and his first female protagonist since Carol Kennicott. Like Lewis himself and many of his characters, Ann grows up in a small midwestern town where she first learns the value of doubting from a gentle socialistic shoemaker. She goes to an eastern college for women, and her idealism leads her, after her graduation in 1912, to eventually become a suffrage worker. Tiring of this, she goes into settlement work in a New York slum district.

Soon after the beginning of World War I, Ann, her appetite for love having been first awakened in college by an attractive young professor, has an affair with an army officer

which results in her becoming pregnant. She has an abortion, and after a short time at various other social work positions, Ann goes to England. On her return she gets interested in penology and secures a job in a New England women's prison, at the same time studying for an M.A. degree. The degree in hand, Ann decides she wants to see the worst possible prison and so gets an appointment to the ill-famed Copperhead Gap penitentiary, located in an unnamed southern state.

At Copperhead Gap Ann is so shocked by the deplorable conditions that she soon makes herself unpopular with the officials by crusading for improvement, but her crusade ends abruptly when she is forced to resign. She returns to New York with the story of what she has seen bursting from her lips, but when she finally does get it published, Ann is dismayed to find that the public ignores it. By this time, she has accumulated considerable fame and is appointed to head a new, model women's prison in New York. In the interim, however, her private life has suffered, and when an old flame announces his engagement to someone else, Ann, on the rebound, accepts the marriage proposal of one J. Russell Spaulding, a boyish middle-aged charity executive. But she soon realizes that the marriage is a mistake and separates from her husband.

During the separation Ann meets and immediately falls in love with Barney Dolphin, a rather unscrupulous judge

but a likeable fellow, and in the torrid love affair that follows, Ann again becomes pregnant. This time determining to have a father for the child, she returns to live with her husband, and though she tells him that the expected child is not his, he welcomes her back. Ann has her baby, a boy, and after squelching a scandal about her prison instigated by her enemies, she leaves her husband, this time for good.

In the meantime Ann's lover, Judge Dolphin, has been convicted of accepting bribes and sent to prison. Ann works ceaselessly to get his release and when he is pardoned, they to away to Ann's country home and, as the book ends, prepare to live happily ever after.

It is obvious from this plot outline that Ann Vickers is not a person bound by conventional moral standards, nor, in fact, by conventionality of any kind. In this way she if the most radical of all Lewis' rebels. However, there is, intermingled with the satire in the book on American prisons and various other targets, the further appearance of that nostalgia already hinted in Dodsworth. Often, Lewis combined the two on the same page, for after a quick satiric slash at one of his favorite topics, colleges, he lapsed into this passage, one which reveals that Lewis was conscious of the passing of time and his own youth, a period which he attempted to reconstruct here:

> It was the era of a fantasy known as Christian socialism. It was the era of windy optimism, of a pre-war "idealism" which was satisfied with

> faith in place of statistics, of a certainty on one hand that Capitalism was divinely appointed to last forever, and on the other that Capitalism would be soon and bloodlessly replaced by an international Utopian commonwealth rather like the home-life of Louisa May Alcott. It was from this era that everyone who in 1930 was from thirty-five to fifty-five years old imbibed those buoyant, Shavian, liberal, faintly clownish notions which he was to see regarded by his sons and daughters as on a par with Baptist ethics and the cosmogony of Moses.[13]

Ann Vickers' career as a suffrage worker was narrated by Lewis with a mingling of amusement, sympathy, and contempt (with the emphasis on sympathy), and also a considerable knowledge of the history and activities of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. But perhaps the most important thing that the suffrage episode does in the novel is to serve as the introduction for the main area of social criticism, penology; for during her career as a suffrage worker, Ann is thrown into jail, an experience which leads her for the first time to perceive what Lewis regarded as the whole matter of society's stupidity in dealing with its law-breakers. Thus, Ann's views on the prison system, expressed in the following passage, were Lewis' own:

> She saw that war was stupid, that conducting business for the profit of a few owners was insane . . . but that in the entire range of human imbecility, there was nothing quite so senseless as imprisonment as a cure for crime . . . and that the worse the crimes became, the more serious it was that there should be only so barbaric an effort to cure.
>
> (p. 152).

But Lewis dropped this particular issue, to resume it in greater detail later in the book, in order to continue the story of Ann Vickers' career, in the course of which she finds it necessary to have an abortion, an incident which gave Lewis the chance to express his opinions on this matter. That these opinions were liberal is to be expected, and in the expression of them he saw a way to cleverly connect the two subjects, abortion and prisons, as the quotation below indicates:

> Just as it is felony to help a condemned murderer cheat the state of its beloved blood-letting by passing poison to him, so that he may die decently and alone, with no sadistic parade of priests and guards and reporters, so is it a crime to assist a woman condemned to the tittering gossip that can be worse than death by helping her avoid having what is quaintly known as an "illegitimate baby" - as though one should speak of an "illegitimate mountain" or an "illegitimate hurricane." A physician who keeps a rich woman abed and nervous is a great and good man; a physician who saves a girl from disgrace is an intruder who, having stolen from society the pleasure of viciousness, is rightly sent to prison. It is, then, difficult for respectable people to find an abortionist; it is only the notoriously sinful who are rewarded for their earnest cultivation of vice by being able to find ways out of its penalties.
>
> (p. 197).

Obviously, Sinclair Lewis, becoming older and mellower as he was, could still on such occasions as the one above, wield a rather sharp satiric blade.

Just as Ann Vickers tires of suffrage work she also becomes disillusioned in the novel with the whole system of charity in modern society. Her weariness with charity

was, moreover, an exact statement of Lewis' own, a matter which offers a further illustration of Lewis' sense of timeliness, something he never lost even at his worst. His feelings about charity were appropriate, because in 1933, with Depression in the land, the disparity between wealth and poverty was marked more sharply than ever before, and Lewis saw the inherent evil at the root of all charity, the degradation of those who must receive, the exaltation of those who choose to give. Nor was his bitterness here theoretical, for he undoubtedly recalled both his own poverty-stricken days as a struggling young writer and his experiences as a social worker after his graduation from Yale. All this was suggested in the following passage from Ann Vickers, as was also Lewis' hatred for wealth, and his sympathy for the poor:

> The fundamental wickedness of settlement houses, she decided - and suddenly she extended it to all "charitable work" . . . in all ages . . . was precisely the feature for which it was most praised in optimistic sermons, enthusiastic magazine articles, and the dim reasoning of well-meaning benefactors: that, as such sermons and articles always stated, "it brings together the well-to-do and the unfortunate, so that the prosperous may broaden and deepen their sympathies by first-hand contact with the poor . . . and the unfortunate may have an opportunity to learn and to better themselves by this friendly contact with those who can instruct and help them."
> (p. 239).

But this new radicalism of Lewis', this doubting of one of the most sacred Christian ideals, charity, was not further developed in Ann Vickers. It was an aside, one of the scattered pellets of satiric buckshot that Lewis fired

in the book, and as it stands it is difficult to decide just how serious Lewis' indictments against charity were intended to be. The whole matter is typical of the unevenness that characterizes the novel, the lack of any central, dominant theme which would have given the book force and direction.

However, the one theme in Ann Vickers which showed Sinclair Lewis in his familiar role as social critic, and the only theme in the book which called forth the indignant reforming zeal and raging satire of yore was the theme of prison reform and reform of society's entire way of thought regarding crime, criminals, and punishment. It is this which dominates the last half of the book, only slightly weakened by the intercession of events in the private life of the heroine. Lewis prepared the reader for what was to come when he defined, in classic satiric form, the word "penology," a definition reproduced here:

> (Penology! The science of torture! The art of locking the stable door after the horse is stolen! The touching faith that neurotics who hate social regulation can be made to love it by confining them in stinking dens, giving them bad food and dull work, and compelling them to associate with precisely the persons for associating with whom they have first been arrested. The credo, based on the premise that God created human beings for the purpose of burning most of them, that it is sinful for an individual to commit murder, but virtuous in the State to murder murderers. The theory that men chosen for their ability to maul unruly convicts will, if they be shut up in darkness, away from any public knowledge of what they do, be inspired to pray and love these convicts into virtue. The science of penology!)
> (pp. 267-8).

and Lewis' entire philosophy about the matter was summed up, on the rational level, by one of the book's minor characters, a Professor Jelke, who is introduced only as a device to give Lewis the chance to deliver his ideas on the prison system.

Professor Jelke's long speech (pp. 271-275 in the novel), summarized here, was not only Lewis' philosophy of penology, but also an expression of what was then and still is the most enlightened and progressive approach to this crucial, unsolved social problem. The main points of this philosophy are:

1. There are no good prisons. There cannot be good prisons any more than good murders, rapes, or cancers.

2. At its best, prison is an unnatural form of segregation from normal life and makes its victims unfit for normal life. At its worst, prison developes every possible human anti-social trait.

3. We put people into prison because we don't know what else to do with them, a situation which parallels the actions of ostriches under stress.

4. Any intelligent prison official believes that prison should be abolished.

5. What is to take the place of prison? For those needing only help and reconstruction, parole and probation. For the ethically-diseased and incurable, safe-keeping in hospitals. An incurable criminal should be permanently shut up with the same attitude as incurable carrier of disease, only his incurability must be decided by trained psychiatrists, not judges.

6. The theory of abolishing prisons is virtually unknown to the public. Thus, the normal response of a good citizen on hearing of a great crime, is

> to demand an increase in penal severity, while he should really demand something else, since prison has proven to be a failure in the prevention of crime.

In the plot of the novel, all this only leads up to the section in which Ann Vickers takes a job at the Copperhead Gap Penitentiary in order to observe prison conditions at their grimmest. The warden of the place, the bland, smooth-talking Dr. Slenk whose function is to preserve a respectable front for the horror that goes on behind the walls of his institution, is bad enough. But even worse is the utterly terrifying Captain Waldo Dringoole, the man in charge of the guards, who is the real master of Copperhead Gap. Dringoole, brutal to the point of bestiality, ignorant of all penal methods save torture, is evil personified and made all the more frightening by the conviction planted in the reader's mind that such men do exist and do control some American prisons. This gentleman's penal opinions were summed up by Lewis in one long dialogue wherein Dringoole proudly and righteously presents his views to Ann. In the reproduction of this dialogue, quoted in part here, Lewis included everything he hated in penal thought:

> "I tell you the only way you can handle criminals - they simply ain't human . . . is to put the fear of God into 'em so they'll behave themselves while they're in the pen and not want to come back when they get out. . . . When it comes to psychology, here's the real lowdown on it. Why are criminals criminals? Because they think they're too good to mind the rules. Then what ought a keeper to do with 'em? Why <u>break</u> <u>'em</u>! . . . Show 'em they ain't any good at all, and the only way they can get along,

> in prison or out, is by minding all the rules no matter what they are. . . . Fact, it's a good thing to give 'em fool rules that don't mean nothing, just so they will learn to do what they're told, no matter what it is! And if they don't - break 'em!. . . Discipline! That's the greatest word in the English language! I tell you, if the truth were known, the worst trick that was ever played on these poor devils was to do what the fool theorists call 'reforming the prisons! . . . Why if I could just have some of the good old punishments, if I could brand the incorrigibles so's people could see just what those skunks are, if I could lash 'em, not on the Q.T. but in public, so's it'd be a warning and a deterrent to everybody, give him five hundred strokes with a real cat-o'-nine-tails - stop when they fainted, and go to it again, and put plenty ofsalt in the scratches afterwards - why, say, if I could do that, I'd cure all crime in a jiffy!"
> (pp. 291-2).

and if the reader is inclined to scoff at Lewis for exaggerating the case, let him read yesterday's newspaper or examine the legislative records of many states in the United States and other "civilized" nations to find the number of bills calling for harsher penal methods, such as the restoration of flogging, and other "progressive" methods of crime prevention.

Ann finds the rest of the staff at Copperhead Gap as depraved as Captain Dringoole. The prisoners are sweated in the shops for the benefit of their keepers, who have profitable arrangements with outside contractors. They are beaten, fed rotten food, degraded, brutalized. They live in filth and disease, and have almost no medical facilities. Homosexuality, drug addiction, prostitution, are even more rampant inside the prison walls than out, all overlooked by

the staff for a "consideration." Above all, Ann is shocked by witnessing the execution of one of the prisoners, an old colored woman, and in his depiction of the scene, Lewis penned a powerful argument for the abolishment of capital punishment. From this experience Ann concludes the following, almost a footnote to the entire matter of penology in the novel:

> It is not true that every person who came as a first offender to Copperhead Gap, with only amateurish notions of crime, learned in that university of vice about new and slicker crimes, learned the delight of drugs and of prostitution, learned that it was his duty to get even with society by being more vicious next time. Not every one. A few of them were too numbed and frightened to learn anything. But it is true that not one single person failed to go out of Copperhead Gap more sickly of body and more resentful for it and more capable of spreading disease among the Decent Citizens who had been breeding him to their own ruin.
>
> (pp. 350-1).

Although the last half of the book is devoted to Ann's career as a penologist, the interest of the story slackens considerably after her resignation from Copperhead Gap. She returns to New York, soon to take up a new prison job as supervisor of a house of correction for women which Lewis described as favorably as he could any prison, but almost immediately the reader's attention shifts to Ann's private life, whether Lewis intended it that way or not. It is in her story, primarily the record of her romantic vicissitudes, that a second important theme in the book is suggested. It is one which Lewis had expressed sixteen years earlier in

The Job, the theme that a woman's life, no matter how constructive and busy, is incomplete without men, love, and children. This theme is implied in the whole narrative of Ann Vickers' career, for, despite all her labors, positions, and triumphs, she still longs for love. The entire matter was summed up by Lewis in one paragraph, expressed by him through a minor character in the novel. It is here quoted:

> "If a woman were handsome as Diana, a better physicist than Lord Rutherford, President of the United States, world tennis-champion, mistress of seventeen languages, a divine dancer, and possessed of a perfectly functioning adrenal gland, still she would be miserable and humble in the presence of any bouncing chorus-girl, if no male had ever looked at her moist-eyed. And I'm afraid it will be the same world without end." (P. 413).

That this theme had significance in 1933 as well as in 1917 when Lewis first voiced it, there can be no argument. But the manner in which Lewis stated it in Ann Vickers somehow lacks the impact and force with which he had been in the habit of stating all his important convictions. Only on the narrative level did the theme have importance, enough, in fact, to suggest that the novel could have had for its subtitle "All for Love," or "The World Well Lost," for Ann risks her wordly position in the behalf of her last and permanent lover, the not-quite-convincing Judge Barney Dolphin. As social criticism, however, the value of this whole concept in the novel is virtually nil.

One final passage in the book should be considered here. It is another of those which occur rather suddenly all through

Ann Vickers, without great importance to the story but with considerable interest to the study of Lewis as a social critic. It is a passage which refers directly to the Depression, one of the few in Lewis' writing from 1930-1940 (outside of It Can't Happen Here), and it offers a key to Lewis' view of the effect of the Depression on the nation. This section is reproduced as follows:

> The Great Depression had been on for a year. It had the one blessing that, since dinner parties talked of nothing else, at least they no longer talked about Prohibition . . . A few people even presidents and bankers, were beginning to stop saying "We have turned the corner and are on the up-grade; the Depression will be over in three months." A few were beginning to wonder whether such prosperity as America had known from 1890 to 1929 would ever return; and a rather smaller number to consider whether it might not profit our great land to lose the theory that a family which does not own a radio, at least two automobiles, a bedroom and a bathroom for every member of the family, and a membership in a country club, is a spiritual failure and a moral menace and in general an offence to the Lord God.
>
> (pp. 496-7).

It is evident from the above that Sinclair Lewis was one of those few who were beginning to think that the Depression, despite the economic hardship it was creating, might have an ultimate beneficial effect on America, the effect of a rejection of that dominant and oppressive materialism which was ever Lewis' personal demon. Whether the Depression actually had the effect Lewis hoped for, and whether he would have written the way he did if he had been an unemployed factory worker, are questions every reader must answer for himself.

As for the critical reception of Ann Vickers, it seemed to be as uneven as the novel itself. In its own day the book was received with a mixture of praise and censure. J. Donald Adams, for example, gave the novel a highly favorable review, concluding that Ann Vickers herself was Lewis' best female character, "a woman first and a feminist afterward," while Henry Hazlitt, writing in The Nation, also placed the book in the upper half of Lewis' work. Hazlitt wrote:

> It does for the social worker and penologist what Arrowsmith did for the doctor and medical research worker and Elmer Gantry for the ministry. It is not only a novel, in brief, but a vivid and passionate tract. And one more example that, in the hands of a skilful enough writer, a book may quite adequately be both.[15]

Michael Williams, on the other hand, in his review in Commonweal, denounced the book as literary escapism, attacked Lewis as a perverter of morality, and concluded that Ann Vickers was trash.[16] Harry Hansen, in a milder but still unfavorable notice, remarked that Lewis had revealed no progression either in style or tone and that he was losing touch with the modern novel by continuing to denounce human folly without placing the blame for it.[17] Perhaps the fairest and wisest review of all was written by Malcolm Cowley, who noted the episodic structure of the work, praised the Copperhead Gap passages, but resolved that the book was disappointing because of Lewis' uncertain attitude toward his heroine.[18] Time has proven that the hostile reviewers were more right than wrong,

but in any case, the book cannot be dismissed so lightly here because it has elements worthy of further consideration.

In the first place, although Lewis' satire in Ann Vickers generally does not reach the same level as before, the Copperhead Gap section does show Lewis at his purest, most concentrated, and most powerful.[19] The other satire in the book unfortunately becomes blunted by its indecisiveness and by its failure to lodge around one great, typical, satiric character.[20] Also, for the first time, Lewis seems to have lowered his ideals, and in Ann's amoral search for love and in the sympathetic portrait of the likeable but corrupt Judge Dolphin, Lewis came closer to being morally unhealthy than in any other previous work. This attitude is even more surprising because of the consistently high standard of behavior of all of Lewis' major characters, with the exception, of course, of Elmer Gantry. Like all the others Ann Vickers is a rebel, but more than they, she finds her escape in a carnality and personal selfishness incompatible with the idealism of her professional career.[21] Finally, as the Marxist critics rather angrily noted, there is considerable evidence in the book which indicated that Lewis was retreating from rebellion and becoming more and more conservative.[22]

But Lewis' conservatism was not of the conventional kind, it was his own special brand and in its own way, entirely consistent with his life and career. Sinclair Lewis' conservatism in Ann Vickers, his growing distrust of radicalism,

his increasing nostalgia were primarily a result of the quality which had always typified his work, timeliness, a quality born of an unfailing sense of the climate of opinion, the temper of the time. In 1933, the Depression was three years old and had already become an ugly giant in its brief existence. Radicalism was on the upsurge everywhere and the American intelligentsia was heading in one direction, Left. These were the years when virtually every American intellectual and liberal thinker critically examined the national way of life, may of them even to toy with socialistic and communistic movements, if not actually to become active members in them. These were the years when the Communist Party gained its greatest strength here, including in its membership notables from the fields of literature, art, music, drama, publishing and motion pictures who were later to be disillusioned, some of them too late, as recent Congressional investigations have revealed. These were the years when Steinbeck wrote The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle, Dos Passos the USA trilogy, and Hemingway To Have and Have Not. Thus, with radicalism as the accepted mode of conduct among the cultural elite, Lewis, the most natural rebel of them all, was the real radical in becoming conservative. As Lewis saw it, conservatism, the clinging to native traditions, the turning back to the past, was what the people needed and wanted, and Lewis was right. This whole matter has influence on Lewis' writing in the decade and will be discussed in

connection with other of his books written in this period.

Still, there is enough social criticism retained in Ann Vickers to make it a more valuable and important book in this connection, rather than to consider it as fiction. As some critics have noted, Lewis here for the first time was more directly concerned with specific social institutions than ever before.[23] How much of this new, specific interest was a result of Lewis' wife, Dorothy Thompson, is a matter of speculation, but it is curious that Ann Vickers' career as a social worker and suffragist closely paralled the life of Miss Thompson. In any case, and whatever the source, Ann Vickers stands as an important document in the history of American penology, and where it deals with this topic, the book includes some of the most effective social criticism Lewis ever wrote. In fact, it is even more timely now, in view of the recent epidemic of prison riots, reported in yesterday's headlines. As Lewis pointed out in 1933, prisons do not solve any problems, they only postpone them, and for this lesson alone the novel deserves re-reading today.

In his next book, however, Sinclair Lewis almost completely abandoned satire and social criticism to handle a subject which had long been one of his most ardent interests, hotels and hotel-keeping, and in Work of Art may be seen a continuation of the same conservatism and withdrawal from the rebel camp that had been suggested in Ann Vickers.

3. Work of Art: 1934

All his life Sinclair Lewis was fascinated by hotels.[25] As an inveterate traveler he had stopped at hundreds, perhaps thousands of them through the years, and in 1934 in the novel Work of Art he wrote his hymn to hotels and hotel-keeping. Allied with his love for hotels was Lewis' belief they could be improved. Accordingly, one of his fondest ideas, among the innumerable business schemes he conceived as a sort of hobby, was the plan for a nation-wide chain of small, comfortable, pleasant country hotels to replace the provincial hostelries he had satirized as early as 1919 in Free Air.[26] Lewis had complained in that novel, in Main Street, in short stories, and in various magazine articles that one of the greatest evidences of the lack of civilization in the Middlewest was the fact that good hotels and restaurants were unknown and, moreover, apparently unwanted there. In brief, then, Lewis' interest in hotels had been apparent since early in his career. Work of Art was the culmination of that interest.

On its fictional level the novel is the story of two brothers, Myron and Ora Weagle, who grow up in a small Connecticut town around 1900. Ora is the poet and Sensitive Soul, charming, graceful, imaginative, and unbearably superior, while Myron is the stolid, hard-working, older brother who does most of the work around the little country hotel

which is the family's livelihood. After graduation from high school Myron leaves home with the resolution to learn the hotel business from top to bottom, and in one job after another he perseveres in his ambition. When his working day is over, he studies on his own every aspect of hotels, until finally he attains a directorship in a large hotel corporation. In the meantime Ora has squandered his talents as a hack writer, becoming a drunkard and unscrupulous chiseler, a fake artist who writes only one honest book in a literary career of fifteen years, but all this does not prevent him from mocking Myron as a Babbitt whenever they meet.

Myron marries and prospers in his work, at the same time planning to undertake his lifelong dream, the building of a perfect country resort hotel. He brings his dream to reality and builds his hotel, but the dream is violated when on its opening day the hotel becomes the scene of a lurid murder-suicide staged by two of the guests. The notoriety, of course, is the beginning of the end, and although the place prospers as a roadhouse, Myron refuses to see his ideal corrupted and sells his interest. From there, he goes on to manage hotels in New York and Minnesota, but soon settles in a little Kansas town as the owner of the local hotel which he makes into a miniature replica of his ideal. As the book ends, he and his family are planning to build a model tourist court, happy in their plans for the future and in each other. Ora, in the interim, had prospered as a stage and movie writer,

and on a trip West had glimpsed his once-wealthy brother at the desk of his country hotel, a sight which had made him flee as from a ghost, not realizing that he had seen a truly happy man instead of a ruined soul. Thus, the ending of the book contains the paradox, reminiscent of Arrowsmith, that Myron, a failure by Ora's worldly materialistic standards, has found true happiness in doing what he wants, while Ora, grown wealthy and famous, is really a corrupt, unhappy man.

Lewis' main theme in the book, as is apparent from the plot outline above, was that hotel-keeping scrupulously done could be a greater art than dishonest creative writing. In Lewis' original conception of the book this moral was to be the central point of the whole novel, around which the entire story was to revolve. The character of Ora was first intended to be a full-sized creation, equal in stature with Myron, but in its final version Ora's characterization is only a sketch, while Myron emerges as the only important protagonist. Also, in Lewis' first plan for the book, he intended to make Ora and Myron the modern counterparts of Hogarth's idle and busy apprentices, with Ora as the idle apprentice who tries to escape from reality in order to be a true artist, while Myron was to be the virtuous apprentice who does the menial tasks so well that he becomes the true artist instead.

However, Lewis' original concept broke down once he started the book because he could not get interested in Ora as more than a caricature, while the science of hotel-keeping

became increasingly fascinating. Enough of the first plan remained in the final version so that the novel's most apparent theme is still the comparison of the two brothers and the values that each represents, but essentially the book had a deeper meaning than this in Lewis' career, as will be seen in the discussion to follow.[27]

In the novel itself there is almost no satire and no direct social criticism. The small towns of Black Thread Center, Connecticut, where Myron Weagle grows up, and Lemuel, Kansas, where he settles, are depicted as nice, friendly places. There was absolutely nothing of Lewis' Main Street spirit in his description of these towns. At the same time, there are in the book only a few of Lewis' typical satiric portraits, and of these Ora Weagle is the important one. On the other hand, there are a great many likeable people, almost all business men or hotel workers, including one character reminiscent of Samuel Dodsworth, Mark Elphinstone, a kindly millionaire. Myron, the hero of the book is an idealist and a tireless worker of the utmost integrity who grows more admirable as the story progresses. Lewis' portrayal of him led some of the critics to call him a Babbitt, gleefully pointing out how Lewis betrayed his real fondness for the Babbitts in such characters as Myron. Indeed, these critics were right to some extent, but they also missed the essential ingredient in Myron's character, his idealism, the ingredient which makes Myron Weagle, though only a hotel-

keeper, much more like Arrowsmith than Babbitt.[28] It is not money and success that drive Myron, but his dream of improving hotels, of creating the perfect hotel, just as the quest of an ideal drove Arrowsmith.

Myron is not a contemplative man, but he has an occasional vision. One of his early visions is that of the importance of the hotel to civilization, and his thoughts were essentially those of Lewis himself:

> He decided, meditating as he sat . . . that no church or capitol or university or fort or hospital has so known the heart and blood circulation of history as a great hotel, where all the people, famous and petty - but especially the famous, since they must travel most - have rested and made plots, forgotten their masks in the exhilaration of wine, whispered in darkened chambers, and roared at banquets in the admiring presence of all the press and dignitaries, and publicly thrice thrust aside crowns that had never been offered them.[29]

Myron realizes that he has been self-sacrificing in his professional devotion, but he also realizes he has enjoyed his work and has done it well, and in so doing has fulfilled his obligation to society. This has a bearing on Lewis' own views about his writing during this period, for just as Myron asserts his enjoyment in doing what he wants, so Lewis intended to assert his freedom to write about hotels, if he so desired. If, for the moment, I am not reforming, Lewis seemed to say, so what? I'm a little tired of it anyway. All this is suggested in the passage below, actually the thoughts of Myron Weagle, but perhaps Lewis' hypothetical

reply to the Marxist critics who were then attacking him for his failure to participate in the then-fashionable assault on society:[30]

> Possibly, if his furlough had occurred not in 1911 but after the Great War, when it became the fashion to be disillusioned and revolutionary, he would have decided that his work . . . had been futile. But he could feel none of the Puritannical guilt which afflicts young socialists and anarchists so much more than it ever does Presbyterian elders. He had enjoyed keeping hotel! He had enjoyed making better bedrooms at lower prices. He had enjoyed competing with other driving young men. He did not, he admitted, see that his career had contributed notably to making the world perfect. But then he did not see that anybody's career had done so, except possibly, just possibly, Shakespeare's and Goethe's and Edison's and Rembrandt's and Paul Ehrlich's.
>
> (pp. 202-3).

This passage is not only further evidence that Lewis had temporarily rejected the rebellion of the previous decade, but is also typical of the tone of the whole book, a tone of affirmation of the traditional American values of hard work and honest business. Accordingly, Myron Weagle, although he is only a hotelman, is depicted as a noble character, and in this depiction lies the real significance of the book. For, Work of Art was truly, as one scholar noted, a strange book for Sinclair Lewis to write in an era when almost every American of importance reflected social pressures. However, it was not, as the same scholar called it, either a "disturbed" or "schizophrenic" book.[31]

Work of Art is an affirmative book. It is a book which contains a success story, one reminiscent of Horatio Alger,

a story of a small-town boy who rises by his own merit to a great position in the hotel world. Nor does this hero, when he finds his lifetime dream exploded, sink into pessimism or futility, but together with his wife and son starts again to build a new dream and a new future. Nothing could have been more significant or timely in the America of 1934 than for Lewis to write such a book, one which reaffirmed positive qualities in an age of negation, the values of integrity, hope, optimism, and dogged labor.[32]

On another level, the novel is representative of a role which Lewis in the 1930's preferred more and more to that of social reformer, the role of story-teller. He had started his career that way and had continued it throughout, although the fictional aspects of his books had rightfully been overlooked because of their satiric and socially critical content. Yet Lewis himself never ceased to think of himself as a romantic story-teller, and it was as such that he chose to characterize himself in this decade, as the following autobiographical note written in 1936 indicated:

> I read in the public prints that the man Lewis . . . is a raging reformer, an embittered satirist, a realist dreary as cold gravy, and a bustling journalist. I don't know. Maybe. The critics ought to know - it's their job. True, these catagories are mutually contradictory, but the same critics can undoubtedly explain a little matter like that. Only, I should have thought Brother Lewis was essentially a story-teller - just as naive, excited, unself-conscious as the Arab story-tellers beside the caravan fires seven hundred years ago, or as O. Henry in a hotel room on 23rd Street furiously turning out tales for

> dinner and red-ink money. In his stories Lewis does not happen to be amused only by the sea or by midnight encounters on the Avenue, but often by the adventure of the soul in religion and patriotism and social climbing. But they are essentially stories just the same. And as for the man Lewis himself and his private personality, I rather doubt his having any, outside those stories.[33]

To continue on this same matter, not one of Lewis' novels had been intended merely as tracts or social documents, although their real worth was as such in their day and will probably be as such in the future. Still, even in the '20's, Lewis had turned from his satire to write Mantrap, while Dodsworth showed a further retreat from the barricades of rebellion to the spirit of pure fiction. In the same way Ann Vickers was basically a book with only a superstructure of social criticism, and the other books of the decade, Work of Art, Prodigal Parents, Bethel Merriday, all suggest that at this time Sinclair Lewis preferred to tell stories, not right wrongs. Only in It Can't Happen Here did he concentrate on a social situation and even in this case the book was as much exciting novel as it was effective social criticism. It is also notable that in 1935, when Lewis published his collection of short stories, that the spoke of himself in the introduction to the book as a "romantic medievalist of the most incurable sort,"[34] concluding, as if underscoring his own work of the time, "But I wonder if this American optimism, this hope and courage, so submerged now in 1935, are not authentic parts of American life. They are good things to have."[35]

But as many writers have revealed that they are their own worst critics, so did Sinclair Lewis in picturing himself as a romantic story-teller. A good story-teller he was and an able novelist, Work of Art is proof enough of that, yet he could never have attained permanent stature in American literature on this score alone. Sinclair Lewis will not be remembered for such books as Work of Art, even though it is an interesting novel and one of the better treatments of the hotel business in modern fiction, but he will be remembered for such books as the one he wrote in the year 1935, the stirring It Can't Happen Here. For, that novel was the only book Lewis wrote from 1930 to 1940 which had an impact on American consciousness at all equivalent to that of the novels of the 1920's. This book, the only one of the decade in which he dealt directly with the most vital social conditions of the time, was to be one of his best, and perhaps one of the most significant of the entire period.

4. It Can't Happen Here: 1935

Ann Vickers and Work of Art had been retrospective books, tracing the life of a character from the turn of the century to modern times, ending in the early years of the Depression. In these books Sinclair Lewis had mentioned the contemporary scene only in passing, but in 1935 in It Can't Happen Here he wrote a novel which was more concerned with the actual, specific social forces and conditions of the day than any other book he ever wrote, even the great satirical novels of the preceding decade, for It Can't Happen Here was Lewis' version of how Fascism could conquer America.[36] It was a book he almost inevitably had to write, a book which had an impact on its time at least equal to that of his earlier work, a book which marked the return to action of the savagely satirical, burningly idealistic Lewis who had been awarded the Nobel Prize in recognition of his greatness.

Although he had been awake to the mass-movement behind Fascism as far back as Main Street and Babbitt, and although he had consistently used various aspects of this mass-movement and its effects on American life as his main theme,[37] it is probable that Dorothy Thompson, his wife, had a considerable influence on Lewis' writing It Can't Happen Here just when and how he did.[38] Miss Thompson had charted the rise of Fascism in Europe almost from its beginning and had interviewed Hitler around the time he rose to power, with

the result that when her interview was published, its irreverent description of the man caused her expulsion from Germany. The actual germ of It Can't Happen Here may even have come from her book I Saw Hitler (1933), in the passage which read:

> Imagine that in America, an orator with the tongue of the late Mr. Bryan and the histrionic powers of Aimee Semple McPherson combined with the publicity gifts of Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee should manage to unite all the farmers, with all the white-collar unemployed, all the people with salaries under three thousand dollars a year who have lost their savings in bank collapses and the stock market and are being pressed for payments on the icebox and the radio, the louder evangelical preachers, the American Legion, the D.A.R., the K.K.K., Mathew Woll, Senator Borah, Henry Ford - imagine that and you will have some idea of what the Hitler movement in Germany means.39

Lewis himself had already experienced an unpleasant brush with Fascism. In 1933 Klaus Mann, the son of Thomas Mann, had established an expatriate anti-Hitler newspaper called Die Sammlung, and had written to Lewis asking his endorsement and permission to use his name on the masthead. Lewis had refused because he felt that he was ignorant of the issues involved, but through some misunderstanding Mann still used Lewis' name. Almost immediately, with this supposed endorsement of the newspaper, a move was made in Germany by the booksellers to censor Lewis' books without further investigation of the matter. This action so enraged Lewis that he wrote a blazingly indignant letter to his German agent, Ernst Rowoholt, condemning the booksellers for their actions, questioning what censorship had to do with the merits of his books, and ending

all his publishing agreements in German under the Nazi regime.[40] Thus, Sinclair Lewis was brought face-to-face with the unpleasant facts of Fascism as they could affect the artist and it may have been this very incident, combined with his wife's influence, which so aroused Lewis' interest in dictators that a year and a half later he wrote a book about dictatorship in America.

Never did Sinclair Lewis attack a story with such intensity as he did It Can't Happen Here. The entire book was planned and written in less than four months, for Lewis started planning it in May, 1935, and had completed it by August 13, an achievement that borders on the incredible.[41] Nor did the speed of composition affect the novel's quality; it ranks among Lewis' best. Essentially, it is the story of how America becomes a Fascist state and of how this changes the life of Doremus Jessup, a liberal, elderly, newspaper editor in the town of Fort Beulah, Vermont. Thus, with this combination of novel and tract, Lewis was able to reach the reader both on the intellectual and emotional level, as will be seen in the plot summary which follows.

As the story opens, the time is 1935, the scene Fort Beulah, Vermont, which like the rest of America is ripe for Fascism, as exemplified in the person of Senator Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. Windrip is a ridiculous, lovable, and dangerous character, a sort of combination Huey Long, Abraham Lincoln,

and Hitler. He is guided by his secretary Lee Sarason (a blend of Machiavelli and Goebbels, with a dash of homosexuality), and when Reverend Prang (a mixture of Father Coughlin and Elmer Gantry) comes to Windrip's support, Buzz gets the presidential nomination. His first act is to issue a campaign platform of Fifteen Points (a hodgepodge of Socialism, Fascism, and bigotry, sugar-coated), and he makes as his main campaign pledge the promise that he will end unemployment and redistribute all the country's wealth, while, at the same time, he secretly solicits the support of powerful industrial and banking interests. Buzz's opponents in the election are Walt Trowbridge, Republican, an unexciting but honest man, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who leaves the Democratic Party to head a new "Jeffersonian Party" to oppose Windrip. However, Windrip sweeps to victory over all opposition in a whirlwind campaign.

In the meantime in Fort Beulah, Doremus Jessup, the hero of the novel, has campaigned for Trowbridge and is one of the few to realize what Windrip's election would mean to the country. Doremus' worst fears come true immediately after the election, for Windrip's first presidential action is to appoint a cabinet composed of militarists, Fascists, and rogues, with Sarason as head, while his next moves are to organize a private army, the "Minute Men," proclaim martial law, and virtually disband Congress and the Supreme Court. Bishop Prang, a possible threat, is spirited away

into an insane asylum, and the riots aroused all over the country by these deeds are quickly and bloodily quelled. In short, Windrip's rise to power parallels that of the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy, with all the usual trappings of violence, coercion, and corruption.

President Windrip's reforms continue. He abolishes the system of the forty-eight states and reorganizes the whole country into eight provinces, replacing the political party system with a new form called the American Corporate State, or the "Corpo" government. The Minute Men army is expanded and the unemployment problem is solved by putting all the jobless into labor camps, where they work for one dollar per day. Inflation sets in when Windrip has more money printed and securities devalued, and only big business thrives. Persecution of Negroes and Jews starts, and the situation looks unrelievedly gloomy until Trowbridge escapes to Canada and organizes a resistance movement, the "New Underground."

Doremus finds that Fascism has come to Fort Beulah when, awake at last to the cancer infecting the nation, he writes an anti-Windrip editorial. He is immediately jailed and released only on probation of his good-behavior in supporting the Corpo regime in his newspaper. For a while Doremus conforms to protect his family, but when the Corpo reign of terror continues, he leaves his paper and starts an underground resistance cell in the town, including the publication of a resistance newspaper. However, he is discovered

and thrown into a concentration camp along with his helpers.

Life in the camp is indescribably bitter, although the prisoners are heartened to learn that the Corpo government is beginning to show signs of strain when Sarason deposes Windrip and becomes dictator, so enraging the Corpo idealists that they assassinate him and put into power Dewey Haik, a Nazi type, whose rule is even worse than Sarason's. Doremus is smuggled out of the concentration camp by his friends and into Canada to help in the New Underground movement. About this time the Corpos, conscious of their growing unpopularity, declare war on Mexico to distract the public, but the army chief of staff declares Trowbridge temporary President of the United States and leads a popular revolt against the Corpos. However, after a series of successes in the West, the revolt loses its momentum because the people are too confused to rise up unanimously in its support. At this point, Doremus is sent to Minnesota by Trowbridge as a secret agent to organize the resistance movement there, and as the book ends, Doremus works for and dreams of an America once again free of tyranny.

Despite the interest of the narrative of events in Doremus Jessup's personal history, the real significance of the book lies not in these events but in Lewis' view of America in the 1930's, an America ready for totalitarianism. However, Doremus Jessup did serve as the observer through whom Lewis chose to speak, and it was Doremus' shifting viewpoint,

changing with the times, which was intended by Lewis as a moral lesson to every reader. Consequently, it will be with Doremus and his opinions, as representative of Sinclair Lewis' picture of America in 1935, that the subsequent discussion will be largely concerned.

Lewis wasted no time in setting the scene, for in the first chapter of the book, in a masterfully ironic description of a Ladies' Night Dinner of the Fort Beulah Rotary Club, he paved the way for the ominous events that were to come:

> The occasion was essentially serious. All of America was serious now, after the seven years of depression since 1929. It was just long enough after the Great War of 1914-18 for the young people who had been born in 1917 to be ready to go to college . . . or to another war, almost any old war that might be handy.[42]

and the speakers at the dinner, a woman prominent in public affairs and a retired general, both "patriotic" Americans, stress in their speeches that what the country needs is Discipline, a war, and the suppression of college professors, labor unions, and writers. The general is especially outspoken, claiming that although he does not completely favor developments in Germany and Italy, he does admire them for their strength and accomplishment.

Doremus Jessup finds that these two speakers express the beliefs of a good many people when, after the dinner, Francis Tasbrough, the town's richest man, tries to persuade him to stop being a liberal in such a serious time. Tasbrough

declares that with Jew Communists and bankers plotting to take over the country, and with labor more organized than ever, it is a time for strong action. Doremus agrees that the times are serious, but for different reasons. Discontent is powerful enough to bring in Windrip and when that happens, Doremus predicts tyranny "It can't happen here," Tasbrough snorts, but Doremus believes it can, and goes on to show why by citing these examples from current events, the same events that worried Sinclair Lewis: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, America's indifference to Tammany corruption, Chicago gangsterism, Harding's crooked political appointees, the Klu Klux Klan, American war hysteria, the rise of Billy Sunday and Aimee McPherson, Red scares and Catholic scares, Bryan's triumph in forbidding the teaching of evolution, trainloads of people going to enjoy lynchings, Prohibition, etc., and Doremus concludes: "Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for dictatorship as ours!"[43]

It seems that Doremus is right when Buzz Windrip is nominated for the Presidency and sets forth his platform, "The Fifteen Points of Victory,"[44] which are not only, as Doremus sees them, the road to Fascism, but, as one critic has called them, "a potpourri compounded of Huey Long and Father Coughlin and Senator Heflin, Upton Sinclair, Mussolini and Hitler."[45] They were also, by indirection, Sinclair Lewis' version of the innumerable conflicting ideas and issues

of the time, a combination of the proposals of socialists and capitalists, labor unions and associations of manufacturers, militarists and isolationists, inflationists and deflationists, progressives and conservatives. And, in Lewis' opinion, the people who would support such a man as Windrip and his platform, who in the novel actually do elect him, included: farmers with mortgages, unemployed white-collar workers, people on relief, suburban dwellers behind on their installment payments, the American Legion, the popular preachers, the KKK, the A.F. of L., the non-union workers, petty lawyers hoping for government jobs, millionaires who wanted more, reformers, intellectuals, individualists, and Europe. Nor was Lewis without justification in his listing of these potential supporters of Fascism, for, in 1935, a man like Windrip who could talk to the masses on their own level, a man with hypnotic powers of persuasion, a man who catered to the forces of intolerance, and above all a man who promised prosperity could well have been elected president, had he appeared (witness the rise of Long in Louisiana). It is not all as far-fetched as it seems. Recent history has shown that people who are hungry often prefer food to freedom.

If, in his earlier books of the '30's Sinclair Lewis had skipped lightly over the Depression, in <u>It Can't Happen Here</u> he gave it full treatment. It is, in fact, the background for the entire novel. Doremus' reflections on the period were those of Lewis, and with his ability to grasp

the prevailing mood of the nation, Lewis was deeply aware of the change that had come over America since 1929. He chronicled this change in a passage, quoted below, which is as important to the historian as to the student of contemporary literature as a document of the age:

> All through the "Depression," ever since 1929, Doremus had felt the insecurity, the confusion, the sense of futility in trying to do anything more permanent than shaving or eating breakfast, that was general to the country. He could no longer plan, for himself or for his dependants, as the citizens of this once unsettled country had planned since 1620.
>
> Why, their whole lives had been predicated on the privilege of planning. Depressions had been only cyclic storms, certain to end in sunshine; Capitalism and parliamentary government were eternal, and eternally being improved by the honest votes of Good Citizens. . . . The Horatio Alger tradition, from rags to Rockefellers, was clean gone out of the America it had dominated.
>
> It seemed faintly silly to hope, to try to prophesy, to give up sleep on a good mattress for toil on a typewriter, and as for saving money - idiotic! . . . The coming and going of the N.R.A., the F.E.R.A., and the P.W.A., and all the rest, had conviced Doremus that there were four sets of people who did not clearly understand anything whatever about how the government must be conducted: all the authorities in Washington; all the citizenry who talked or wrote profusely about politics; the bewildered untouchables who said nothing; and Doremus Jessup.
>
> (pp. 126-8).

In the 1920's Lewis' main target had been American complacency and materialism. With book after book he had attempted to probe through the layers of fat to reach the infection underneath, the infection of false values. Now, in 1935, his diagnosis had come true, the fat had shrunken away, and complacency had collapsed as completely as the

stock market. Lewis' cry that a philosophy of materialism was not enough for happiness had been heeded too little and too late. It had taken disaster on a national scale to make the public realize what Lewis had always known. Karl Pascal, the local Communist, a minor character in the book, expresses the fact of the poverty which had existed even in the midst of prosperity, poverty which people like Doremus had never thought about, but which Lewis had hinted at all through his work:

> "What burns me up is the fact that even before this Depression, in what you folks called prosperous times, seven per cent of all the families in the country earned five hundred dollars a year or less - remember, those weren't the unemployed, on relief; those were the guys that had the honor of still doing honest labor.
> (pp. 130-1).

It is such events as the rise of Windrip and the condition of a country which could allow such a man to come to power that force Doremus to reflect on the whole trend of modern civilization. His thoughts, conclusions, and solutions are important because they indicate what Lewis himself was thinking at this time, as will be seen in the discussion below.

At first Doremus mulls over the idea that humans have always been and always will be imperfect. He speculates that the crust of civilization is so thin that it would crumble under the impact of an all-out war, a war which would, ironically, be fought to cure the incurable, and he concludes:

> "There is no solution! There will never be a state of society anything like perfect!
> "There never will be a time when there won't be a large proportion of people who feel poor no matter how much they have, and envy their neighbors who know how to wear cheap clothes showily, and envy neighbors who can dance or make love or digest better."
> (p. 133).

But although neither Doremus nor Lewis believed in the perfectibility of man, they did believe in the continuation of basic human values and habits, that, despite all his illnesses and infirmities and nature's violence, man would continue to survive.[46]

From this point Doremus goes on to question all reform, all idealism, all Utopias, and he concludes they have been failures. He even ponders American history, wondering whether the Civil War had truly accomplished the emancipation of the Negro, in view of his modern status. Finally, he questions the American Revolution, speculating that if America had remained part of England a great, peaceful world federation might have resulted. And Doremus concludes by asking himself one last startling question:

> "Is it just possible . . . that the most vigorous and boldest idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress instead of its greatest creators? Possible that plain men with the humble trait of minding their own business will rank higher in the heavenly hierarchy than all the plumed souls who hve shoved their way in among the masses and insisted on saving them?"
> (p. 141).

If they were taken at their face value, Doremus' thoughts would be a direct contradiction to the life and career of

Sinclair Lewis. At first the meaning of the whole thing is rather puzzling, but on reading further, it becomes clear that Lewis was not, for once, speaking for himself but simply establishing Doremus' state of mind before he comes to realize the evil of Buzz Windrip's totalitarian state. In short, what Lewis was trying to do was to reconstruct the thought process of the complacent liberal mind. Only when Doremus is jailed for writing an editorial hostile to the "Corpo" regime does the full implication strike him of what has happened to America, and in a memorable passage intended by Lewis as a lesson for all his readers, Doremus recants his former heresies:

> "The tyranny of this dictatorship isn't primarily the fault of Big Business, nor of the demagogues who do their dirty work. It's the fault of Doremus Jessup! Of all the conscientious, respectable, lazy-minded Doremus Jessups who have let the demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest.
>
> "A few months ago I thought the slaughter of the Civil War, and the agitation of the violent abolitionists who helped bring it on, were evil. But possibly they <u>had</u> to be violent, because easy-going citizens like me couldn't be sitrred up otherwise. If our grandfathers had the alertness and courage to see the evils of slavery and of a government conducted by gentlemen for gentlemen only, there wouldn't have been any need of agitators and war and blood.
>
> "It's my sort, and Respectable Citizens who've felt ourselves superior because we've been well-to-do and what we thought was 'educated,' who brought on the Civil War, the French Revolution, and now the Fascist Dictatorship. . . . I can blame . . . only my own timid soul and drowsy mind. Forgive, O Lord!"
>
> (p. 224).

With the knowledge that it has happened here, Doremus starts to fight the evil which has been alowed to triumph. As in Germany, persecution of the Jews begins, and Doremus, with sharp wisdom concludes: "There is no greater compliment to the Jews than the fact that the degree of their unpopularity is always the scientific measure of the cruelty and silliness of the regime under which they live."[47] In his new role as revolutionist and as the publisher of an underground paper, Doremus' main stock in trade are the reports of the atrocities committed under the Corpo rule, but the more of these reports he gets the more he realizes that many of the same things had happened all along in so-called "normal" times.

Doremus Jessup's education is completed when he is caught in his resistance work, tortured, and thrown into a concentration camp. There he finds that one of his fellow prisoners, the Communist Karl Pascal, has become so fanatically devoted to the Red cause that he can see no other possible way of life, and when Karl, formerly a man of liberal opinions, attacks Doremus for not turning to Communism, Doremus philosophizes about the whole nature of the conflict of the time. His conclusions, quoted below, were Lewis', valuable to any student of modern history, for this passage is as pertinent today as it was in 1935:

> As a newspaperman, Doremus remembered that the only reporters who misrepresented and concealed facts more unscrupulously than the Capitalists

> were the Communists.
>
> He was afraid that the world struggle today was not of Communism against Fascism, but of tolerance against the bigotry that was preached equally by Communism and Fascism. But he saw too that in America the struggle was befogged by the fact the worst Fascists were they who disowned the word "Fascism" and preached enslavement to Capitalism under the style of Constitutional and Traditional Native American Liberty. For they were thieves not only of wages but of honor. To their purpose they could quote not only Scripture but Jefferson.
>
> That Karl Pascal should be turning into a Zealot, like most of his chiefs in the Communist party, was grievous to Doremus because he had once simple-heartedly hoped that in the mass strength of Communism there might be an escape from cynical dictatorship. But he saw now that he must remain alone, a "Liberal," scorned by all the noisier prophets for refusing to be a willing cat for the busy monkeys of either side, But at worst, the Liberals, the Tolerant, might in the long run preserve some of the Arts of Civilization, no matter which brand of tyranny should finally dominate the world.[48]

and Doremus' final statement is perhaps the most important thing in It Can't Happen Here; also, in the opinion of a recent scholar, the most important thing that Sinclair Lewis ever said.[49] That statement is here reproduced:

> "More and more, as I think about history," he pondered, "I am convinced that everything that is worth while in the world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring, critical spirit, and that the preservation of this spirit is more important than any social system whatsoever. But the men of ritual and the men of barbarism are capable of shutting up the men of science and of silencing them forever."
>
> (p. 433).

The preservation of this free, inquiring, critical spirit was what Lewis, the self-styled romanticist, had been trying to accomplish all his life. He himself was the symbol

of that spirit and some of the things it could do. In the novel the spirit did not live only in Lewis' hero, Doremus Jessup, but also in a host of minor characters, especially Walt Trowbridge, the leader of the resistance movement against the Corpos. Trowbridge has an ideal for a new America, an ideal that was Lewis' own, one in direct contrast to Windrip's "Fifteen Points." In this ideal it would be a greater crime than murder for any individual to take advantage of the state, that the new concept of the state would be a "Universal Partnership." Thus, would the danger be eliminated of one man ever grabbing enough power to become dictator in America.[50]

It Can't Happen Here, despite the pessimism of much of the book, ends optimistically. The America crushed under the heels of its native Fascists arises, and a revolt against the Corpo government begins, but it slows down because the people still are confused as to what they want. Lewis placed the blame for this confusion squarely upon the brow of American education, and in the following passage, which appears in the closing pages of the novel, made perhaps the most bitter statement of his career against the schools, although he had indicted them often before:

> In the America which had so warmly praised itself for its "widespread popular free education," there had been so little education, widespread, popular, free, or anything else, that most people did not know what they wanted - indeed knew about so few things to want at all.

> There had been plenty of schoolrooms; there had been lacking only literate teachers and eager pupils and school boards who regarded teaching as a profession worthy of as much honor and pay as insurance-selling or embalming or waiting on table. Most Americans had learned in school that God had supplanted the Jews as chosen people by the Americans, and this time done the job much better, so that we were the richest, kindest, and cleverest nation living; that depressions were but passing headaches and that labor unions must not concern themselves with anything except higher wages and shorter hours and, above all, must not set up an ugly class struggle by combining politically; that, though foreigners tried to make a bogus mystery of them, politics were really so simple that any village attorney or any clerk in the office of a metropolitan sheriff was quite adequately trained for them; and that if John D. Rockefeller or Henry Ford had set his mind to it, he could have become the most distinguished statesman, composer, physicist, or poet in the land.
>
> (p. 449).

What Lewis was saying, in effect, was that American education had not preserved the free critical spirit but had inculcated false values. It had maintained smugness in an already smug people and had created as the only American ideal the ideal of material success. What Lewis implied was that American education would be unable to function in a time of crisis, such as the reign of Fascism he pictured in the book. And what Lewis despised was the failure of American education in not creating a realistic ideal of freedom, democracy, and politics strong enough to resist totalitarianism. That Lewis' indictment has its truth is undeniable, that it is wholly, or even generally true is inadmissable.

There is, however, very little else that Lewis said in It Can't Happen Here that is invalid, even now. The book was a parallel of actual events taking place in Europe and Lewis intended to show how they could also take place here. Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler and the rest all have their American counterparts in the novel, while Hitler's Mein Kampf becomes Buzz Windrip's "Zero Hour", which Lewis cleverly quoted as the opening paragraph of each of the chapters in the central portion of the book. Even the justification for the "New Order" in America is the same as in Germany.[51] Yes, it is possible to doubt Sinclair Lewis' version of how Fascism takes over the United States and it is possible to doubt that it conquers as completely as it does, but no perceptive reader can come away from It Can't Happen Here completely dubious about the basis of the book or without a feeling of horror that what Lewis had to say was essentially true.[52] Proof enough of this that the reading public responded immediately to the novel by buying more than a quarter of a million copies,[53] while it reached audiences all over the country in the form of a drama.[54]

Even Main Street was not more timely than It Can't Happen Here. The menace of Fascism supplied the issue Lewis had been groping for in trying to write the labor novel. At a time when hostile parties were drawing together in a united front against war and Fascism, Lewis precipitated the argument in a novel which was a warning and might be an innoculation

against the disease.[55] The 1930's were dark and cloudy and torn by a welter of new and strange ideas. This confusion is evident in the book, not only in its background, but in the transition which takes place in the mind of its hero, Doremus Jessup, the transition from doubt and conservatism to confidence and liberalism. Sinclair Lewis, with his seismographic sensitivity to the American mind, obviously shared the confusion of the age, and It Can't Happen Here, and The Prodigal Parents, written three years later, were the documents of his and the national dilemma; the dilemma presented by such forces as Communism and Fascism to such decent, well-meaning people as Doremus Jessup and Fred Cornplow, the hero of the later book.

The critics also responded to It Can't Happen Here. One called the book "probably the wisest and most human, the most searching and suggestive piece of realistic political thinking that has been done in America or England for a dozen years,"[57] while another wrote that any reader who could still believe it can't happen here after reading the book, had missed the great moral of it, the moral that Doremus Jessup, liberal, woke up too late, the moral that liberalism in an unstable society cannot afford to be disinterested if it is to survive.[58]

There is the impulse for violence in the soul of every people, only needing the proper circumstances to become actuality. Lewis himself had chronicled this violence as

it had happened in a free and democratic America and as it could happen in a Fascist America. In 1935, he was on even firmer ground in his assumptions, and although It Can't Happen Here is much more than a Depression story, the book would have been meaningless without the foundations of economic blight and unemployment.[59] At the same time that the novel appeared in the bookstores, the morning papers quoted remarks of Governor Eugene Talmadge which might have been spoken, word for word, by Buzz Windrip, and speeches at a D.A.R. convention which, if Lewis had written them, would have been dismissed as burlesque too exaggerated to be credible. True, Lewis had mellowed in the '30's, either from wealth, time, or Vermont, for which he showed more affection than Gopher Prairie. The comments on American life scattered all through the book were generally more temperate than those in Main Street, but in the final analysis It Can't Happen Here proved that Sinclair Lewis could still hate all the enemies of liberty, whether Right or Left, for that novel was essentially an ode to freedom.[60]

The book was a logical developement from Lewis's earlier work. Doremus Jessup was another of his rebels, and of all of them, the one who perhaps best symbolized Lewis' ideals and democratic beliefs. In another way, also, It Can't Happen Here followed from the previous books in that the rigid class distinctions which Lewis had noted before became, in this work, the actual lines of class warfare in

the imaginary Fascist state.[61] Buzz Windrip might be called "Babbitt with a machine gun," while the character Bishop Prang has much in common with Elmer Gantry.[62] Another factor that gives It Can't Happen Here its intensity is the realization that Sinclair Lewis, who had already discovered evidence of Fascism in American life in the small town, in the city, in science and in religion, was not a novelist turned political propagandist but was the consciousness of those whose sinister potentialities he imagined, the pre-destined delineator of the social mass behind the popular dictatorship. In short, Lewis knew the people who gave Fascism its strength far better than the Fascists themselves.[63]

Taken by itself, It Can't Happen Here might lead one to believe that Lewis really thought Fascism would come to America, that it would happen here. Such was not the case. Although Lewis did feel that the fifty years from 1885 to 1935 had failed to culminate the full potentialities of the innovations in science and thought, he still maintained that the half-century had, in general, been an era of progress in all fields.[64] He was very conscious of the danger of Fascism in the depression era and thought that the United States might be heading for something like it, but at the same time he was convinced that Babbitt had been purified in his thoughts and ideals by the suffering of hard times. He also admired the New Deal for its accomplishments and felt that it had caused a definite improvement in business

and a return of confidence.[65]

Perhaps the best non-fiction source for Lewis' ideas at this time is an interview given out by Lewis during the rehearsals of the dramatic version of It Can't Happen Here, as reported in the New York Times, October 4, 1936.[66] In the interview Lewis had this to say about Fascism:

> "If we ever have fascism in this country, it will come as a result of the activities of the economic royalists whose minds are closed against anything that has happened since 1870, of such organizations as the Liberty League and of the Communists. . . . The one danger of fascism's taking hold here is that the people of this country always have to have some cult or other. . . . Despite these strange vagaries, the American people always come to their senses in a short time. . . . It can't happen here so long as the government remembers that men and women are human beings with rights to be preserved and privileges to be enjoyed."

Elsewhere in the interview Lewis stated his Utopian ideas, already familiar here, that "there never will be a state of society anything like perfect" and debunked the Communist claim to rid the world of poverty, saying, "I am fool enough to believe that there never will be a time, no matter what system of government we have, when a large proportion of the people will not think they are poor no matter how much they have." He went on to declare his opposition to machine-gun rule and to place his faith in the future on the middle class, the bourgeois, as the people who would save the country.[67] "Of all forms of government so far devised," Lewis concluded, "a democracy seems best," and repeated, as the interview ended, the words of Doremus Jessup

regarding the perpetuity of man and of his civilized way of life.

It is clear from It Can't Happen Here and from such utterances as the above that Lewis had abandoned the looking-backward quality of Ann Vickers and Work of Art. Admittedly, a faint trace of mellowness was still present in It Can't Happen Here in the depiction of Fort Beulah, Vermont, as a rather charming little city, not a drab village, yet Lewis' obvious affection for Vermont did not blind him to the fact that the town was ready for Fascism and, in fact, succumbed to it.[68] The important thing was that the great Lewis who had swept all before him in other days had again returned to the field.

In an age when America's finest writers were beset by the same doubts and radical tendencies operating on the populace, Sinclair Lewis had the inspiration, given to no other writer, to picture the result of those doubts on America in such a realistic and terrifying manner that it served as a deterrent to Fascism for hundreds of thousands of literate Americans. In an age when liberalism was in disrepute, Sinclair Lewis chose to defend it. In an age when the democratic ideal was being questioned, Sinclair Lewis reaffirmed it. In an age when the great strength of America, its middle class, was under attack from all sides, he became its champion, both in It Can't Happen Here and in his next novel The

Prodigal Parents, which will be discussed in the pages to follow. Above all, It Can't Happen Here was one more proof to be added to the already overwhelming evidence that Sinclair Lewis was a true patriot, a man who came to his country's aid in its hour of need.

5. The Prodigal Parents: 1938

It Can't Happen Here had been concerned with the America of 1935, and in Prodigal Parents, three years later, Sinclair Lewis turned his attention to the state of the nation in 1938. The book was curiously reminiscent of Lewis's earlier work, especially such novels as The Innocents and Babbitt, with the sentimentality of the former and the hero of the latter; and as a novel it deserves the abuse heaped upon it by the critics, but as a social document and as the example of certain trends in Lewis' career, it demands detailed consideration.[69]

The Prodigal Parents was an example of that phase of Lewis in which story-teller was combined with social critic. In the twenty years from 1930 to 1950 Lewis' writing was not dominated by satire, as it had been in the 1920's, but seemed to be almost equally divided between story-telling, evident in such books as Work of Art, Bethel Merriday, and The God-Seeker, and a combination of story-telling and satire, e.g., Ann Vickers, Prodigal Parents, Cass Timberlane, and World So Wide. Only three books in this whole period were representative of Lewis as pure satirist and social critic, It Can't Happen Here, Gideon Planish, and Kingsblood Royal, and of these Gideon Planish certainly did not rank among Lewis' best.

The hero of Prodigal Parents is Fred Cornplow, a prosperous, middle-aged automobile dealer who lives in a small town in upstate New York. Fred, a kindly man, has only two great tribulations in life, his children, Sara and Howard. Sara is a Vassar graduate and a self-styled authority on everything, while Howard, a handsome, spoiled undergraduate is as susceptible to new enthusiasms as a hayfever sufferer is to ragweed. Fred has cause for real concern when his son and daughter lend their support to a newly arrived, smooth talking young Communist organizer, Gene Silga, to establish a Communist cell in the town.

This new pressure on Fred is one of the things that make him decide to leave his business and his social niche for the first time in his life and escape with his wife from the grind of convention. However, he is delayed in his plan for adventure by having to set up Howard, newly-married, in business and housekeeping, and also to clean up the mess caused by Sara's amateur Communism. With these matters settled and with Silga gone, Fred and his good wife Hazel sneak off for a week's vacation, happy until tracked down by Sara and Howard. Fred returns to home and business, but even success cannot repress the latent rebellion in him. His family becomes worried about his eccentric behavior, and to please them he even allows Sara to dupe him into visiting a pschoanalyst.

This to Fred is the last straw. He puts his business in order and leaves for Europe with Hazel. They have been there only a short time, however, when Howard's wife suddenly appears to inform them that their son had undergone a complete moral collapse. Leaving the women in Europe, Fred returns to find that Sara is comfortably married but that Howard has become a drunken sot. Wasting no time, Fred gets Howard away into the Canadian woods on a camping trip and the boy is soon restored to mental and physical health. They are joined in the woods by Hazel, and as the story closes, the three are happy together, with Howard ready to make a new start in life.

It is probably already evident that as fiction Prodigal Parents was a rather unfortunate return to the kind of popular writing practiced by Lewis before 1920. Cowley's judgement that the book is below the level of Saturday Evening Post material is too severe, but in it Sinclair Lewis certainly did not show to advantage. But the very faults of the book, its sentimentality, its far-fetched plot of a business man so assailed by his children's demands and by the dullness of his own life that he precipitately flees to Europe, sprang both from Lewis' previous work and from his sensitivity to the temper of the time. For Fred Cornplow, as almost every contemporary reviewer noted, has a striking similarity to George F. Babbitt and his story is what would have happened if Babbitt had persevered in his revolt.[70]

It is true, as one critic pointed out, that Fred succeeds where Babbitt fails, that he has more character, money, and brains, but it is also true, and more important, that Fred Cornplow is a symbol of exactly the same class and social forces as Babbitt.[71] There was one vital difference, however, in Lewis' view of Babbitt in 1922 and in 1938. Lewis had always liked Babbitt. His affection had been evident even beneath the satire, yet at the same time this affection had not blinded him to Babbitt's evil potentialities. Now, in 1938, these evil potentialities were no longer present, and instead Lewis saw America's Babbitts and Fred Cornplows as the great strength of the nation, threatened by Communism, as represented in the novel by Gene Silga, and destructive change, in the persons of Sara and Howard.[72] As a result of this vision Sinclair Lewis wrote Prodigal Parents in defense of the middle class and as anassertion of the value of that class in an age when it was being threatened with extinction.

The novel is not entirely devoid of satire, and what there is centers around two main targets:

1. The Cornplow children, Sara and Howard, whom Lewis intended to represent the younger generation.

2. Communism, its folly as manifested in the ludicrously amateur activities of Sara, Howard, and their friends, and its danger, as symbolized by Gene Silga.

However, Sara and Howard come in for the greatest share of

abuse, not only because they exhibit all their generation's lighter qualities of frivolity, inconstancy in deed and word, and an infuriating contempt for their parents combined with a strong dependence on them; but because they also support such destructive changes as Communism without understanding it. Taken as a whole, Lewis' view of the Cornplow children suggest the belief he had then that the generation was a decadent one, without the positive values and strength of the older generation as symbolized by Fred Cornplow.[73]

In any case the young people of Prodigal Parents and, with a few exceptions, of It Can't Happen Here documents the shift Lewis' viewpoint had undergone from his earlier work. There are no Una Goldens, Milt Daggetts, Hawk Ericsons, or Martin Arrowsmiths in Lewis' books at this particular period. But his pessimism about American youthdid not long endure because by the time World War II had ended (in which Lewis lost his elder son, Wells), his faith in them had been restored, and one of his most admirable heroes, Neil Kingsblood, was no more than an older Howard Cornplow whose soul had been purged in the fire of battle. In 1938, however, Howard Cornplow was an empty-headed irresponsible boy masquerading as a man, saved from disaster only by his father's strength and kindness.[74] Sara, similarly, is another irritating peron, rather closely related to Lewis' early sophisticated types (e.g., Istra Nash) and also to Fran Dodsworth.

She patronizes everyone and finds a release for her virgin energy in one activity after another, including Communism, or as Lewis put it in the novel: "She had done a little Communism just as she had done a little tennis, Thomas Wolfe, golf, Bach, diving, William Faulkner, biochemistry, Buddhism, vegetarianism, and Buchmanism."[75]

Sara's characterization was used by Lewis to show not only the folly of the younger generation, but also the pitfalls their innocent, blind idealism could lead them into. If Sara toys with Communism as a kind of new social game, Gene Silga, the young Communist organizer, is deadly serious about his work. Fred Cornplow recognizes him as a dangerous adversary at first glance, and although Lewis wanted the reader to respect Silga's courage and devotion to his cause, he had no intention of making him an attractive or admirable character. The passage quoted below makes this clear:

> Let us be clear about the political activities of Eugene Silga. He was not at all like the melodramatic Bolsheviks of British detective stories. . . . Fred suspected that Sara's radical toying . . . meant nothing more than a desire to be important, to be Different, to associate with romantic young men. But Gene's purpose was clear. He had hated the bland and rich ever since his infanthood in a riverside slum in Brooklyn. Making his way at C.C.N.Y. by pressing clothes had not improved his benevolence. He wanted power and revenge; he was willing to risk death in the hope of smashing the entire democratic system and winding up with the factory workers dictatorially running the country, and himself running the workers.

> Both Sara and he did love humanity. Whether either of them loved a single individual human being was less certain.
> Eugene did not come out of the comic papers. He was neither dirty-necked nor bellowing, nor had he any special tropism for soapboxes. He was neat and quiet-voiced; he smiled affectionately; and he was, to the world of Fred Cornplow - to the world of Franklin and Emerson and Mark Twain, of Willa Cather and William Allan White - as dangerous as a rattlesnake.
> (pp. 48-9).

Nor does Fred let himself be browbeaten by his daughter and by Silga into supporting causes in which he does not believe, Communism for example, which Lewis wanted the reader to know had no monopoly on humanitarianism, although it pretended to at the time. In a period when American idealists flocked to the Red banner because they sympathized with the Loyalist forces in Spain and the struggles of Communist groups in Germany and Italy against Fascism, and because they believed that Communism might be the answer to the woes of the world, Lewis recognized that Communism was only another kind of Fascism.[76] Thus, Fred Cornplow, when he is condemned for his refusal to donate funds for Spain, indignantly refutes any slight on his humanitarian instincts, and his statement of his position was very likely an expression of Sinclair Lewis' own feelings:

> "I do read the newspapers. Seriously, I do know there's a lot of things wrong in this world; mining is dangerous and badly paid; Tom Mooney was railroaded and ought to be released; the Southern share croppers have a terrible time - <u>and</u> so do most of the plantation owners! - a lot of priests and college professors get sent to prison in Europe for

> telling the truth; the Negroes get an awful deal; a lot of farmers just work to feed their mortgages. But unlike you Communists, I don't feel that I'm Almighty God. I can't do everything in the world at once. I'm the president of the Mind Your Own Business Association. I'm just not rich enough and not smart enough to rebuild the New York slums and stop all work at one and the same time. I don't think I've done so bad with my own job. My workmen and my customers both seem pretty well satisfied. I get along all right with my own family. . . . I'm just a plain ordinary citizen. . . and you highbrows, who love to talk so much about realism and seeing clearly, ought to appreciate the fact that I know who I am."
> (pp. 52-3).

As the novel progresses its hero, Fred Cornplow, emerges as a more and more admirable character. In many ways, as has been suggested, he is a close relative of Babbitt, but with this important difference. He is a liberal and enlightened Babbitt, blind neither to his dangers nor to the faults of his family or country. He is also a strong Babbitt, strong enough to make his dream of escape come true, as Babbitt had never dared to do. He resists the attempts of family and friends to drag him back into contented conformity. He begins to think critically, to examine his life, his work, his goals. From this examination a new confidence arises, a new realization of his potentialities, the same realization of Babbitt's potentialities which enabled Lewis to produce Sam Dodsworth, who, together with Babbitt were the predecessors of Fred Cornplow.

The result of Lewis' realization of Babbitt's true merit was expressed by the passage below from Prodigal Parents. It

did not represent a contradiction, negation, or denial of anything Lewis had said previously. Rather, it was a more complete, hopeful, positive statement of faith in an age of anxiety. It was a defense of the common man, and it was Sinclair Lewis at his wisest:

> Who in the world has ever been more important than Fred Cornplow?
>
> He has, at times, been too noisy or too prosy; he has now and then thought more of money than of virtue and music; but he has been the eternal doer; equally depended upon - and equally hated - by the savage mob and by the insolent nobility.
>
> When Fred Cornplow was an Egyptian, it was he who planned the pyramids, conciliated the mad pharoahs, tried to make existence endurable for the sweating slaves. In the days when he was called a Roman Citizen, he was a centurion and he conquered Syria and ruled his small corner of it with as much justice as the day allowed.
>
> As Fr. Abbot Cornplow, in the bright Dark Ages, he developed agriculture and the use of building stone; later, as a captain under Cromwell, he helped tame the political power of the ecclesiastics. The American Civil War was not fought between General Grant and General Lee, but between Private Fred Cornplow of Massachusetts and Private Ed Cornplow of Alabama; and a few years later it was they who created bribery and railroads and gave all their loot to science.
>
> From Fred Cornplow's family, between B.C. 1937 and A.D. 1937, there came, despite an occasional aristocratic Byron or an infrequent proletarian John Bunyan, nearly all the medical researchers, the discoverers of better varieties of wheat, the poets, the builders, the singers, the captains of great ships. Sometimes his name has been pronounced Babbitt; sometimes it has been called Ben Franklin; and once, if Eugene O'Neill may be trusted, he went by the style of Marco Polo and brought back from civilized China to barbaric Europe the sound of camel bells, and the silken tents, scented with sandalwood, which have overshadowed the continent ever since.

> He is the eternal bourgeois, the bourjoyce, the burgher, the Middle Class, whom the Bolsheviks hate and imitate, whom the English love and deprecate, and who is most of the population worth considering in France and Germany and these United States.
> He is Fred Cornplow; and when he changes his mind, that crisis is weightier than Waterloo or Thermopylae.
>
> (pp. 99-100).

Fred succeeds in his revolt. He overcomes the demands of his children, the disapproval of his neighbors, and the doubts of his wife, and with her escapes to Europe. On board ship Fred, released from all social obligations for the first time in his life, has the chance to think objectively, and Lewis used the occasion to summarize the entire theme and moral of the novel. In a long, eloquent passage he reviewed the changes in the social order that the twentieth century had wrought, concluding, through the thoughts of Fred Cornplow, once again in that doctrine of individualism and the right of individual happiness which was of all the themes and conclusions in Lewis' work, the most enduring and important. No longer a young man, Lewis had undoubtedly grown mellower with the years, but his basic belief in the ideal of liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all men had never wavered, as this passage which appears near the end of <u>Prodigal Parents</u> proves indisputably:

> Women have for decades been revolting against the restrictions of men and the home. Votes. Jobs. Uniforms in 1914-18. Cocktails they didn't appreciate enough and cigarettes they appreciated too much. Now the children were revolting; thought their parents were convenient

bores at best, tyrants at worst; children not, as for centuries past, claiming merely their own just rights in the household, but domination over it.

Perhaps next would come, perhaps there was already coming, secret and dangerous, the Revolt of the Men; they would admit how sick they were of the soft and scented cushions of the women, of women's nervous reminders that pipe ashes didn't belong on the floor; perhaps they would go off to monasteries and fishing camps (much the same thing) and leave their wives and children flat.

If the institution of The Family was to survive at all, if it possibly could survive, parents would have to stop expecting children to accept their ideas (but that was a warning even older than Bernard Shaw). Men and women must expect nothing, nothing whatever, from each other as of vested right (but that was an ancient battle, too, though still as little won as when Ibsen was new and shocking). But beginning about 1914, and each year since then more violent, there was a growing revolt of parents against the growing revolt of Youth; a demand that the young Saras and Howards should regard their parents' houses as something more than places in which to change clothes before dashing off in motorcars (dressing rooms, clothes and car all provided free, by the courtesy of the management) to places more interesting.

But Fred didn't at all advocate the Fascist-Nazi-Bolshevik system, the naively new and wearisomely antiquated system of belief that everybody ought to sacrifice himself for everybody else. He had the opposite faith: that nobody ought to expect any sacrifice from anybody else, and that (in merely ten thousand years or so, if the luck and the weather held good) thus might be ended forever the old structure, equally praised by small circles of relatives and by monstrously great nations, whereby A sacrifices his honest desires on behalf of B, and B sacrifices for C, and C sacrifices himself violently but complainingly, all day long, for A, and everybody resented the whole business and chanted, "How loyal and unselfish we all are - curse it!"

(pp. 282-4).

while Fred's last discovery, one born of his vacation in Europe, was also an echo of something Lewis had always believed and had said in one of his earliest novels, Trail of the Hawk: "How bully it is to be living, if you don't have to give up living in order to make a living,"[77] for in Prodigal Parents Fred Cornplow concludes on returning to America: "It seems to me now that it isn't going where you want to that is freedom, but knowing that you can go."[78]

If, as the critics remarked, Lewis went to the extreme in portraying Fred Cornplow as an over-heroic character, it may be forgiven in consideration of the time in which the book was written.[79] Complete objectivity had never been one of Sinclair Lewis' attributes. As has been indicated, he was a man unable to do things moderately. He talked, drank, wrote, traveled, loved, and hated excessively. It is this same excess, a splendid excess, which was a part of Lewis and his greatness as it has been a part of many artists. Because Lewis gave excessive vent to his hate in Elmer Gantry and his love in Prodigal Parents, it is true that neither is a great book, yet it is the very excess in these books that makes them worth reading, if only as social documents.

The revolt of the parents against the revolt of youth is not really the main theme of the book. What Lewis and Fred Cornplow were opposed to in the novel was the violent, destructive change which was challenging the American way of

life. To Lewis the Cornplows were the bulwark of everything good, while their children, although not intended as actual representatives of the entire younger generation, did represent such threatening new forces as Communism and psychiatry. True, they were a little terrifying, but Lewis meant it to be that way. Now, the readers saw all this but the critics did not, a situation which suggests the greatest paradox of all, for Lewis' critics had always denied him recognition as an artist because he had not defined the good life, they said, and when in Prodigal Parents he gave them a full and clear definition of the good life as it should be lived in 1938, he was never less an artist.[80]

Whatever else the novel implied, it stated for once and for all Lewis' hatred of Communism. After It Can't Happen Here, although Communists and Communism had been treated anything but gently in that book, Lewis was feted at a dinner in New York given by a large group of leftist intellectuals, writers, poets, critics, etc., during which Lewis was welcomed to the Marxist ranks by the prominent critic Granville Hicks and others.[81] How Lewis got to this dinner or what his intention was in going is a mystery, but his novels and other writing that he was doing at the time can leave no doubt that he was an ardent anti-Communist as well as anti-Fascist. For example, from October 4, 1937 to April 18, 1938, Lewis wrote a weekly book column for Newsweek and in this column again and again attacked Communism, Marxist

writers, and all radical influences in modern literature, while at the same time he consistently defended traditional American values. In his first article he wrote that America had the chance to dominate world literature as never before, urged the nation's writers to abandon their slick standards, and lashed out at those who were turning out Communist "trash."[82] His next essay advocated the mastery of great books as an important element in America's coming of age.[83] In some of his other columns he praised Thoreau as the captain of freedom,[84] chose Willa Cather as the greatest American novelist because of her treatment of the frontier,[85] prophecied that the Southwest might someday produce great writers,[86] and predicted that the nation's theater would soon undergo a great revival.[87]

One of Lewis' most important statements in these essays was his article of November 29, 1937, in which he made a direct frontal attack on the prevalence of Communism in American literature and the increasing number of Marxist writers. He concluded as follows:

> There is no excuse for anyone to swallow the Bolshevik claim to be the one defense against fascism. There are too many dependable accounts of what, actually, the Communists have done in their own private laboratories. It is not necessary to listen to hacks for reactionary magazines, so large a store is there of scrupulous books by men who went to Russia with every hope, and returned in disgust.[88]

Another important utterance of Lewis' was his statement about standardization in America, a statement which reveals both

that by 1938 Lewis had reconciled himself to this former peeve and that he had not given up his ideals, despite the standardization. In his column for February 14, 1938, he wrote:

> That the standardization of everything in America is increasing is obvious. But not so obvious is the conclusion as to what to do about it. . . . If one will face realism, the mass-produced avenue is here to stay, and on that realistic basis, not upon any dream fantasy, one must found any propaganda - any Lecturer's Message - about our desperate need for the preservation of the lone and proudly individualistic human mind.89

No, despite the sentimentality in Prodigal Parents, Sinclair Lewis had not given up the good fight. All through the late 1930's he was increasingly active as a lecturer and writer, and his messages were in his own classic tradition. In a speech given in New York City, November 11, 1937, Lewis attacked the softness of American life. He asked, "Are we strong enough to fight for our freedom and our democracy? If we are not, then it has happened here." And he went on, in a manner refreshingly reminiscent of Babbitt to attack the philosophy of salesmanship which he saw dominating the country:

> "Perhaps in America we don't call it slavery. We call it salesmanship. Perhaps it has happened so drastically here that we are unaware of it.
> "In Russia the people are contentedly becoming slaves of the machine. In Germany and Italy the people are contentedly becoming soldiers. In this country the people are contentedly becoming salesmen."90

Appropriately, Lewis ended his speech with a reading of the Gettysburg Address.

In another talk, given several days later, Lewis contemptously named such figures as Charlie McCarthy (the ventriloquist's dummy), Mickey Mouse, Joe DiMaggio, and Dale Carnegie as America's national heroes, concluding that their prominence was an indictment of the nation. He went on to again attack salesmanship, "The Great God Business," and advertising, "The Great American Art," and stated, "If American democracy is to be swept away and we must choose between fascism or communism, there is another choice, suggested by that old patriot, Patrick Henry, who said 'give me liberty or give me death!'"[91] Some other important Lewis speeches of the time were those in which he made a plea for the preservation of learning andintellectuality in a chaotic world,[92]and in which he condemned the American ideal of "Service."[93]

It is obvious from all of the above that Sinclair Lewis, despite a certain conservatism, still had much to say about his country and did not hesitate to say it, for after <u>It Can't Happen Here</u>, Lewis probably regained his position of the 1920's as the American writer most in the public eye. In the meantime he had, all through these years, been increasingly active in the theater, first as playwright, then as actor and director. It was an interest which became so strong in the latter part of the decade that it finally

provided material for a book, Bethel Merriday. Accordingly, the next section of this study will deal briefly with the description and analysis of Sinclair Lewis' connection with the drama.

6. Bethel Merriday: 1940

Sinclair Lewis' interest in the theater had first borne fruit in 1934, when he collaborated with Sidney Howard on the dramatic version of Dodsworth. The play was produced in New York, received favorably, and enjoyed a successful run.[94] Although Howard did most of the work on Dodsworth, Lewis' part seems to have inspired him to further dramatic writing, for in the same year he joined with Lloyd Lewis in writing the play Jayhawker.[95] In this play, a satiric drama about political intrigue in the Civil War, Lewis himself wrote the major portion and his touch is evident in most of the dialogue.[96] This drama also had its share of success, and when the stage version of It Can't Happen Here appeared two years later, George Jean Nathan thought enough of Lewis' future as a dramatist to write:

> Sinclair Lewis, more than any other American novelist, has in him the potentialities of a valuable writer for the American stage. . . . He has, as a writer, more force and fire, more sharpness of character sense, more rich humor, and more general awareness than nine-tenths of the men who are writing for the stage of this country at the present time.[97]

In It Can't Happen Here Lewis not only wrote most of the play himself, but also directed and starred in its New York production in the role of Doremus Jessup.[98] About this time Lewis evidently decided to do a book on the theater and his research for it led him into further dramatic activity, including acting in summer stock and the writing of

three more plays, one of which, Angela Is Twenty-Two, was written with the technical advice of Fay Wray. Lewis also played a leading role in this play and toured with it through thw West.[99] Although the drama and Lewis as its male lead received ten curtain calls in Columbus, Ohio, where it opened, the local critics doubted that the play had Broadway stature.[100] As it turned out, they were right; the play never reached New York. But Lewis was not discouraged. He had always been a natural impersonator and it was the logical thing for him to turn to the theater, and once in it, give it all his energy and enthusiasm as writer, actor, and director.

As an actor, Sinclair Lewis was not to be listed among the great, but his performances were, according to one famous critic, always to be counted on for excitement and interest.[101] His flamboyant personality, his natural impudence and bravado, and the spectacularity of the successful man in one profession who challenges another, were the elements that drew large audiences wherever he played, especially summer stock.[102] For a few years, from late in 1936 to 1941, he became immersed in the theater and worked as hard at being an actor as he had at writing. Lewis was impressed by the professionalism of the theater, and always a lonely man, he liked the gregariousness of the stage. He had never been comfortable in formal society, and in the informality of theatrical people he found a vitality that was refreshing to him.[103] Later, he turned to directing and found that even

more stimulating than acting and, in his own opinion, second only to the joy of being a "traffic cop."[104]

Bethel Merriday, 1940, was a natural result of all this activity.[105] Although Lewis made it a point to state in the foreword of the novel that it was not a portrait of actual stage people nor a record of his own experiences, it is evident in the book that these experiences served as the background for the entire novel and gave it authenticity.[106] Like most of Lewis' other books, the name of the chief character, the young actress Bethel Merriday, is also the title, and the story is a record of her career as a stage-struck girl, as a summer-stock apprentice, and finally as a player in a touring troupe. The book was another of those interludes in Lewis' career which displayed him as pure story-teller, and like all the other novels in this catagory,it did not feature Lewis at his best.

It would be to no purpose to relate here in detail the plot of the novel, for although it is a pleasant enough story and interesting in its description of theatrical folk, it has very little significance to Lewis' career either as a writer or social critic. Bethel Merriday demonstrates only one thing about Sinclair Lewis, the fact that he loved the theater, understood it, and saw in it a fulfillment of a part of the romantic dream of escape that he cherished all his life, the same dream manifested so strongly in his novels. This is not to say, as one recent scholar has done, that the

book is "a deliberate and sustained attempt to reduce everything outside the theatre to inferior play-acting."[107] But it does reveal a further yielding to the sentimentality that had been one of the most glaring weaknesses of Prodigal Parents, and like that novel it shows that Lewis was still groping for some means of assertion in an age of crisis. This assertion of the value of the theater in a dubious world is made directly in the early pages of the novel, when one of the minor characters says:

> "Even if you aren't much good - and me, I guess I'm probably just the run-of-the-mill ham - even so, when you've been creating a human being, and living in him, then the rest of the world outside the theater, with all its fussing about houses and motorcars and taxes, seems pretty shabby. Acting - it's a heightening of life."[108]

As for the heroine Bethel Merriday, she finds in the theater just what Lewis found, a vision of democracy and cameraderie, especially reassuring in a strife-torn society:

> She saw all the people of the theater - director, scene designer, actors, electricians, stagehands, stage manager, musicians, author (though she wasn't yet enlightened enough to include the wicked producer) - as a fraternity, the sincerest democracy in the world, united to create in a troubled world an illusion of strength and beauty and hope and honor and noble wrath that were more real than reality.
>
> (p. 87).

Finally, Lewis found in the theater one more expression of the artistic impulse, the impulse to make triumphant the imaginative spirit, the same spirit that drove him to produce twenty-two novels, and hundreds of short stories and essays, in a lifetime of sixty-five years:

> Like all artists - all painters, all musicians, all poets, even some of those plodding recorders, the novelists - actors are glorious children, with a child's unwearied delight in the same story over again, and the child's ability to make dragons grow in a suburban garden, but with an adult magic of crystallizing the day-dreams into enduring life.
>
> (p. 320).

Bethel Merriday may not have been a good book, but even its most glaring weakness, its sentimentality, makes it a peculiarly appropriate terminus for the work of Sinclair Lewis in the decade 1930-40, a decade which demonstrated a considerable change in his career, a change from satire to sentiment, a change which will be chronicled in the summary to follow.

7. Summary and Conclusions: 1930-40

Sinclair Lewis' unsuccessful attempt in the early 1930's to write a great labor novel may have been the turning point of his career, for his literary output in the entire decade revealed an increasing amount of the nostalgia, sentiment, and mellowness that had briefly shown itself in Dodsworth. While his first book of the decade, Ann Vickers (1933), was an important document for its attack on the American penal system and while its satire on this topic ranked with Lewis' best, the novel as a whole failed to reach the standards of the outstanding novels of the 1920's. There was, moreover, to be seen in Ann Vickers a new conservatism and turning away from the cause of reform, strangely combined at the same time with Lewis' attempt to reform the entire field of penology. This conservatism and mellowness was most evident in the avoidance, except in scattered instances, of mention of the greatest issue of the day, the Depression.

Simultaneously, there was to be found in this novel a moral looseness and a rejection of recognized codes that may have been appropriate to such a heroine as Lewis depicted Ann Vickers to be, but that were certainly new to Lewis' work, which, however controversial, had always complied with accepted moral standards. True, Gantry had been a lecher, but there was no intention that the reader admire him, while that was precisely the intention in regard to Ann Vickers.

But this is a relatively unimportant matter in the general view of the significance of the book. What is important is that Ann Vickers revealed Sinclair Lewis groping for new, positive values in an age of increasing negation. Part of that search was manifested by the heroine's attempt to find personal happiness, at the risk of her wordly position, in a real but illicit love. Part of that search was manifested by Lewis' attack on the penal system, an attack which was a vestige of the earlier, greater, satiric Lewis. And finally, part of that search was manifested in a growing, unmistakeable conservatism.

Lewis' next book, Work of Art, was a continuation of his conservative trend. As a novel, it gratified his lifelong interest in hotels and was another of the story-telling interludes in his career, interludes in which social issues were usually avoided. But the theme of Work of Art, the theme that conscientious hotel-keeping could be a nobler art than writing, was a strong, albeit indirect, statement of the Horatio Alger tradition in America, while the book's hero, Myron Weagle, was symbol of that tradition in a time when it was threatening to break down for once and for all. Once again, as in Ann Vickers, although the story carried through to the early 1930's, almost no mention was made of the nation's economic crisis, and Myron Weagle survives the first grim years of the Depression to go on to other triumphs. It now became obvious that Lewis was not blind to what was

happening around him, but rather had deliberately chosen to write an American success story when success had almost been forgotten. With his seismographic perception, Lewis had rejected satire to give his readers of the '30's the assurance and optimism they wanted and needed. Thus, Myron Weagle was more than the fictional portrait of a hotelman, he was the symbol of the poor American boy who makes good through his own diligence and hard work. And when Myron's dream hotel, the dream of a lifetime, becomes ruined, he refuses to give up, leaves the past behind him, and strikes off toward new horizons. This in itself was a lesson for the age, a lesson which did not fail to hit home, despite the mediocre quality of the book.

Lewis' career in the early part of the decade had started in a relatively quiet manner. From 1931 to 1935, Lewis was not much in the news as compared to the '20's, and although he produced two novels in those years, the books did not arouse the interest that had greeted the earlier work. But beginning in 1936 after the publication of It Can't Happen Here, Lewis again became a public figure from 1936 to 1941 as a writer, lecturer, essayist, playwright, and actor. It all began with It Can't Happen Here, a novel which marked Lewis' return to greatness. It was a story of America under the rule of native Fascism, and as such it was directly in the line of those masterpieces in which Lewis had dealt with the forces of philistinism and fascism in various aspects

of American life. He had charted these forces and warned of their danger to the democratic ideal, and in 1935 he visualized them as strong enough to conquer a Depression-weakened America.

The very title of the novel, "It Can't Happen Here," was indicative of the prevalent smugness of the nation's liberals, as symbolized in the character Doremus Jessup. It was also a warning and a paradox, for Doremus found out too late that it could happen here. No longer was Lewis' lesson indirect as it had been in Ann Vickers and Work of Art. Now, it was direct, explicit, terrifying in its truth, and it hit Americans where they lived. The whole Depression era was the background for the book, while the rise to power of Hitler and Mussolini was an almost exact parallel in fact what Lewis pictured in fiction.

Above all, the book was an appeal to American liberals to leave their ivory towers and join in the good fight, the fight to preserve the free, inquiring, critical spirit which Lewis perceived was the foundation of all human progress and liberty throughout all of history. It was an appeal to liberals to wake up to the dangers that threatened them here, before they too, like Doremus Jessup, felt the storm trooper's whip and saw life through the barbed wire of the concentration camp. Nor did Lewis, like so many other intellectuals, make the mistake of seizing upon Communism as the way out of the dilemma, because he was careful to

show in It Can't Happen Here, in Prodigal Parents, and in other of his writings that Communism was only another kind of totalitarianism, equally dangerous to the American way of life.

Prodigal Parents, although it lacked merit as a novel, was another assertion by Sinclair Lewis of the democratic ideal and of the value of the middle class. No greater proof of Lewis' philosophical developement can be had than by comparing this book with Babbitt. In 1922, Lewis had seen Babbitt as a slave-man, a symbol of all the stultifying forces of conformity in the nation and in the world. But in 1938 he saw him, as is evident in the characterization of Fred Cornplow, as the strongest force for the preservation of the permanent values in a free society. Babbitt himself had changed, of course. As Fred Cornplow, he had grown up, been educated, developed strength of character and resolution. Above all, he could see as Fred Cornplow that the most precious thing in life was not security but freedom, freedom to travel, to live, to escape from the comfortable and sterile rut of home, business, family.

Sinclair Lewis had grown older. He had become more conservative and sentimental. But this did not mean, as the critics saw it, that he had become less wise. Just the contrary was true. He had never been wiser or more sensitive to the spirit of the age. He may have relented on some of his old feuds and he may have qualified some of his

youthful heresies, but he never sold out any of his ideals.[109] These ideals were not, as many of the less discerning had believed in the 1920's, to destroy the American way of life, but to refine it of its impurities and purge the dross from the gold. His ideals were always the great native ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and he had of necessity become America's angry man when he had seen those ideals corrupted and debased. Now, in the decade 1930-40, he again saw the same ideals endangered, but from new directions, and like the brilliant literary strategist that he was, he asserted them in a new way, a way appropriate to the age.

Lewis' last book of the period, Bethel Merriday, was a fitting conclusion to it. Like Work of Art it was an interlude, an interlude in this case dedicated to the theater which had increasingly drawn Lewis' interest as the decade progressed. Like Work of Art it was Lewis the story-teller, and it suffered accordingly. But like all the other books of the 1930's it was an affirmative book, one which stated the positive value of one more phase of American life, the theater, in a time of confusion. In common with all the other instances in Lewis' career where he chose to play the part of romantic story-teller, Bethel Merriday showed a tendency toward escapism, but in 1940 such a tendency was not necessarily an unfortunate one. However, this tendency

ended at that point for the time being because Lewis' first book of the new decade, Gideon Planish (1943), marked a return to the earlier satiric genre. It was this genre, combined with other elements both old and new, that was to dominate the last ten years in the literary career of Sinclair Lewis, and although Lewis' career was not to end as auspiciously as it had begun, the new decade did prove that there was still a lot of life left in the old master, for he was still hard at it when death cut him short.

Footnotes to Chapter III

1. See the N.Y. Times, LXXX (March 13, 1931), p. 1, col. 2, for a report of this incident. Lewis revenged himself on the D.A.R. by savagely satirizing the organization in a passage in It Can't Happen Here, pp. 5-6, which concluded: "It has provided hearty and innocent laughter for the judicious, since it has contrived to be just as ridiculous as the unhappily defunct KuKlux Klan, without any need of wearing . . . high dunces caps and public nightshirts."

2. This occurrence had taken place at a dinner for a visiting Russian novelist which was attended by many notables in the literary and publishing world. Lewis, one of the speakers, arose and said that he declined to speak in Dreiser's presence because Dreiser had plagiarized three thousand words from Dorothy Thompson's book on Russia and used it in his own Dreiser Looks at Russia. The two men continued the argument after dinner, and in the course of events Dreiser struck Lewis, but the two were parted before further damage could result. Dreiser later explained that he and Mrs. Lewis had access to the same material, and that the similarity was unintentional. For the full details of the matter, see the N.Y. Times, LXXX (March 21, 1931), p. 11, col. 1; Lit. Dig., CIX (April 11, 1931), 15-16; and Cleaton, Books and Battles, p. 252.

3. Sinclair Lewis, "Letter to Critics," Nation, CXXXIII (Sept. 16, 1931), 280-1.

4. Anon., "Lewis Says Movies Begin to 'Grow Up'," N.Y. Times, LXXXI (Dec. 9, 1931), p. 23, col. 5.

5. See above, chapt. 2, section 3.

6. The main source for the discussion of Lewis' labor novel is Ramon Guthrie's "The Labor Novel Sinclair Lewis Never Wrote," N.Y. Her. Trib. Book Rev., XXVIII (Feb. 10, 1952), pp. 1, 6. This essay is also a valuable general reference.

7. Louis Adamic, My America, 1928-38 (N.Y., 1938), pp. 96-104.

8. Sinclair Lewis, Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929 (N.Y., 1929). This pamphlet, published by the United Textile Workers of America, was a revision and extension of Lewis' six articles written for the Scripps-Howard newspapers beginning Oct. 21, 1929.

9. Adamic, p. 103.

10. Benjamin Stolberg, "Sinclair Lewis," Amer. Merc., LIII (Oct., 1941), 455-6.

11. Guthrie, p. 6.

12. Malcolm Cowley, "Tired Feminist," New Repub., LXXIV (Feb. 15, 1933), 22.

13. Sinclair Lewis, Ann Vickers (N.Y., 1933), pp. 59-60.

14. J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Sinclair Lewis," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXXII (Jan. 29, 1933), sec. 5, p. 1. On the whole issue of Lewis' feminism in Ann Vickers, he himself said, in an interview reported by the N.Y. Times, LXXXII (March 7, 1933), p. 18, col. 7, that the point of the novel was that "women have almost caught up to men . . . they are almost complete, full-sized human beings, with ideas, reasons, ambitions, force - with virtues and faults. All through history, men were the masters, women the inferiors. Now they are nearly equal - but men still have them licked."

15. Henry Hazlitt, "Sinclair Lewis, Campaigner," Nation, CXXXVI (Feb. 1, 1933), 125.

16. Michael Williams, "Babbittry into Vickery," Commonweal, XVII (March 22, 1933), 567-9.

17. Harry Hansen, "Fashions in Fiction," Forum, LXXXIX (March, 1933), 152-5.

18. Malcolm Cowley, "Tired Feminist," New Repub., LXXIV (Feb. 15, 1933), 22-3. For other critical opinions of the book, see "Lewis Travels Far." Lit. Dig., CXV (March 4, 1933), 18-19.

19. Bernard DeVoto, Forays and Rebuttals (Boston, 1936), 312.

20. Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," p. 291.

21. Harry Hartwick, Foreground of American Fiction, pp. 274-5.

22. V. F. Calverton, "Sinclair Lewis, the Last of the Literary Liberals," Modern Monthly, VIII (March, 1934), 79, and Granville Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," English Journal, XXV (April, 1936), 269.

23. Hartwick, p. 274, and Geismar, Last of the Provincials, p. 117.

24. For a lively account of the life, times, and activities of Dorothy Thompson, including Lewis' whirlwind courtship of her and their married life, see Jack Alexander's "The Girl From Syracuse," and "Rover Girl in Europe," SatEvePost, CCXII (May 18, May 25, 1940), p. 9 ff., 20ff.

25. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis' Executor," New Yorker, XXVII (Sept. 22, 1951), 26, and W. E. Woodward, "The World and Sauk Center," New Yorker, IX (Feb. 3, 1934), 25.

26. Woodward, p. 25. Some of Lewis' business schemes were included in several passages of Work of Art. Even to the layman these ideas show that Lewis had an extraordinary talent for creative, profitable business projects. His letters, in fact, the amount of money he made in his writing career, prove further that Lewis could be a realistic and shrewd man of affairs. Although he spent freely all his life, he still left an estate of more than a quarter of a million dollars!

27. The best sources for an understanding of Work of Art are Sinclair Lewis, "In the Workshop of a Nobel Prize Novelist," SRL, X (Feb. 10, 1934), 465ff., which reproduces a chapter Lewis omitted from the book's final version, and Henry Seidel Canby, "Sinclair Lewis' Art of Work," SRL, X (Feb. 10, 1934), 465 ff., which analyzes Lewis' original concept of the novel, his preparation for it, and traces the developement of Lewis' thought in it.

28. Among the critics who attacked Work of Art and the characterization of Myron Weagle were Hartwick, p. 276, Gurko, pp. 291-2, and the contemporary reviewer Florence Codman, "Objet d'Art," Nation, CXXXVIII (Jan. 31, 1934), 134-5, who found the book Lewis' poorest "biographical romance." Two critics who noticed the novel's idealism were J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Sinclair Lewis," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXXIII (Jan. 28, 1934), sec. v., p. 1; and Elmer Davis, "Sinclair Lewis' Hick of Genius," SRL, X (Jan. 27, 1934), 433.

29. Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art (N.Y., 1934), pp. 156-7.

30. The best examples of the Marxist critics' approach to Lewis' work of the early 1930's are Calverton, p. 79, and Hicks, p. 270, who both attacked Work of Art as an indication of Lewis' deterioration and loss of sensitivity to the climate of opinion.

31. Geismar, p. 123.

32. Canby, p. 465.

33. Printed in Georges Schreiber, Portraits and Self-Portraits (Boston, 1936), p. 61.

34. Sinclair Lewis, Selected Short Stories (N.Y., 1935), p. x.

35. Ibid., p. x.

36. It must be stressed from the beginning of this discussion, as W. L. Phelps, "Mr. Lewis' Fourteenth Novel," Scribners, XCIX (Jan., 1936), 59-60, pointed out, that It Can't Happen Here was not a prophecy that Fascism would come to America, but a demonstration that it could happen and how it might happen. In connection with this, Lewis, speaking in New York on Dec. 18, 1933, had said: "We are in the midst of history, and I advise those who wonder how it would feel to see Caesar marching at the head of his Nazis to look about them at the great mass of the citizenry today following their bewildered leaders." In short, Lewis saw that the time was ripe for violent events. For a full report of this speech, see the N.Y. Times, LXXXIII (Dec. 19, 1933), p. 18, col. 2.

37. John Middleton Murry, "The Hell It Can't," Adelphi, XI (March, 1936), 324.

38. Harrison Smith, "Sinclair Lewis: Remembrance of the Past," SRL, XXXIV (Jan. 27, 1951), 37; Elmer Davis, "Ode to Liberty," SRL, XII (Oct., 19, 1935), 5; Don Wharton, "Dorothy Thompson," Scribners, CI (May, 1937), 13; and Jack Alexander, "Rover Girl in Europe," SatEvePost, CCXII (May 25, 1940), 115, are the main references for Dorothy Thompson's influence on It Can't Happen Here.

39. Wharton, p. 13. There were definite similarities to this passage in pp. 94-5 of It Can't Happen Here, where Lewis listed the supporting elements of Buzz Windrip.

40. The best source of information on this matter is Lewis' correspondence with Ernst Rowohlt, now in the Yale Collection, item #207. See especially Lewis' letter of Nov. 2, 1933, which stated Lewis' indignation at the censorship and ordered the further publication and sale of his books in Germany to stop. Lewis' idealism and integrity are nowhere more in evidence than in this letter. Lewis also cabled Rowohlt as follows: "Dear Ernst have you gone crazy? Do you think I will let you or your government or any other government tell me what I should write or where I should publish?" See also Lewis' attack on the Catholic Church for its censorship of several current plays in 1937, the report of which appeared in the N.Y. Times, LXXXVII (Dec., 17, 1937), p. 14, col. 5. Lewis stated that it was such censorship that created the "slave-type mind."

41. Lewis' time schedule for It Can't Happen Here appears in his notebook, item #155, Yale Collection.

42. Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here (N.Y., 1936), p. 1.

43. Ibid., pp. 21-2. Lewis had already charted American excesses in his essay "Self-Conscious America," discussed at length in Chapt. II of this study.

44. Windrip's "Fifteen Points" are pp. 74-9 of the novel.

45. J. Donald Adams, "America Under the Iron Heel," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXXV (Oct. 29, 1935), sec. vi, p. 1.

46. These beliefs appear in It Can't Happen Here, pp. 134-6. This philosophy of Lewis' should come as no surprise, for, despite his idealism, he had never been a Utopian. To Lewis, Utopia was a static condition, incompatible with human nature. He had said so in 1938 in his article "Mr. Lorimer and Me," Nation, CXXVII (July 25, 1928), 81, where he stated: "I'm awfully sorry, but I do not believe that mankind will ever be ideally perfect." This does not mean that Lewis was a pessimist, but the opposite, because although he saw evil as a permanent thing, he also saw man's desire for self-improvement equally permanent. In any case, no matter what he said he believed, his whole career proved that he never stopped trying to improve man or lost faith in him. The entire matter was summed up by Lewis in his essay, "Sinclair Lewis' Utopia - 2939 Model," N.Y. Her. Trib. Book Rev., (April 30, 1939), p. 1., where he stated: "No one is a more tireless perfectionist and nagger than myself, but I insist the developement of mankind must rest upon actuality and not upon wish-dreams; that in the millenium, men will not cease to be men; and that I don't want them to, because I like human beings just as they are."

47. It Can't Happen Here, p. 293. Lewis also spoke out against the treatment of the Jews in Germany in 1938, joining with other prominent citizens. See the N.Y. Times, LXXXVIII (Nov. 14, 1938), p. 6, col. 2, for a report of this.

48. It Can't Happen Here, p. 432. As has been stated, Lewis was a bitter enemy of Communism in an era when it was highly fashionable to be a Party member or supporter. He was also to attack it on several occasions in his later work.

49. George J. Becker, "Apostle to the Philistines," American Scholar, XXI (Autumn, 1952), 423-32.

50. For the exact expression of Lewis' ideal for the new America, an ideal which suggests a brief return to the romantic socialism of Lewis' youth, see It Can't Happen Here, pp. 441-2. However, this was the lone instance of anything like this in the whole body of Lewis' later writing.

51. Robert Morss Lovett, "Mr. Lewis Says It Can," New Repub., LXXXIV (Nov. 6, 1935), 366.

52. Almost every contemporary reviewer admitted the effectiveness of It Can't Happen Here and praised Lewis' achievement in it, although some of them questioned various aspects of it (e.g, the quickness of the transition to Fascism). Some of the more important reviews of the book were: Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life;" Murry; Max Lerner, Ideas Are Weapons (N.Y., 19390, pp. 280-4; Halford E. Luccock, American Mirror (N.Y., 1940), pp. 134-5; R. P. Blackmur, "Utopia, or Uncle Tom's Cabin," Nation, CXLI (Oct. 30, 1935), 516; Phelps.

53. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis," Pub. Weekly, CLIX (Jan. 27, 1951), 527.

54. In 1936, the year following the publication of the book, Lewis rewrote It Can't Happen Here as a play. It was produced simultaneously in twenty-eight different theaters in eight different cities by the Federal Theater Project on Oct. 20, 1936. Lewis himself directed the New York production and played the lead in it. Soon afterward, MGM bought the movie rights, and after the screenplay had been written, the cast announced, and the sets built, the production was suddenly abandoned, supposedly because of excessive costs but actually because the Hays Office feared political repercussions both here and abroad. The whole matter aroused a protest and controversy reminiscent of that caused by Lewis' books of the 1920's. For details of the play production, see Anon, "It Can't Happen Here on the Stage," Pub. Weekly, CXXX (Sept. 5, 1936), 829. For reviews of the play, see: Lerner, p. 280; Anon., "Stage," Newsweek, VIII (Nov. 7, 1936), 40-1; and Stark Young, "It Can't Happen Here," New Repub., LXXXIX (Nov. 11, 1936), 50. For reports of the movie controversy, see Anon., "Hollywood Tempest Breaks on It Can't Happen Here," "Author's League Protests Ban," and "It Can't Happen Here Storm Continues Unabated," Pub. Weekly, CXXIX (Feb. 22, March 7, March 14, 1936), 900, 1076, 1174.

55. Carl Van Doren, Three Worlds (N.Y., 1936), p. 274.

56. Stolberg, p. 459.

57. Murry, p. 324.

58. Blackmur, p. 516.

59. Luccock, p. 134.

60. Davis, p. 5.

61. Geismar, p. 119.

62. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis: 1885-1951," Time, LVII (Jan. 22, 1951), 36.

63. Murry, p. 324.

64. Sinclair Lewis, "This Golden Half-Century," Good Housekeeping, (May, 1935), 24-5. This is a valuable reference in connection with It Can't Happen Here.

65. See the two statements by Lewis reported in the N.Y. Times, LXXXIV (Sept. 1, 1935), p. 17, col. 2, and XC (Nov. 3, 1940), p. 48, col. 6, which are a good source of Lewis' ideas at this time, especially his political ideas. The 1940 report shows that Lewis backed Roosevelt for a third term.

66. S. J. Woolf, "It Won't Happen Here, Lewis Believes," N.Y. Times, LXXXVI (Oct. 4, 1936), sec. vii, pp. 3, 25.

67. This is a direct reference to Lewis' main theme in Prodigal Parents, two years later.

68. Lewis had made his summer home in Barnard, Vt., ever since his second marriage in 1928, and he developed more affection for it than any of the other places in which he lived. In reference to this, see Lewis' article "Back to Vermont," Forum, XCV (April, 1936), 254-5, which was a long pean of praise for Vermont, its scenery, climate, and people.

69. Malcolm Cowley, in his review of Prodigal Parents, "George F. Babbitt's Revenge," New Repub., XCIII (Jan. 26, 1938), 342-3, noted the similarity of the book to several of Lewis' earlier novels. Cowley's review is also a good example of the hostile criticism that greeted the work, especially since Cowley had been one of Lewis' most consistent favorable critics.

70. Among the reviewers who compared Fred to Babbitt were Cowley, Louis Kronenberger, "The Prodigal Lewis," Nation, CXLVI (Jan. 22, 1938), 101; Elmer Davis, "From Babbitt to Cornplow," SRL, XVII (Jan. 22, 1938), 6; John Chamberlin, "Prodigal Parents," in H. E. Stearns, ed., America Now (N.Y., 1938), pp. 42-4; and V. F. Calverton, "The Prodigal Lewis," Modern Monthly, X (Feb., 1938), 11-13.

71. Davis, p. 6.

72. Lloyd Morris, "Sinclair Lewis - His Critics and the Public," No. Amer. Rev., CCXLV (Summer, 1938), 389.

73. For an interesting comparison of It Can't Happen Here and Prodigal Parents with Spengler and Plato's Republic, see Joseph E. Baker, "Sinclair Lewis, Plato, and the Regional Escape," English Journal, XXVIII (June, 1939), 460-8. In this essay Baker depicted Lewis as a modern counterpart of Plato and Spengler as a critic of a decaying civilization, illustrating his points by cross-comparison of passages from the works of these men. While Baker's treatment was a brilliant and provoking one, the present writer strongly disagrees with his conclusion that Lewis, like Spengler, viewed western civilization as old and disintegrating. One of the main points of this study has been to show how Lewis never lost his faith in America's future.

74. The scene in which Fred Cornplow returns from Europe to find his son in a state of dissipation and Fred's subsequent control of the situation is strongly reminiscent of a scene in Lewis' first book, Our Mr. Wrenn, in which the hero, just back from England, finds one of his friends on the verge of disaster, takes charge, and straightens out the whole matter.

75. Sinclair Lewis, The Prodigal Parents (N.Y., 1938), p. 39.

76. One example of a prominent American writer who briefly identified himself with the Communist cause was Ernest Hemingway (e.g., To Have and Have Not, The Fifth Column), who later rejected it when he realized its true nature (e.g., For Whom the Bell Tolls).

77. See above, p. 40.

78. Prodigal Parents, p. 299.

79. Lewis' over-favorable depiction of Fred Cornplow was probably the greatest basis for the critics' hostile comments toward the book. They interpreted it as evidence of Lewis' deterioration (Davis); as an example of his identification with those he had once satirized (Calverton); as proof that he had become soft and sentimental (Chamberlin); and as an indication that he hoped to be restored to favor with the Babbitts and that he was being deliberately reactionary and anti-intellectual (Kronenberger).

80. The source for much of the discussion of Prodigal Parents is Lloyd Morris' splendid article "Sinclair Lewis - His Critics and the Public," noted above, which is one of the most perceptive and stimulating commentaries on Lewis ever written.

81. Anon., "Red Menace," Time, XXXI (Jan. 24, 1938), 61-2.

82. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Onward Chicago," Newsweek, X (Oct. 4, 1937), 32.

83. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Too Much Fate for America," Newsweek, X (Oct. 11, 1937), 42.

84. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: One Man Revolution," Newsweek, (Nov. 22, 1937), 33.

85. Sinclair Lewis,"Bookweek: The Greatest American Novelist," Newsweek, XI (Jan. 3, 1938), 29.

86. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Desert Terror," Newsweek, XI (April 4, 1938), 34.

87. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Theater by the Fire," Newsweek, XI (April 11, 1938), 32.

88. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Seeing Red," Newsweek, X (Nov. 29. 1937), 30.

89. Sinclair Lewis, "Bookweek: Lecturer's Message," Newsweek, XI (Feb. 14, 1938), 32.

90. Anon., "It Has Happened Here, Lewis Finds," N.Y. Times, LXXXVII (Nov. 12, 1937), p. 23, col. 7.

91. Anon., "Charlie McCarthy Is Lewis' Hero," N.Y. Times, LXXXVII (Nov. 23, 1937), P. 21, col. 3.

92. Anon., "Lewis Makes Plea for Ivory Tower," N.Y. Times, LXXXVII (March 31, 1938) p. 21, col. 3.

93. Sinclair Lewis, "Is Service Overdone?" Rotarian, LII (April, 1938), 8.

94. See Joseph Wood Krutch, "Dodsworth," Nation, CXXXVIII (March 14, 1934), 312, for a sample review of the play.

95. George Jean Nathan, "Art of the Night," SRL, XV (Nov. 28, 1936), 20.

96. Lloyd Lewis and Sinclair Lewis, Jayhawker (N.Y., 1935). Joseph Wood Krutch, in his review of the play, "Healthy Hawks and Sickly Eagles," Nation, CXXXIX (Nov. 21, 1934), 600-1, stated that although the play lacked the tension to make it a smash hit, Lewis' "delight in contemplating the grotesque aspects of human life" made it worth seeing. Krutch also pointed out that the hero of the drama, Ace Burdette, was a character who combined the qualities of Gantry and Babbitt. In the opinion of the present writer, however, Jayhawker is neither important nor memorable enough to demand detailed consideration here.

97. Nathan, p. 20.

98. For further details on the dramatic version of It Can't Happen Here, see above, #54. The play was published in 1938 in New York under the title It Can't Happen Here, A New Version, by Sinclair Lewis and John C. Moffitt. Moffitt's part in the writing was only nominal, however.

99. The two plays which Lewis wrote in 1937-8 have never been either produced or published. To the best knowledge of this writer there are no available copies to be found of these works. They are not included in the Yale Collection and are thus probably not available to scholars. The third of Lewis' plays, Angela Is Twenty-Two, probably written in 1938, may be seen in typescript form in the Yale Collection. Its plot is the January-May theme of a young girl married to a middle-aged doctor, and in the present writer's opinion, does not merit careful study here.

100. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis, Actor," Newsweek, XIII (Jan. 9, 1939), 33-4.

101. George Jean Nathan, "The Red Menace," Newsweek, XII (Aug. 22, 1938),

102. Ibid., p. 22.

103. Lewis admitted all this in an interview with Robert Van Gelder, "Sinclair Lewis Talks of Writing and Acting," N.Y. Times Book Rev., LXXXIX (June 30, 1940), sec. vi., p. 2, col. 1. This interview also contains valuable information on Lewis' opinions about literary style, his own career, and the artistic temperament.

104. Sinclair Lewis, "Novelist Bites Art," N.Y. Times, XCI (Oct. 19, 1941), sec. ix, p. 1, col. 4.

105. Benjamin Stolberg, "Sinclair Lewis, " Amer. Merc. LII (Oct., 1941), 459. Stolberg also related the amusing incident which occurred when a German theater wanted to produce Dodsworth, and wrote to Howard and Lewis asking them to prove their Aryan purity. Lewis wrote back, addressing the letter to Goebbels, regretting that he could not permit the play to be produced because the real names of the authors were Horowitz and Levy.

106. Ben Ray Redman, "Mr. Lewis' Suppressed Desire," SRL, XXI (March 23, 1940), 7, and Anon., "Bethel Merriday," Nation, CL (March 23, 1940), 401.

107. Geismar, p. 136.

108. Sinclair Lewis, Bethel Merriday (N.Y., 1940), pp. 30-1.

109. Probably the most notable example of Lewis' shift in attitude between the two decades is the fact that in his work of the 1930's there were very few instances in which a small town, a business man, a minister, or a doctor was portrayed with anything like the satire that Lewis had used on these types in his earlier work. What satire there was in this period was mainly directed at new targets, such as penology, Communism, Fascism, and the modern generation. Perhaps the most striking example of the mellowness brought to Lewis by the passing years was his acceptance of membership in both the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1935, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1938, organizations which he had savagely attacked in his Nobel Speech.

IV. The Final Phase

1. Gideon Planish: 1943

Sinclair Lewis' eighteenth novel, Gideon Planish, was proof that he had not forgotten how to hate, for in that book he dropped the sentimentality so prominent in the 1930's in order to resume what he probably did best, satire. Long before it was the fashion Lewis had attacked the half-truths and false gods in the American credo, and Gideon Planish showed that not only was he back in fighting trim after his stage jaunts but also that there was still no one else around who could carve up a twentieth century two-timer with more gusto.[1]

Gideon Planish was essentially one more of Lewis' investigations into various aspects of American life. In this case the target for his satiric probing was the entire field of philanthropy, committees, lobbies and the people behind these activities, as symbolized in the novel's hero, Gideon Planish. As a matter of fact, probably the best review of the book's contents, as one critic shrewdly pointed out, was the blurb on its own dust jacket, which read, in part:

> In Gideon Planish Mr. Lewis turns his devastating analysis to uplifters, do-gooders, lecturers, professional philanthropists, committee maniacs, public dinner presidents, microphone hounds - all rolled into one man.[2]

Lewis' hatred of pompous-sounding organizations had been evident from the beginning of his work, especially

those representing vested interests.[3] It was a part of his antipathy to all falsity and "bunk." At the same time, his prominence as a writer and public figure must have made him the target for innumerable such begging letters and requests for endorsement as those he satirized in the novel, so that his anger was probably born from personal experience as well as a purely objective attitude. Also, as in all his work, Lewis' knowledge of his subject seemed to be detailed, accurate, and complete, indicative of a great deal of research, and if he chose to emphasize the evil it was not because he didn't know any better, but because he wanted it that way.

As fiction, the story traces the career of Gideon Planish from childhood to college, college professor to lecturer, and finally, to a position of eminence in the world of organized philanthropy and professional misrepresentation. As a boy Gideon has a feeling about his own future greatness and in college, through his ability as a shrewd conniver and orator, he becomes a Big Man On Campus. From college he goes on to get his Ph.D. and ends up as a professor of speech at little Kinnikinick College in Iowa.[4] There, while he carries on an affair with the widowed daughter of the head trustee, he still hungers for the love of a beautiful woman who will understand his potential greatness.

His dream is satisfied by the appearance of Peony Jackson, a lovely co-ed, and after a whirlwind courtship, they are married. From the beginning Peony reveals enormous

cleverness and sublety, combined with a grasping acquisitiveness, and Gideon immediately becomes putty in her hands. It takes Peony only four years to manouver Gideon into a deanship of the college and to make him locally prominent. To keep up with his wife's extravagance, Gideon branches into lecturing and writing, and it is the latter which leads him to accept the editorship of a magazine on rural education.

From this point things move quickly for Planish. First, he becomes executive secretary of a philanthropic school foundation, loses this job, serves as a flunky in a phony culture organization, but soon leaves to ghost-write a biography. Next, he secures an important post in an anti-labor lobby and becomes prominent in Washington social circles, but moves to a religious organization when his conscience begins to trouble him. All the while, he is learning the angles in the fund-raising racket and at the same time building a reputation in the field.

The last great step upward in Gideon's career is his meeting with Colonel Marduc, millionaire advertising magnate and publisher, who has the secret ambition to be President. Marduc hires Gideon to establish an organization called the Dynamos of Democratic Direction, whose real purpose is not democracy but to keep Marduc's name in the news. Gideon works at this job from 1938 to 1941, all the while becoming increasingly ashamed of his own hypocrisy and uselessness. He is overjoyed to be offered the presidency of

Kinnikinick College and almost accepts, but Peony decides that she cannot leave the glamour and notoriety of their public life. Gideon, of course, is bound by her decision. Thus, as the book ends, Gideon Planish rather miserably contemplates the future, knowing it will bring only hollow glory and wealth, never true happiness.

The story of Gideon Planish was, in this way, another of Lewis' classic tales of a man led by his own ambition and love of pomp (inthis case aided by a grasping, sweetly domineering wife) into a life of wealth and prestige, only to find no happiness or satisfaction therein. It was one more repetition of the warning Lewis never tired making, the warning that materialism leads to spiritual prostitution. One of the many examples of this warning in the novel occurs when Gideon makes his first big jump from his college position to the editorship of a magazine in a larger city:

> So Dr. and Mrs. Planish were Successes in Life, according to the best American tradition: they resided in a larger city than before, and they knew many more people much less well . . . and they had a somewhat larger income and very much larger expenses.[5]

But materialism is only a minor, implicit theme in <u>Gideon Planish</u>. The main purpose of the book is to attack, expose, and satirize the whole area of organized philanthropy and its related activities in America. It is this theme which appears before the half-way point in the story and dominates the remainder of it, with Lewis' skeptical attitude toward

the entire matter evident from the start. For example, as the plot progresses Gideon is among the first to see that the business of philanthropy, soon to grow into a major industry, is a good business with which to be associated, as Lewis cynically suggested:

> The Biblical virtue of philanthropy was in this era turning into something far nobler than the impulsive handing out of a quarter. It was no longer emotion and friendliness, but Social Engineering, Planned Giving, with a purpose and a technique; it was Big Business, as big and busy as General Motors, but with God for executive vice president. . . . Not for some time yet would Organized Philanthropy rank eighth among the major industries of the United States. But already Dr. Planish could forsee a wedding of generosity and efficiency which would make the Crusades look like a bonus march, and perceive that it was going to be valuable for a scholar with a wife and child to be stationed close to this waxing flood of gold.
> (pp. 214-5).

Gideon has at least the virtue of going into the business with a little idealism, an idealism which is shattered in his first position with the "Heskitt Rural School Foundation," for the trustee of the foundation, a shrewd and cynical lawyer named Frisby, tells Gideon the facts of life about philanthropy, facts which Lewis wanted every reader to know. These facts are summarized here:

1. Those who give money are either doing it to salve sore consciences, climb socially, or, rarely, to really help.

2. Many of the rich men who set up foundations do so to escape taxes. This is accomplished by the man placing a block of stock in a philanthropic organization in a sort of trust fund, while either he or his agents hold

voting proxies on this "donated" stock, thus retaining control of it and the capital it represents.

3. Such men are indifferent to the money that is spent as long as their own reputations are enhanced.

4. Philanthropy serves as a showier symbol of wealth than anything material. It also serves to protect the estates of the wealthy from voracious relatives.

In conclusion, Frisby tells Planish not to be afraid of spending the foundation's money. It would only be a splash in a very large pool.

However, Gideon is too ambitious to stay with this foundation for very long, and when he attempts to move it to New York, where the pickings are richer, he is discharged. After a short time in a subordinate position in the "Association to Promote Eskimo Culture," one of the many fraudulent organizations of its type, Gideon eventually begins to work himself into some of the really big, high-powered philanthropic organizations which abound in New York City. Some of these groups support causes so impressive that they force the respect and cooperation of even the most prominent men, as Lewis indicated in the passage quoted below:

> The best of the money-raisers will not waste time on any objective under one hundred thousand dollars; they much prefer a million; and they get, as their fee, an amount which equals anywhere from five per cent to ninety-five per cent of the total blessed treasure. They represent such noble causes that they can command cabinet officers to preside at dinners, and permit bishops to introduce strip-teasers at spectacles attracting twenty-five thousand

> persons at five dollars each. They efficiently make use of the "boiler room," in which caramel-voiced young women sit all day long, telephoning to hundreds of strangers, "This is Judge Wallaby's secretary, and His Honor would like you to buy four ten-dollar tickets to the Fiduciaries' Fund Festival. If you'll have the check ready, I'll send right over for it." (Judge Wallaby? Is he that demon of the traffic court? You buy the tickets.)
>
> (p. 303).

and in this case Lewis' satire was as true as it is amusing. Certainly every reader will recollect his vision of forever incurring the wrath of the local police department if he refuses to buy tickets to the policemen's ball, or his fear of losing a friend if he does not purchase a book of tickets on the television set to be raffled at the veteran's post, the orphan's home, the campfire girls' benefit, etc., etc..

Lewis' attack on fund-raising was temporarily halted when, about two-thirds through the novel, he introduced the fascinating but unnecessary character of Winifred Marduc Homeward, the Talking Woman (the capitalization was Lewis' own). To the uninitiated reader this character must have been puzzling, for she has no real part in the story and no apparent function, but to the Lewis scholar this character is important in that it was probably based on Dorothy Thompson, Lewis' second wife, whom he divorced in 1942.[6] She is introduced in the novel as follows:

> Winifred Homeward the Talking Woman.
> She was an automatic, self-starting talker.
> Any throng of more than two persons consti-

> tuted a lecture audience for her, and at sight of them she mounted an imaginary platform, pushed aside an imaginary glass of ice water, and started a fervent address full of imaginary information about Conditions and Situations that lasted till the audience had sneaked out - or a little longer.
>
> (p. 320).

and there is more of the same scattered through the last section of the novel.

Now, Miss Thompson had always been known for her conversational ability and her willingness to deliver opinions on almost everything at a moment's notice. Since this is one of the main characteristics of Winifred Homeward, it strongly suggests that Lewis was gratifying an instinct to affectionately satirize his former wife in creating that character. In any case, the marriage of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson had for a long time amazed their friends because both of them were strongly individualistic and tremendously volatile personalities, to the extent that it seemed impossible that they could continue to live together. For example, Rebecca West once said of Lewis on first meeting him and conversing with him, "After five solid hours of it (conversation), I ceased to look upon him as a human being. I could think of him only as a great natural force, like the aurora borealis."[7]

Undoubtedly, however, both Lewis and his wife each learned much from the other, for, beside her own erudition, Dorothy was constantly surrounded by a group of intellectuals

and experts whom Lewis did not hesitate to pump for information,[8] and as for her part in the bargain, her improvement as a writer was probably due mostly to Lewis' influence. As she herself put it, "No one can live with Sinclair Lewis for ten years without being educated."[9] Yet, it was the very qualities which Lewis satirized in the character of Winifred Homeward that had a large share in breaking up his second marriage, because Dorothy's great extroversion, her aggressive gregariousness, her immense intellectual, physical, and emotional energy - in combination with her growing fame in the 1930's as journalist and oracle - tended to put Lewis in the shade, no mean feat in itself. The result was that at parties he often became moody or simply walked out and went to sleep, if he felt that he was not being noticed. Once, at a gathering where he had been completely left out of the conversation, Lewis interjected, in a lull in the talk, "I wrote a book once."[10]

But in creating the character of Winifred in Gideon Planish, Lewis did more than express a personal feud. He also expressed a life-long anti-intellectual bias. It was this bias that was behind Lewis' early satire on "Hobohemians." It was this bias that may partially explain his affection for Babbitt. It was this same bias that appeared again and again in his novels in many different forms. Now, it must be understood that Lewis did not hate intellectuality itself. He himself was a deeply intellectual and widely-read man.

What he did hate was the flaunting of intellectuality and the pomp with which it often surrounded itself. The whole thing was a part of Lewis' aversion for pretense, falsity, or pomposity in any form, and understood as such, the matter offers a direct insight into the satiric attacks in such books as Gideon Planish, where one of Lewis' main points was to show how worthless organizations often masquerade behind imposing titles and sponsors with impressive degrees.

Despite the introduction of Winifred Homeward, Lewis did not lose sight of his target in the novel, and in its closing pages he summarized and concluded his indictment of organized pressure groups. In this summarization he returned to one of his most insistent complaints against America, the danger of unscrupulous pressure groups or factions using organized methods to impose their own selfish demands upon the national will. Of all the traits of his people one of the most feared by Lewis was their tendency to be swayed by glib talkers, by noble-sounding causes, by empty promises and glowing phrases. In short, Lewis feared the emotional instability and credulity of the populace, and his fear had been evident as far back as Babbitt. In 1935 Lewis had visualized a potential dictator like Buzz Windrip riding to power on a flood-tide of blind faith and blind confidence, and in 1943 he saw the same blindness operating in organized philanthropy, being parlayed into wealth and power by scoundrels like Planish and Marduc. As a minor character in the book expressed it:

> "In a republic like this, I'm scared of any private organization that can spend thousands on propaganda - that can persuade thousands of people to telegraph their congressman to do what the private organization demands. It's a little too much like private army - like the Brown Shirts."
>
> (p. 424).

At this point Sinclair Lewis cast aside all pretense of being just a novelist and in a passage reminiscent of his best work, became zealous social crusader. The passage is the satiric climax of Gideon Planish and deserves reproduction here in part. The "quiet man" was, of course, none other than Lewis:

> After he came back to New York, Dr. Planish made a lot of speeches, and there was a quiet man who heard one of them, and this quiet man got to thinking.
>
> He thought that the one thing that might break down American Democracy was the hysterical efficiency with which these pressure groups crusaded to seize all the benefits of that Democracy for themselves: the farm bloc, the women's bloc, the manufacturers' associations, the Protestant ministerial associations, the labor unions, the anti-labor unions, the Communist Party and the Patriotic Flag Associations. Drug stores combining to force legislation forbidding the sale of aspirins on trains. Irish Catholics voting not as Americans but as Irish and Catholics, Swedish Lutherans voting as Swedish Lutherans, Arkansas Baptists voting as Neanderthals.
>
> Catholics forbidding the Episcopalians to advocate birth-control, and Methodists forbidding the Unitarians to drink their ancestral rum, and people who really believe in Christianity overwhelmingly outvoted by all these monopolies.
>
> The Friends of Russia, the Friends of Germany, the Friends of the British Empire, the Friends of the Slovenes and Croats, the Sons of the American Revolution, and the Sons of Dog Fanciers.

> Each of these private armies led by devout fanatics - not always on salary - who believe that the way to ensure freedom for everybody is to shut up every one of their opponents in jail for life, and that this is a very fine, new solution.
>
> God save poor America, this quiet man thought, from all the zealous and the professionally idealistic, from eloquent women and generous sponsors and administrative ex-preachers and natural-born Leaders and Napoleonic newspaper executives and all the people who like to make long telephone calls and write inspirational memoranda.
>
> (pp. 425-6).

"God save poor America." That had always been Sinclair Lewis' battle-cry, except that he had not trusted the entire matter to God but had himself taken a goodly share in the struggle. In Gideon Planish he tried to save it from one of its greatest rackets and confidence games, the racket that continues to take billions annually for causes often as ridiculous as the "Association for Eskimo Culture," while even the worthwhile causes sometimes do not receive the funds donated to them after the money has passed through the hands of professional fund-raisers.

It is true, as most of the novel's contemporary reviewers noted, that Lewis often was dealing only in half-truths, and it is also true that the parade of charlatans who march through the pages of the book is a little too long and unrelievedly evil to make for complete factuality and credibility.[11] Lewis himself commented with amusement on this very factor, saying: "This man Lewis is certainly going downhill fast. In each of his early books . . . there were

one or two characters you could like. But in Gideon Planish everybody's a scoundrel."[12] But to admit all this is not to admit that Lewis' satire does not have just the salutary effect he intended, for in questioning the whole area of American philanthropic and organizational activity, probing into a hitherto sacred matter, Lewis was doing a valuable thing. Whatever its faults as a novel and as a social document, and these faults are many, Gideon Planish accomplishes its most important mission - it makes its readers never again as credulously willing to accept an impressive letterhead or title as proof of an organization's worth, and it makes them a little more careful about donating to a cause until they know something about it. Thus, Sinclair Lewis triumphed in what he hoped to do, and his triumph was one for the good of all.

As regards the merit of the book as a work of art, that is another matter. It is not, as one reviewer stated, "unimportant, sloppy, and even dull."[13] But at the same time, it definitely does not rank among Lewis' best, and although it is in the style and tradition of such novels as Elmer Gantry, it does not approach the quality of that work. Yet, it is still a better book than either Prodigal Parents or Bethel Merriday not only because Lewis worked harder on it but also because he was doing something that coincided more closely with his natural genius.[14] At the same time, there was apparent in Gideon Planish beneath the surface of Lewis'

indignation a sense of the comic and an undertone of laughter that qualified his bitterness and made it more palatable, for, Lewis' satire, unrelieved by the quick flashes of humor with which he injected it in almost all his work, would be too rich a diet for any reader to take for very long.[15]

Although the minor characters of the novel fail to come alive, perhaps because they were created by Lewis the caricaturist and not Lewis the artist, Gideon Planish and his wife Peony do emerge as real and memorable. Gideon has the moral unscrupulousness of Gantry combined with Babbitt's weakness of character, but in the final analysis the reader likes and pities rather than despises him. Peony, moreover, is one of Lewis' best female characters.[16] Her closest equivalent would be Fran Dodsworth, but she had a certain sweetness and earthiness that Fran never had, in combination with Fran's driving ambition and love of material things. Peony is the cause of both Gideon's rise to success and his final realization of unhappiness, for, once she gets a taste of what to her is the good life, she refuses to leave it.

In the opinion of a recent critic, Peony represents the wiles of the flesh in getting what she wants from her husband, while her later indifference to his increasing sense of uselessness and their slavery to the material world represent a corruption that Lewis had never before adequately represented.[17] The statement that Lewis had never, before <u>Gideon Planish</u>, adequately represented the corruption of

materialism is a dubious one, but the present writer does concur in the belief that Peony is one of Lewis' best female characterizations. It is unfortunate only that the rest of the novel does not live up to this portrayal.

Whatever its failings, the book did prove several things. It proved that Lewis had not lost his stuff. It indicated that although he would probably never again write another Babbitt, it showed that at his best Sinclair Lewis could still be very good indeed. Further, for a writer who in 1943 was nearly sixty, Gideon Planish revealed that the man had retained an amazing amount of energy, vitality, and wit, that he was on occasion still to be ranked among the most vivid and stimulating writers in America.[18] In short, the book held a promise for the future, a promise which Lewis was to maintain in his next novel, Cass Timberlane, and completely fulfill in the one following that, Kingsblood Royal.

2. Cass Timberlane: 1945

The public, in the case of Sinclair Lewis, had almost always been an accurate barometer of his success, since the sale of his books seems to have closely corresponded to their merit or importance. Thus, while the mediocre Bethel Merriday had sold only 63,000 copies, the resurgent Gideon Planish sold more than 150,000, and Lewis' next novel, Cass Timberlane was greeted by enthusiastic readers in 1945 to the tune of 869,000 copies.[19] Admittedly, the American reading public is not always the best judge of art. The opposite is too often true. But it is especially interesting to note that as far as Sinclair Lewis was concerned, the readers have usually been more perceptive than the critics. Perhaps they saw what the critics did not, the expression of their mood, the confirmation of their thoughts, the focus of their doubts and fears. Similarly, in Cass Timberlane Lewis gave them what they wanted, a story of modern love and marriage, one that concentrated more than any other of Lewis' books, including Dodsworth, on the relationship of a man and a woman, uncluttered by social criticism or anything else, yet at the same time realistically cast against a background of contemporary society and events.

Lewis' own married life seems not to have been happy. His first marriage with Grace Livingstone Hegger (now the Countess Casanova) had ended in divorce in 1928, and his

second marriage with Dorothy Thompson had been similarly terminated in 1942, although Lewis and Miss Thompson remained good friends until Lewis' death.[20] Dodsworth had included the fictionalized account of the first marriage, but Cass Timberlane, while it contains certain autobiographical elements, cannot be consistently interpreted as autobiography in regard to specific events and people but only Lewis' conclusions about love and marriage in general.[21]

Whatever Lewis' own experiences were they had not embittered him, although they had caused him to look around and observe many examples of American marriage with eyes uncloaded by any romantic or sentimental haze. The results of that observation are found in Cass Timberlane in the sections called "An Assemblage of Husbands and Wives," which are often as good or better than the story itself in their insight into the institution of matrimony. The main theme of the novel, however, the tale of the courtship, love, and marriage of Judge Cass Timberlane of Grand Republic, Minnesota and Jinny Marshland, is handled not only with wisdom and depth, but also with tenderness. The story opens early in 1941 in the courtroom of Judge Timberlane, where a dull trial is going on, dull until Jinny Marshland, a witness, appears and Cass is stricken with Cupid's arrow at first sight.

Cass is a lonely man of forty-one, an ex-congressman, just recovering from the pain of a recent divorce. Consequently, he is ripe for affection, and although he is

surrounded by upper-caste friends including the faithful Chris Grau, an attractive spinster, he longs for a wife. To this end he begins to court Jinny Marshland. At first Cass' friends are shocked by his attraction for a younger, socially inferior woman, but the courtship continues and Cass and Jinny finally marry. After a honeymoon made grim by the news of Pearl Harbor, they return to Grand Republic, where Jinny is now accepted socially as Cass' wife, and begin their new life together. The early months of the marriage are marred only by Jinny's flirtation with one of the town's perennial bachelors, but Cass steps in and prevents any really serious developements. The Timberlanes buy a new home, take a trip to New York, and return to settle down in their home. Jinny solidifies her social status by becoming pregnant and is momentarily frightened to learn that she has diabetes, but soon recovers her gaiety.

The turning point in the marriage of Cass and Jinny occurs when their baby dies soon after its birth, an event which sends Jinny first into a mood of listlessness then into a phase of frantic pleasure-hunting. Cass finds that they are beginning to quarrel more and more, at the same time realizing that his good friend Bradd Criley, an attractive bachelor, is spending a lot of time with Jinny. Their physical ardor cools, and Cass rightfully suspects that Bradd is behind it all, a suspicion which finally forces Cass to break up the increasingly warm relationship between his wife

and friend. For a time Cass wins back his wife's love again, but when he sees that she is growing stale and losing her zest for life, he contemplates moving to New York to practice law in order to restore Jinny's joie de vivre. She agrees eagerly with the plan and they travel to New York, where they are greeted by Bradd, who had gone to live there permanently.

In New York Cass makes the rounds of the law firms, purposely leaving Bradd and Jinny alone, and just as he is about to accept an offer, Jinny states that she wants to return to Grand Republic immediately. No sooner are they home when Jinny announces that she loves Bradd and is going back to him. She rejects all Cass' pleas and returns to New York, leaving a miserable and distraught husband. Cass is terribly lonely for a while and is just beginning to reconcile himself to permanently losing his wife, when he learns that she is very ill. He flies to her side just in time, and she asks to go home. After she has recuperated somewhat, they return to Grand Republic and are welcomed by all their friends. Cass cares for Jinny tenderly, and in her convalescence their love grows strong again. Jinny admits that her affair has been an education, that she had always envied Cass his first marriage. All the ghosts of the past are exorcised when they are able to meet Bradd Criley and realize that he is out of their lives forever, and so the book ends with the promise of future happiness.

As is evident from this plot outline, Cass Timberlane is an admirable and sympathetic character, while Jinny, although she is attractive and even lovable, is not one to inspire awe. She is, in fact, often rather despicable, and the reader senses almost from the beginning that she will bring Cass as much pain as happiness. It is Cass, strong and wise, who holds the marriage together and it is his understanding and forgiveness that salvages both their lives from complete despair. He is a man strong enough to stand alone in any society, yet he is also a passionate and warm-hearted man, incomplete without a woman's love. The situation is strikingly similar to the case of Ann Vickers and it may also be conjectured that the same situation was a parallel of Lewis' own life, for he knew that success was hollow without someone to share it with. Thus Cass Timberlane, who summarizes this whole matter very early in the book, could be taken as Lewis' spokesman when he says:

> "Divorce is hell . . . If it weren't for my work, my life would be as empty as a traitor's after a war. Ever since Blanche divorced me - why . . . I have nobody to show my little triumphs to. . . . And I don't seem to find any girl that will take Blanche's place."[22]

In the same way there are, throughout the book, little asides, some spoken by various characters and others directly from Lewis himself, revealing a man who has been often deeply hurt by love, as for example when he asks, after a quarrel between Cass and Jinny: "Do people who love each other

always bicker and scratch and hurt? Must they?"[23]

But Lewis saw married love as more than a personal affair in Cass Timberlane. He saw it as a criterion of the survival of modern civilization and as the great hope of that civilization, as is evident in the passage quoted here, ostensibly the reflections of Cass, but actually a communication from Lewis himself:

> If the world of the twentieth century . . . cannot succeed in this one thing, married love, then it has committed suicide, all but the last moan, and whether Germany and France can live as neighbors is insignificant compared with whether Johann and Maria or Jean and Marie can live as lovers. . . . With each decade . . . serenity was more difficult, with Careers for Women opening equally on freedom and on a complex weariness. But whether women worked in the kitchen or in the machine-shop, married love must be a shelter, or the world would freeze, out in the bleak free prairies of irresponsible love-making.
> (p. 173).

As the book continues, the reader becomes increasingly aware that the women in it are on the whole far less admirable than the men. There is no female character, not even the understanding Chris Grau, who even approaches Cass Timberlane's nobility of character. Even in Bradd Criley's seduction of Jinny one despises her weakness more than Bradd's disloyalty to his old friend Cass. In fact, Jinny consistently shows an inability to keep on the straight and narrow path of marital fidelity, for she responds to the advances of almost every man who takes an amorous interest in her and is prevented from straying earlier than she does only by Cass'

watchfulness and strength. The same thing is true in the Assemblage of Husbands and Wives sections, because what sticks in the reader's mind in the narration of these little marital biographies, each a story in itself, is not the infidelity, weakness, or cruelty of the husbands, although there are plenty of examples of these, but the immorality, folly, and domination of the wives.

Lewis' conclusions were implicit. He concluded that not only is th female of the species often more deadly than the male, but that she usually completely controls the male. Simultaneously, Lewis saw this domination by the women affecting even their husbands's work, a result of the emancipation of the women that Lewis himself had chronicled as long ago as 1917 in The Job, now returned to haunt him as it haunts Cass Timberlane in the novel:

> He wondered whether today, as women more and more took on professions of their own, wives in general were less interested in their husbands' work; whether their ears wandered from the men's shop-talk as their eyes wandered from the marriage-bed. Was the sanctity of the profession, to be followed for a lifetime, for many generations, and rarely to be thrown over for a "better-paying job," vanishing from society along with the sanctity of the single family? It frightened him.[24]

The matter of marital infidelity, one of the themes in the novel, arises when Cass finds out from Jinny's own admission that she has slept with Bradd. He is not so much shocked as disappointed in her, but she is not at all ashamed for she defends Bradd and shows a high disregard for

social codes and laws. In this incident Lewis wanted the reader to know that Jinny's attitude was shared by all her sex, that she spoke not for herself alone but for all women, as is evident in this speech by Jinny:

> "Very few women care a hang about the laws or the social rules. What they love in a man is the feeling that he isn't merely with them, but that he is them, and feels and thinks as they do before they've finished thinking it. What people like you detest about the heels, the outlaws, is that they don't give a hoot for the idiotic rules that you've set up to protect your own awkwardness, which comes from your never really being completely one with a woman, but always remaining a little aside from her, noticing how good you are or how bad.[25]

Evidently the ghost that had haunted Lewis in Dodsworth was still lurking about, fifteen years later.

Perhaps the most moving element in the book and the most profoundly autobiographical is the record of Cass Timberlane's loneliness after Jinny has left him. This loneliness was a parallel of that which tortured Lewis all through his life and especially in his last few years after his second marriage. Like his fictional hero Lewis was partially saved by his work, but even this could not wholly take the place of the friends and companionship he so much craved but somehow could not keep. Like Cass Timberlane, Sinclair Lewis felt in his loneliness a kinship with all lonely people everywhere, a sharing of pain, and in the passage below, he documented not only his own feeling but the eternal and universal pathos of that experience:

> He thought of her loneliness, as well as his. He thought of all the loneliness in the world: Of widows who for a quarter-century had depended upon husbands and noisy children, but were alone now in cottages where the clock ticked too loudly. Of more prosperous widows surrounded by alien chatter on the porches of gilt summer hotels. Of young men new to a city, too poor for theaters, desperate in furnished rooms. Of other young men, soldiers in a strange camp. Of young women with a richness of potential love but with no prettiness about them, alone in the evening, waiting for telephone calls that would never come. Of the lookout on the steamer long in the fog. Of traveling men plodding in shaky cars from country store to store, over the prairie that fled always back from them. Of Pullman porters late at night, the passengers sleeping. Of rich old men, so rich that they were afraid of all their bobbing relatives, invalid and waiting for dawn. Of an old doctor, retired now, sitting in his worn chair, knowing only too well what was wrong with him. Of kings and watchmen and babies left alone to darkness.[26]

Cass' loneliness, however, has one good effect. It leads him to ponder not only his own marriage but all marriage as the basis of society. In a passage which is valuable for any student of Lewis or of modern civilization Lewis, in the guise of Cass Timberlane, climaxed his reflections in a great conclusion, the conclusion that mankind cannot progress until it realizes its own imperfections and destroys its false idols, a conclusion in the finest tradition of Lewis' career, a conclusion almost as old as man himself, often forgotten but always true. All this and more enters into the quotation below, ostensibly the thoughts of Cass Timberlane, actually the thoughts of Sinclair Lewis:

> — We're so civilized now that we can kill our horrid enemies - year old children - two hundred miles away, but nobody except a few rather loveless professors has even begun to understand love. Compared with our schools and churches, which are supposed to instruct our emotions, the shabbiest business, even advertising whiskey, has been magnificant in its competence and integrity.
>
> — In the future of married life, will men have to let their wives have as many lovers as they want? The men will hate it; I would hate it, bitterly. Yet all these ages women have hated their men making love to the gigglers. They've had to endure it. Is it our turn now? I don't like it. But what has that to do with it?
>
> — Will the world ever be truly civilized? We always assume so, but will it? Could any caveman be more blundering than this Judge Timberlane, who loses his one love to a fancy-footing shyster named Criley?
>
> — If the world ever learns that it knows nothing yet about what keeps men and women loving each other, then will it have a chance for some brief happiness before the eternal frozen night sets in?
>
> — You cannot heal the problems of any one marriage until you heal the problems of an entire civilization founded upon suspicion and superstition; and you cannot heal the problems of a civilization thus founded until it realizes its own barbaric nature, and realizes that what it thought was brave was only cruel, what it thought was holy was only meanness, and what it thought Success was merely the paper helmet of a clown more nimble than his fellows, scrambling for a peanut in the dust of an ignoble circus.
>
> (p. 373).

But Cass Timberlane, at least, is given the promise of future happiness, for as the novel ends he has won Jinny back. Of course, the scrupulous reader might wonder, as did some of the critics, whether this happy ending was entirely justified or even justice because the reader cannot help thinking that Cass deserved something better than Jinny.

In any case so the matter must rest, as Sinclair Lewis left it, with the artist having the last word.

In reference to Lewis' previous work Cass Timberlane, as several reviewers noted, has certain similarities to some of the earlier books, especially Main Street.[27] Both are stories about a stolid husband and his younger, more flighty wife. Both husbands make like attempts to win back the love of their wives. Both heroines escape and both eventually return.[28] Both novels have the escape theme,[29] and in fact have basically the same plot.[30] However, it is not true that in the twenty-five years between the two books Lewis suggested that American life and marriage had made no progress.[31] It is not true that Cass Timberlane is an inferior novel.[32] And above all it is not true that it was Lewis' most sinister and subtle work; that in it he was attacking the myth of love in America, and that in its ending he was suggesting only that Jinny and Cass were doomed to more suspicion, frustration, and despair.[33]

The critics wrote that the characters were unreal, empty caricatures.[34] They wrote that Sinclair Lewis did not truly understand love and marriage and could not portray them with depth and wisdom.[35] They wrote that he could not help satirizing his characters.[36] And to think that despite all this the public liked the book enough (although there is little of the sensational or erotic in it, qualities which often explain big sales) to buy 869,000 copies! Probably they

realized what the critics missed, that Lewis' knowledge in Cass Timberlane was wise, born of experience. Probably they realized that despite Lewis' familiar "photographic" method and his frequent irony that the characters, especially Cass, did have real, poignant inner lives. Probably they realized that the book was a tightly-written, absorbing story as completely modern in its details as eternal in its concern with basic human problems. In short, probably they realized in Cass Timberlane that Sinclair Lewis was still very keenly aware of developements in contemporary life, still very able, still very brilliant.[37]

It is notable that in not a single instance does a book of Lewis' portray the life of a hero or heroine without the element of love. All fall in love, all marry; their loves are an integral part of their lives. Even the placid wives of Babbitt, Gantry, Myron Weagle, and Fred Cornplow have an important part in the story. Thus, in Cass Timberlane, while Lewis examined marriage as critically as he had examined other aspects of American life and frequently found it wanting, he did not conclude that all marriage was corrupt, all sex degraded, all women dominant, but that in many cases marriage had failed, sex was not fully understood, and women too often had the upper hand (often through the fault of the husbands, Lewis implied).

The social criticism in the book is more often suggested than stated. In this way it defies precise analysis or

detailed discussion. For example, Lewis attacked marital infidelity both in men and women and he also, in certain cases, defended it. He attacked the position of modern woman and also, in particular instances, justified it. What he did attack consistently and without qualification was cruelty in both men and women, lack of understanding, hypocrisy, tampering with other people's lives by both men and women. The present writer can only view Lewis' social criticism here as an extension into a new area of what he had already written. Love and marriage are topics which resist definitive treatment or concrete analysis by any writer, no matter what his genius, and in Cass Timberlane Lewis did his share in exploring their mysteries, perhaps more than his share.

One other element in the novel demands mention. It has been noted that in the 1930's Lewis' prejudice against the small town seems largely to have disappeared, since in no book written after the '20's did he portray an American town or village with anything like the animosity of Main Street. Yet, there is nothing in the books before Cass Timberlane which approaches the deep love and affection that Cass feels for his native city of Grand Republic, Minnesota. Lewis himself was living in Duluth at the time he was writing the book and although he took pains to declare in the foreword to it that neither the characters nor the locale were based on the people of Duluth or the city, it was obvious that Lewis was glad to be back in Minnesota, at least

for the time being.[38] Similarly, Cass Timberlane was made the epitome of that "Western Hero" established by Lewis as far back as 1915, with the character Hawk Ericson. As one recent scholar has written:

> Both the central figure and the milieu of Cass Timberlane . . . represent Lewis' most sustained and mature attempt to record the virtues of a purely western way of life.
> Judge Cass Timberlane himself surely typifies Lewis' highest order of native man in his background and descent as well as in his profession. . . . and almost for the first time Lewis is able to visualize an aristocracy that is established rather than an aristocracy on the make.[39]

Sinclair Lewis, the prodigal son, had returned to the land of his birth in Cass Timberlane, nor was he to leave it again until he went abroad in 1949 for the last time. But in the interim, just as Lewis had used Minnesota for the background of Main Street, the book that launched his career, he was to use it for Kingsblood Royal, his last great novel.

3. Kingsblood Royal: 1947

Sinclair Lewis, American social critic, was never in better form than in Kingsblood Royal. He had started to train for this last great defense of his title as undisputed champion of satire and social criticism in Gideon Planish. He had done roadwork between novels as a literary critic and polished off his training with an assault on Bernard DeVoto as savage as any in recent literature, and he had warmed up for his title defense in Cass Timberlane. It was his success in that book, one which brought him nearly a half-million dollars from its popular sale and movie rights, that perhaps inspired Lewis in his last crucial effort in Kingsblood Royal, just as the success of Main Street had inspired him to do Babbitt.

The novel must have been in Lewis' mind for at least two years, because in 1945 he wrote an article for Esquire called "Gentlemen, This Is Revolution," ostensibly a review of several new books by and/or about Negroes, which actually contained the germ of Kingsblood Royal. After a highly favorable review of Richard Wright's Black Boy in the opening pages of this essay and a defense of the book's bitter tone, Lewis went on to say that it was obvious in the scores of recent books on the Negro in America that a revolution had definitely arrived, and he continued thus:

> The unwritten manifesto of this revolution states that the Negro, backed by a number of whites in every section of the land, is finished with being classed as not quite human; that he is no longer humble and patient and unlettered; and that an astonishingly large number of Negro scholars and journalists and artists are expressing their resolution with courage and skill. They are no longer "colored people." They are people.[42]

Looking backward, Kingsblood Royal seems to be a book that Lewis almost inevitably had to write. Although he had never before in any particular book or essay written at great length about the Negro in America, his entire literary career had demonstrated his sympathy for the underdog, the repressed and persecuted, the lowly and humble.[43] In the same connection Neil Kingsblood, the hero of the book, is another of Lewis' classic rebel types and one of the most courageous and admirable of the lot. But in 1946, with the second war to make the world safe for democracy just over, Lewis saw the continuing prejudice against the Negro in this country as an especially flagrant betrayal of the principles for which millions, including his own son, had died. In the heat of his anger he wrote Kingsblood Royal, a book appropriate not only to the time but one which for years had cried to be written.

However, Sinclair Lewis, with characteristic shrewdness, wrote not of the South, since such a book would have been only another in an already long list, but of the Negro in the North, to be explicit, in the state of Minnesota.

Thus, in choosing for the locale of the novel the American West, a section which prided itself on its democratic traditions, and in showing that the situation in Grand Republic, Minnesota, was in many ways no better or even worse than the situation in Georgia, Mississippi, etc., Lewis was but striking another telling blow right where it would be most effective, in the most unexpected place.

Although the social commentary in the novel admittedly outweighs its fictional portion, the story is more than strong enough to carry its didactic burden. In fact, much of the impact of the book derives from its strikingly original plot mechanism, which unfolds as follows:

Neil Kingsblood, the hero, is a wounded veteran who has returned home to Grand Republic, Minnesota, before the end of the war to his wife, child, and executive job in a bank. He is loved by his friends and family, he is happy in his work, he is a prominent young citizen high in the town's social caste. He has, in short, everything to look forward to when he suddenly discovers that he is of Negro descent, one thirty-second Negro, to be exact. As a typical, fairly intelligent, literate American citizen he had all his life held the usual prejudices and opinions about Negroes, and when he finds that he is a part of the race he had formerly despised, his whole world and sense of values explodes and leaves him frightened and defenseless. Seeking help and advice he befriends a Negro family and through them

meets other Negroes to whom he admits his kinship. His dilemma grows and as he begins to see all around him examples of the discrimmination to which he had been blind previously, he wants more and more to announce his heritage to the whole community. When he tells his own family, they greet him with rage, abuse, bewilderment. Even his wife Vestal is uncertain as to what to do. But they all agree that Neil must remain silent. He must continue to pass. However, Neil's increasing anger at the treatment of his adopted race while he himself stays with the persecutors, his increasing self-identification as a Negro and his pride in it, his integrity - all cause him to publically announce his Negro blood at a dinner at the most exclusive club in town.

The news spreads like a plague. His family, his friends, his employer turn against him. His wife is loyal but unhappy about the fact that from aristocrats they have overnight become pariahs. They receive poison pen letters and anonymous threats. They are urged to sell their home and move out of the wealthy neighborhood in which they reside. Neil resigns from the bank and is reduced to pounding the pavements in search of a job, and when he does find work he is soon forced to give it up either because of humiliation or threats to his employer. Vestal, his wife, goes to work; thus they survive for the time being. Through all this Neil emerges as a better man. His resolution strengthens with each new threat and insult. His pride in himself as a Negro

does not waver. He learns patience, humility, courage, hate - hate of a system which could permit human beings to be so debased, to be judged by such false values. For the terrible paradox is that he, 1/32 Negro, red-headed, blue-eyed, freckle-skinned, college-educated, suffers as though he were a coal-black, illiterate Mississippi cotton-picker. He suffers because he, like the cotton-picker, is basically just a human being, no more, no less.

But not for a moment does Kingsblood yield to his tormentors. He endures his lot patiently and courageously, as the other Negroes in Grand Republic endure theirs, for with the end of the war prejudice comes to the city in earnest. A secret anti-Negro group is formed, a sort of KKK without the crosses and costumes, and through the machinations of this group, the industries and businesses begin to fire their Negro help, even establishments which had employed them for decades. Some Negroes, like Neil's good friend Dr. Ash Davis, the chemist, are forced to leave, others remain, jobless, hoping.

It is in this atmosphere of gathering tension that the book draws to a smashing climax. Neil is given a last chance to get out of the neighborhood. He refuses, and retribution is promised. He tells his friends, and he himself prepares his guns to defend his home. One night the mob gathers. Several of Neil's friends, black and white, rally around him and they prepare for a fight to the death. The shooting

starts and Neil and his cohorts are just on the point of dispersing the crowd with their accurate fire, when the police arrive and haul Neil, Vestal, and one of Neil's Negro friends off to jail.

And so the book ends. There is no explicit optimism, there is not even a definite promise of hope. There is, however, grim determination and the hint of battles to come. The last words in the book are equivocal, they can mean many different things to many different readers; but to the present writer, although they may suggest some optimism, they also contain a threat, a threat of impending revolution, the revolution of such men as Neil Kingsblood, white, black, and tan, against the present status of the Negro in the United States. The last words are:

> "Keep moving," said a policeman.
> "We're moving," said Vestal.[44]

Lewis' purpose in writing Kingsblood Royal was manifest on almost every page of the novel, but it was perhaps best expressed by two comments which Lewis himself made. In one instance (and this bears directly on the plot device) he said that the book's purpose was to show that "the mad, picture-puzzle idiocy of the whole theory of races is beautifully betrayed when you get down to the question of 'Negroes' who are white enough to pass as Caucasians,"[45] and on another occasion he wrote (and this demonstrates the humanitarian basis of the book):

> He would be a heroic man who should dare to say publicly that dogs are frequently nuisances and loving mothers sometimes talk too much. Never, never would I venture to suggest either of these violent thoughts, and perhaps next to them in peril is to suggest that a final and complete solution of all racial questions is to hint that maybe Negroes are nothing more or less than human beings.[46]

But Lewis did venture this perilous thought in Kingsblood Royal, and his solution in the novel was identical to the one in the passage above, the solution that Negroes should be treated as human beings, and in accordance with their humanity, given the equal right to work, love, eat, dress, talk, think, and in general live their lives as they wish - oppressed only by their human imperfections - not by any doctrine of racial inferiority.

One of the factors in the novel that adds to its power is Neil Kingsblood's own prejudice, prejudice inherited with his social position, before he discovers his Negro blood. Thus, in the early pages of the book Neil states some of the common misconceptions, ignorances, and prejudices about Negroes that are to be repeated in a hundred different ways and forms all through the novel. What Neil is really talking about in the passage quoted below is their colored maid Belfreda (who, it later turns out, is as much despised for her worthlessness by her own people as by the Kingsbloods). Not realizing that he is speaking from a hidden feeling of inferiority to Belfreda and discomfort in her presence, Neil goes from self-delusion in believing his own lack of prejudice,

to misinformation about Negro soldiers, to the real issue, the maid:

> "No," Neil said to Vestal, "I've always considered Mr. Prutt too conservative. He thinks that only people like us, from British and French and Heinie stock, amount to anything. He's prejudiced against Scandinavians and the Irish and Hunkies and Polacks. He doesn't understand that we have a new American. Still and all, even hating prejudice, I do see where the Negroes are inferior and always will be. I realized that when I saw them unloading ships in Italy, all safe, while we white soldiers were under fire. And Belfreda expecting to get paid like a Hollywood star - and still out, at midnight!"
> (p. 12).

And after this Neil goes on to extend his opinions about the Negro, including the facts that they are different from white people and "don't quite belong to the same human race," quoting as authority for this a doctor from Georgia Neil knew in the army. Yet, Neil continues, he is glad there is no discrimmination in the North, that the Negroes use the same public schools, etc..

Poor Neil soon has to eat his own words when he discovers that he himself is of Negro extraction. The shock of it wakes him up and starts him on the road to true manhood. For the first time in his life he opens his eyes and sees that beneath their darker skins Negroes are as peculiarly individual and human as his friends and family. Simultaneously, with Neil's awakening, the reader also awakens, for one of the most powerful effects that Kingsblood Royal has on its readers is to make them really see the Negroes

they meet, to make them aware as never before of the fears, aspirations, hatreds, and oppression of their Negro neighbors in the community.[47]

What happens in the novel is that Neil visits a Negro church, where he realizes that these are not colored people but people, and later befriends many of the finest folk in the Negro community. His new friends teach him, as they teach the reader, that they can be far more intelligent, alive, interesting, clever, and amusing companions than the people with whom Neil had associated all his life. Here, as often in his crusading zeal, Lewis came close to exaggerating his moral into incredibility. It is one thing to state that Negroes with equal opportunities are as good as anyone, but it is another to hint, as Lewis sometimes seemed to be doing in the novel, that they are better than almost everybody. But this is only a minor flaw in the book, easily forgiven in the light of Lewis' great achievement in it.

One of the finest things in the novel and one of the most memorable, is the long section which Lewis called "An American Credo about Negroes." It is reminiscent of such great passages in Lewis' earlier work as Babbitt's speech before the Zenith Real Estate Board, and like that passage it is a mixture of satire, seriousness, smugness, ignorance, mininformation, bigotry, intolerance, and prejudice. Ostensibly the record of the conversation of a group of the Kingsblood's friends, supposedly enlightened, higher-class Americans,

it was actually Lewis' classic summary of the most familiar cliches, lies, rumors, false traditions, and misconceptions about the Negro heard in everyday American speech, and at the same time it served as a summary of everything Lewis was attacking in Kingsblood Royal. This notable passage, several pages in length, is reproduced here:

An American Credo about Negroes

> No person has a right to judge or even talk about Negroes except a born Southerner or a Northerner who owns a winter home in the South. But all Southerners, whether they be professors at Chapel Hill or pious widows in Blackjack Hollow, are authorities upon all phases of Negro psychology, biology and history. But the term "all Southerners" does not include any Southern Negroes.
>
> As infants, all (white) Southerners, including cotton-mill hands, had colored Mammies, of whom they and their fathers, all of whom were Colonels, were almost excessively fond.
>
> All Negroes, without exception, however pale, are lazy but goodnatured, thieving and lecherous and murderous but very kind to children, and all of them are given to singing merry lyrics about slavery. These are called Spirituals, and they are beautiful but funny.
>
> All Negroes so revere the godlike white man that no Negro wants to be mistaken for a white man, and all Negroes (which is pronounced Nigras) want to pass and be taken for white. This is called Logic, a favorite subject in Southern (white) colleges.
>
> Any Southern white man, upon meeting any Negro, including judges and congressmen, invariably says, "Here's a dollar, Jim, you black rascal, and you go around to my back door and get a big meal of vittles." Indeed, Negro welfare is the sole interest of all white Southerners, and since it is also the chief desire of Negroes, we have the agreeable spectacle of the Southern Negroes as the best-paid, best-housed, and most extensively and intensively educated group in all history. This is known as the New Industrialism in the Sunny South.

Negroes are not human beings but a cross between the monkey and the colonel. This is proven by their invariably having skulls so thick that, as experiments at the University of Louisiana have conclusively shown, cocoanuts, sledge-hammers and very large rocks may be dropped upon their heads without their noticing anything except that they have been kissed by butterflies. This is called Science.

(But what it really comes down to is, would you want your daughter to marry a Nigger?)

All Negroes, including college presidents and bio-physicists, spend all of their lives, when they are not hanging around white folks' kitchens, in drunkenness, dice, funny camp-meetings, and the sale of marijuana.

Persons who maintain that, psychologically, socially, industrially, Negroes are exactly like the whites are technically called "trouble-makers," and their heresies are "a lot of confused, half-baked ideas," and all pretty women should answer them by saying, "If my husband were here, he would horsewhip you for trying to give the Nigras a lot of false ideas." This is officially known as Loyalty, or The Heritage of Our Gallant Defenders, and is particularly prized by the Lees and Jacksons who produce our patriotic Confederate films in Hollywood.

Even if these cranks who go around criticizing the white attitude toward the darkies is partly right, they don't provide any Solution, and I make it a rule to never pay any attention to these cynics that don't Furnish a Practical Solution to the Whole Problem. "You're very smart," I always tell them, "but what do you expect <u>me</u> to do?"

All Negroes constantly indulge in ferocious fighting with knives, but all Negro soldiers are afraid of and abstain from ferocity, fighting and all forms of cold steel. This is the branch of wisdom called Folk Ways.

Since they are all indolent, no Negro ever earns more than eleven dollars a week, but since they are all extravagant, out of that sum each of them spends eighty dollars every week in the purchase of silk shirts, radios, and the premiums of the Big Creek and Hallelujah Burial Society.

(It ain't a question of prejudice; it's just a matter of freedom to choose your own associates; and let me ask you this: would you like your daughter, sister or aunt to marry a colored man, now answer me honestly.)

All Negroes who move to Chicago are perpetually chilly there, especially on July afternoons in the rolling-mill, and they are ceaselessly homesick for the warmth, cotton blossoms, pecans, magnolias, grits, black-eyed peas, pork chops, watermelons, corn bread, banjos, jails and congressmen of the Southland, and whenever they see any real Southern white man, they rush up to him and volunteer a confession that they should never have left the South and their God-given, natural, Caucasian, meridional guardians.

All Negro males have such wondrous sexual powers that they unholily fascinate all white women and all Negro males are such uncouth monsters that no white woman whatsoever could possibly be attracted by one. This is called Biology.

All Negroes who reside in swamps are extremely happy, and laugh their heads off at the pretentiousness of Negro would-be doctors, lawyers and them phony highbrows in general.

(And just what you do if some big black Nigra breezed up to you and said, "I've been necking with your daughter, and so what? And believe me, that's what we'd have, if them mokes made as good dough as you or me.)

All Mixed breeds are bad. This information we owe to the British, to whom we also owed the original importation of a good share of our slaves. Thus, a mulatto invariably lacks both the honor and creativeness of the whites, and the patience and merriment of the blacks. So, the reason why so many mulattoes display talent and high morality is because they have so much white blood, and the reason why so many extremely dark Negroes show just as much talent and morality is because it simply ain't so. This is called Ethnology, Eugenics, or Winston Churchill.

The Nigra press is full of lies about injustices to the darkies, and down my way we would correct the editors by gently showing them a rope. This is called Good Breeding.

All Negroes, including Walter White, Richard Wright, and Brigidier-General Benjamin Davis, have very funny names, like Sim Sowbelly, Cleopatra Gutch, and I Will Arise Pipsqueak, which proves that all Negroes are ridiculous, and how would you like your daughter bo become Mrs. I.W.A. Pipsqueak? This is called Genealogy.

Any writer who portrays any Negro as acting like a normal American is either an ignorant Northerner or a traitor who is trying to destroy civilization.

> In discussing the education of Negroes, it shows both profundity and originality if you start by saying, "They got to learn to walk before they learn to fly," and, later, when the matter of Heredity has breezed into the conversation, to look pretty profound and explain "Water can't rise higher than its source." This is a branch of Dialectics called Argument-by-Metaphor, as favored by women and clergymen.
>
> All Negroes are inefficient, which is the reason why, during the war, they were able to organize so efficient a movement to jostle white persons every Wednesday afternoon at 3:17, and to drive white women into the appalling horror of doing their own housework, that it was the envy of the German General Staff. For seven months, all Negro women incessantly shouted at white ladies, "You'll be in my kitchen, by Christmas." I know that this is true, because my Aunt Annabel, a woman of probity, told me so.
>
> There may be a little discrimmination against Negroes in backward sections of the South, but nowhere in the North is there any discrimmination whatsoever.
>
> In fact, to be authoritative about it, the Negro Problem Is Insoluble.
>
> Did I ever tell you the story about the nigger preacher that was bawling out his congregation— (pp. 193-7).

For the reader to really let this passage sink in, he must read it slowly, and ask himself how many times he has heard one or more of these statements from someone, and did he speak up to correct it or deny it? He must ask himself how many of these things he himself believes, and if any, why? He must ask himself whether to him a Negro is a Negro first and a human being afterward. And finally, he must answer Lewis' favorite question, the consciously fiendish non-sequitur, the inevitable "How would you like your daughter to marry a Negro?" and until the answer is "Yes, why not, depends on the man himself," the reader knows that behind

Lewis' satire there is terrible, unanswerable truth. It would be impossible to cite here every instance of Lewis' attack on racial discrimmination in Kingsblood Royal, every truth he uttered, every point he made. To do so would demand a hundred pages. But he concluded the section quoted above with a speech by one of the "liberal" members of the group, a speech which Lewis considered the most vicious and most foolish statement of all in regard to the Negro in America. This speech appears below:

> "All of you miss the point. The darkies aren't really so bad. Some of the educated ones are just like us - practically. But where they are all going haywire is in wanting to rush their advancement too fast, instead of taking it naturally and depending on their own honest, unaided efforts to so develope that eventually, some day, they'll make us whites recognize their evolution.
>
> "I always say to my colored friends, 'Yes, yes, I know there are some talented members of your race who don't get their due. I'm a regular rebel myself, and I believe in you coons grabbing all you can get. But let me remind you of something maybe you haven't noticed. There's just been a war on. Europe isn't settled yet, and there's a lot of labor trouble and so on and so forth in the United States, and so, while I'm all for equal rights and maybe social equality some day for you darkies, when the time is right, can't you see that now isn't the time for it?'"
>
> (p. 198).

In other words Lewis saw, and rightfully so, that cautious, half-hearted liberalism, the liberalism that always awakens too little and too late, is even more dangerous to the cause of progress than sheer ignorance, pure intolerance, and outspoken bigotry. To Lewis, there could be no waiting,

no delay, no caution in reform. The right time was always now, never later, and in this he betrayed his uncompromising idealism, his inherent revolutionary instinct, the qualities which were at the root of his literary career. Accordingly, he made Kingsblood Royal end with a veiled promise and a threat of future revolt. In a passage near the close of the book Lewis admitted that Negroes had made some progress but not entough, and he concluded that in 1947, with the war just over and the world in a state of unrest, the time was never better to fight the good fight. All this is apparent in the passage reproduced below:

> Thirty years before, the Negroes had seemed to be gaining so much more of what they wanted because they had apparently wanted so much less. They had demanded then only a roof and sidemeat and not to be lynched. Now, they were demanding every human right, and whites who were self-admiringly willing to give them a dish of cold potatoes were sometimes unwilling to give them room at the work-bench and the polling-booth, and muttered, "We've been too easy. We got to clamp down on these apes before they claim they can do our job just as good as we can." The black crusade had never seemed so risky as now, but any gain that was made was a real increase in human dignity, not a pink bow tied on inescapable chains.
>
> (p. 328).

Accordingly, it is significant that the novel ends not with the rebels looking to their children for salvation as in in Main Street and Babbitt, or in retreating to the woods as Arrowsmith, but in open warfare with the forces of darkness, just as in It Can't Happen Here. The story concludes with the smoke of gunfire still in the reader's nostrils, with no

problems solved and with no explicit solution in sight, but with the promise of continuing warfare and the assurance that men like Neil Kingsblood will never give up until they have won for themselves equal status as human beings.

As one reviewer wisely noted, Kingsblood Royal was not just another novel about the Negro Problem but a novel about the American Problem, comprising one chapter in the long book which chronicles America's attempt to become the free and rational people described in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address and other such Utopian documents.[48] In this way Lewis' whole life might form an episode in that same book about the American quest, for Kingsblood Royal was but another expression in a new area of the corruption in America Lewis never stopped exposing. The middle-class suburban world that he knew so well was again one of the villains here just as it was in Babbitt, and it was again the ambivalence of Lewis' love and hate for this world that showed through enough to give the novel the light and heat of reality.[49] It may be questioned, as did some critics, that all Neil's friends would in real life turn against him as completely as they do in the story, but it could not be questioned that the sequence of events which flows out of Neil's public admission of his Negro blood is painfully convincing, as for example, the loss of his job and the attempts to make him leave the "white" neighborhood.[50] No, Kingsblood Royal may have its faults as

Lewis' other great books have theirs, but like them it will be remembered and be read in the years to come as a stirring novel and a true social document.

Sinclair Lewis accomplished more in the book than just to make the reader aware of the Negro as a human being; he also made him realize that the tragedy of the whites in Grand Republic, Minnesota, is perhaps worse than that of the Negroes, for Lewis showed with deep wisdom that it is the whites' lack of confidence in themselves which is at the root of their race and class hatreds, as the repressed feeling of inferiority is always at the root of bigotry. It is a well-known psychological fact that a man has both an excuse for his failure and a proof of his superiority if he has someone he can hate, persecute and despise, whether it be, to use the popular terminology, a kike, nigger, wop, spic, dago, hunkey, or a heinie, jickey, frog, mick, etc., etc.,. Thus, Lewis made it clear in Kingsblood Royal that it is the whites, who by their senseless fears, their unwillingness to face the simple unexciting truth that all men are equally human, who are making of themselves, not the Negroes, a technically superior but emotionally and morally an inferior race.[51]

The strength of the novel also lies in the fact that it portrays the racial bigotry of the average Northern community in a more basic way than it had before been presented in fiction, and it leaves no doubt in the reader's mind where

Lewis stood. The book has an unusually good cross-section of representative types from both races, black and white, characters not usually found in a race novel (e. g., professional men and intellectuals). Finally, Lewis depicted with undeniable truth that Northerners can and do act just the same way they have always accused Southerners for doing.[52] The North had not been the accustomed target for such novels as Kingsblood Royal, but it was a ripe one. Does anyone doubt this? What about the 1947 race riots in Detroit? What about the riot in Cicero, Illinois, not so long ago when a mob of whites violently prevented a Negro family from moving into an apartment? What about the help-wanted advertisements to be found in any newspaper every day "whites only," or the vacation resort blurbs with "restricted clientele" in fine print? The reader must admit, it can and does happen here.

Kingsblood Royal was Sinclair Lewis' last investigation into American life and last commentary upon American society and it was also his most bitter book, showing perhaps that his patience was wearing thin.[53] In the whole kingdom of Sinclair Lewis the novel was the most violent rebellion of all, but just as in the other books, the problems in Grand Republic remain unsolved - but neither are these problems solved in real life.[54] Yet Lewis was never in better control of his theme than here. It has the inevitability, the dramatic suspense, the controlled fury,

the blazing indignation, the shrewd perception, the needle-sharp humor, the biting satire so characteristic of the man at his best, and like all of his great works, Kingsblood Royal has had and will have effect upon whoever reads it, for it has been Lewis' accomplishment to help change the society he described. It is a great book and it will last.[55]

Although Lewis' career was not yet completely over, for he was to write two more novels before he died, Kingsblood Royal was his last notable book and his last successful book. The novels which followed, The God-Seeker, 1949, and the posthumously published World So Wide, 1951, while they have considerable interest to the student of Lewis, deservedly met indifferent popular and critical reception. Thus, it would be appropriate to make this the terminal point for the discussion of Sinclair Lewis as American social critic; however, for the sake of completeness, an analysis of Lewis' last two novels follows on the pages below, beginning with a brief glance at the only historical novel he ever wrote, The God-Seeker.

4. The God-Seeker: 1949

The God-Seeker would have been the logical book for Sinclair Lewis to have written as the first in his career rather than the next-to-last, for it deals with the early days of the Minnesota which is the locale of many of Lewis' novels. As such, the book is many things. It is a historical novel based on careful research, and a tribute to the courage of the early Protestant missionaries to the Indians, and a satiric description of the lives of those missionaries and their ratherludicrous attempts to convert the Indians, and a love story, and a defense of the Indians against their treatment by the whites, and a satire on religion, and the story of the founding of an early labor union.[57] And because the book is all of these things, but not one of them in particular, it fails.

Basically, Lewis the romantic story-teller was operating here. In the last few years of his life he seems to have developed an interest in the history of his native state, an interest which had appeared briefly in Kingsblood Royal. The God-Seeker was the full gratification of that interest and the fruit of Lewis' researches into early Minnesota history, for many of the characters in the novel are based on actual historical personages, and the narration of conditions in frontier Minnesota has the ring of truth in it. On one level, then, The God-Seeker is a historical novel

pure and simple, and as such it relates the story of Aaron Gadd, who is born and raised in northern Massachusetts, converted at a camp-meeting, and inspired to go West as a missionary. Once there, he finds that the missionaries use him as a general handyman, not a religious leader. He gradually grows more and more disillusioned with the attempt to Christianize the Indians, who in their savage state seem more civilized in many ways than the whites, and finally runs away with his beloved, a beautiful half-breed Indian girl named Selene Lanark, daughter of a white trader and an Indian princess.

Aaron and Selene go to St. Paul, a booming frontier town, and with Aaron prospering as a carpenter, the Gadds soon become wealthy and prominent. The novel switches, in its last few pages, to an account of how a labor union is formed by Aaron's workers and how this union eventually takes in its first Negro member, a runaway slave, whom Aaron had smuggled through on the Underground Rail_road. As the book ends, the Negro is taken into the union and Aaron and Selene are made honorary members.

Despite this obviously uneven story, the novel has some good qualities. First, it is told with zest and humor, as though Lewis enjoyed writing it.[58] Also, there are many interesting passages, such as the opening section of the book which tells of Aaron's boyhood in New England.[59] The description of the Indians is sympathetically done and holds

the reader's attention, while the long passage in which is set forth the Indians' version of white civilization ranks as one of Lewis' better satirical accomplishments (this passage is summarized below).[60] Finally, Lewis' satire on religion is here, as always, sprightly and vigorous.

There are two elements in the novel which indicate that Lewis was still functioning effectively as a social critic. The first of these is the religious satire in the book, which includes the mockery of both New England Calvinism and frontier missionary Protestantism and its attempts to convert the Indians (who Lewis hinted could teach the missionaries a few things). Lewis had never really given up the attack on religion after Elmer Gantry. He had continued it in It Can't Happen Here in his description of such clergymen as Bishop Prang; he had continued it in short stories written in the 1930's; he had continued it in Gideon Planish in his portrayal of how religion could be made a profitable racket, and he had continued it even in Kingsblood Royal, for in that novel is a scene reminiscent of one in Babbitt, where Neil Kingsblood goes to his pastor seeking help in his dilemma, only to find bigotry and hypocrisy.[61] In The God-Seeker, however, both the satire on religion and the satiric commentary on other aspects of white civilization are summed up in a "book" written by one Black Wolf, a college-educated Indian chief. This "book" presents the Indians' view of the white man in the same unfavorable light as the white

was accustomed to seeing the Indian. It is separated into such headings as "Religion and Superstition," "Improvidence and Dirtiness," "Senseless Love of War," "Greed and Commercialism," "Gambling and Lying," "Lack of Common Sense," "Lewdness, Incontinence and Position of Women," etc. Some of this "book's" main conclusions are here summarized.

1. Christianity is an idolatrous religion with many gods, a religion filled with foolish, obviously manufactured theology.

2. The Indians know God is everywhere and do not set apart special places or days for His worship, but worship Him constantly in all places.

3. Christians seem to depend on strange ritual, much of it closely associated with their barbaric superstition.

4. The whites, who accuse the Indian of shiftlessness, are really so wasteful that they have nearly ruined the earth.

5. The whites practice warfare constantly and blindly, killing millions of women and children along with the men. Compared to this, the Indians' war is a chivalrous game.

6. The idea of profiting by another man's need, which the whites call "commerce," is so horrifying to the Indian he cannot understand it.

7. Gambling exists among Indians but not to the extent that it does among the whites, who often risk their children's bread in games of chance. It is this which probably breeds the universal lying amongh the whites, a trait highly esteemed by them.

8. The lack of common sense in the whites is perfectly demonstrated by the ugly, uncomfortable clothing they wear.

9. Typical of the whites' degradation is their perversion of the creative instinct into something unwholesome.

10. Marriage is a mock pageant, while woman, ostensibly honored and sung by poets, really has the position of a slave.

The tract concludes, as it began, on Black Wolf's favorite subject, religion. He wonders whether the childishness of the whites is due to their lack of a native religion, since their present one was stolen from the Hebrews. He states that a great source of the Indians' hatred for the whites is the whites' attempt to foist their religion on their conquered subjects. The Indians do admire Jesus and would gladly take him into their own religion, but as a strong, manly god, and not associate him with Sunday School and snuffling preachers. Black Wolf ends his "book" with the opinion that since the ancient Hebrews were the ancestors of the Indians, the Bible really belongs to them, and in the best manner of Christian clergymen, Black Wolf's tract quotes selected passages from the Bible to prove that the whites will feel God's wrath for their treatment of the Indians.[62]

Does some of this sound familiar? Of course. The religious passages were in Elmer Gantry, the "Senseless Love of War" in scattered places all through Lewis' books, the "Greed and Commercialism" section in Babbitt, Arrowsmith and Gideon Planish, the "Lewdness, Incontinence and Position of Women" in Ann Vickers and Cass Timberlane. In short, it becomes very plain that the ingenious Indian, Black Wolf, was none other than Sinclair Lewis, and his "book" was another

statement and review of many of Lewis' favorite indictments. Almost all of it had been said before at greater length and detail, although rarely more concisely or cleverly humorous than in this section of The God-Seeker.

The rest of the novel, unfortunately, does not measure up to the quality of this one outstanding passage, however. As a historical novel, it is mediocre. It could have been written by someone far less able than Lewis, and like all of the instances in which Lewis gave full release to the story-teller impulse in him, The God-Seeker fell considerably below his best. Here, as in the others, it is the lack of a cause, the absence of a crusade, that robs the book of its potential power. Its apparent theme, the theme of a man who seeks God, never really attains unity or direction. At the end of the book the reader has only the title to tell him what the novel was supposed to be about, for it is about so many things, one gets lost in its maze of topics.

The public, as usual, was right about The God-Seeker, for it sold less than any other Lewis had written after 1920.[63] It was not that Lewis' energy or vitality had flagged, because there is an abundance of those qualities in the work. It is as though Lewis, having investigated almost every area of modern American life, had no new fields to examine and so turned to the past for his material. The sentimentality that had been so prominent in some of the books of the 1930's, although it at least had a certain significance then, haunts

The God-Seeker and spoils it, and the episodic tendency, so typical of Lewis' style but unimportant in his better work, definitely weakens this book. Lewis never made up his mind in The God-Seeker. He admired the missionaries for their courage but mocked them for their ignorance. He had Aaron Gadd begin the story by searching for God but somehow the quest ends up among labor unions, and the reader never knows where the quest starts or ends, or, in fact, if there had been a quest at all. Even the best part of the book, its satiric passages, seem not to be an integral part of it but an insertion, an intrusion by Lewis into his own story.

It is a consummation devoutly to be wished that Lewis had ended his career as auspiciously as he had inaugurated it, but such, unhappily, was not the case. Lewis' next-to-last novel was a poor one, and his final work, completed just before his death, was no improvement, for just as Lewis had returned to the past in writing The God-Seeker, so he returned to one of his own earlier triumphs, Dodsworth, in writing his last novel, World So Wide. The discussion of that book will indicate, in the concluding pages of this study, how Sinclair Lewis failed in his attempt to rewrite the story which had culminated his greatest decade.

5. Terminus; World So Wide: 1951

In 1949 Sinclair Lewis left America to go to Europe, never to return alive. The literary result of that last trip abroad was Lewis' last novel, his twenty-second, World So Wide, a novel in which he returned to the theme and much of the plot of his earlier, greater Dodsworth. Most of Lewis' last two years alive was spent in Italy, the country which he loved better than any other except America, and in that time he lived mainly in Florence, his favorite city. There, Lewis said that he had the impression of being in the Middle Ages, and it pleased him because he had a deep interest in the history of that period. He knew the city intimately and was acquainted with many members of its American colony, although he later came to despise these people for their "clannishness" and their self-removal from the real roots of Italian life.[64] All of this gets into Lewis' last novel.

The hero of World So Wide is Hayden Chart, an architect and prominent citizen of the town of Newlife, Colorado, who suddenly realizes, after an auto accident in which his wife is killed and he himself is seriously injured, that he has not made the most of his life. During his recuperation in the hospital he resolves to hunt for culture and personal fulfillment in study and travel. Accordingly, he goes to Europe, and after brief visits to London, Paris, and

the Riviera, he travels to Italy and stops in Florence. There, for the first time in Europe, he feels at home, and a meeting with the Dodsworths, Nat Friar, an elderly art expert and medievalist, and the beautiful but icily aloof scholar Olivia Lomond, leads him to decide to stay. In Florence, Hayden gets the spirit of scholarship, and he settles down to his quest for culture. He walks through the city, reads, studies Italian, and in his austere pensione room, begins to find himself. He also gradually breaks through Olivia's reserve, first becoming her friend, then her lover.

Halfway through the book its pace abruptly changes from a leisurely, rather interesting story to a somewhat frenzied and confused tale about phony culture and a romantic quadrangle. The shift is caused by the appearance of the characters Lorenzo Lundsgard, an ex-scholar, ex-movie star, who has come to Italy to gather the background for a Hollywood production about medieval Europe, and Roxanna Eldritch, a lively, modern American girl from Hayden's home town. When the smoke had cleared away, Hayden has married Roxanna and Olivia has flown into the arms of Lundsgard, and the novel ends with Hayden and Roxanna en route to the Near East in search of true culture, finally freed of false culture, as symbolized by the characters of Olivia and Lundsgard.

It is obvious, even in this sketchy resume, that the novel is basically little more than a new version of Dodsworth,

with Hayden Chart as a younger Dodsworth and Olivia as a scholarly Fran.[65] Once again the theme is the classic one of Americans in Europe with Chart (like Dodsworth) fleeing to Europe to escape Babbittry, only to be saved at the last moment by a girl from home, while the phony-culture-priestess Olivia gets what she deserves, the phony-culture-priest Lundsgard.[66] But there is one vital difference. Dodsworth is a great book and an important one while World So Wide is a poor book and important only to Lewis scholars.

Despite its weakness, however, Sinclair Lewis still had something worth while to say in the novel, and it was directly in the tradition of his literary career and his feeling toward America and Americans. To be specific, in World So Wide Lewis was more interested in the role of the American in Europe than in anything else, and in the two most important passages in the novel he presented his views on this topic. The first of these is here quoted:

> Mr. Henry James was breathless over the spectacle of Americans living abroad and how very queer they are, in English country houses or Tuscan villas or flats in Rome, and how touchy they become as they contemplate the correctness of Europeans.
>
> But just how queer they are, Mr. James never knew. He never saw a radio reporter, never talked to an American Oil Company proconsul gossiping in the Via Veneto about his native Texas. Americans are electric with curiosity, and this curiosity has misled foreigners and Mr. James into crediting them with a provincial reverence which their ancestors got rid of along with their native costumes one month after Ellis Island or after Plymouth Rock.

> If a queen comes to America, crowds fill the station squares, and attendant British journalists rejoice, "You see: the American cousins are as respectful to Royalty as we are."
> But the Americans have read of queens since babyhood. They want to see one queen, once, and if another comes to town next week, with twice as handsome a crown, she would not draw more than two small boys and an Anglophile.
> Americans want to see one movie star, one giraffe, one jet plane, one murder, but only one. They run up a skyscraper or the fame of generals and evangelists and playwrights in one week and tear them all down in an hour, and the mark of excellence everywhere is "under new management."
> Nor are they so different when they are expatriates. . .. Mr. James' simple miss has become the young lady at the Ritz Bar, and his young American suitor, apologetic for having been reared in the rustic innocence of Harvard instead of the Byzantine courtliness of a bed-sitting-room at Oxford, has been replaced by the American flying major who in Africa, Arabia, China, Paris is used to being courted as the new milord.[67]

while the second of these passages follows closely upon the first:

> The St. James American Episcopal Church in Florence has no more Episcopalians than Methodists or Unitarians or plain indifferentists. In the bright stone chancel, the American flag hangs along with the Italian, and for an hour every Sunday morning even the Colonists who seem almost alienated from Home are betrayed into being Americans again. Social climbing is halted, and girl students kneel beside florid gentlemen who have superbly been in steel.
> Most of the Colonists are given to complaining at dinner parties that America has gone to hell, along with lazy and overpaid servants, impertinent children, tasteless food and fiendish labor leaders who will soon be purging all responsible citizens. Yet at St. James, as they unite in the old hymns, there rises in them something primitive.
> Colonists who have been asserting that they would as soon die as go back to the States and see executives being obsequious to bellboys and

> subway conductors and their own cooks, now hear through the music at St. James, the heavy shoes on Plymouth Rock, the barefoot Confederates marching in the wintry Tennessee mountains, the plodding of moccasins on the Oregon Trail. In their flippant unfaith to their lean and bitter mother, America, there is yet more faith than in their zest for Europe, their opulent mistress. . . for the American never really emigrates but only travels; perhaps travels for two or three generations but at the end is still marked with the gaunt image of Tecumseh.[68]

What do these passage signify? It is very clear. To Lewis, an American once was an American forever. He may travel all over the world; he may stay away from America for years, just as Lewis did; he may scoff at America and mock it, just as Lewis did, but deep down he is proud of his country and proud of himself as its citizen, for he knows that his destiny is to conquer the world, not with arms, but with the force of his American vitality. The last few lines in the quoted passage above refers not only to Hayden Chart but also to Sinclair Lewis, the man who loved his country. In this way, World So Wide reaffirms familiar Lewis values. He implied that there is something to be had from the old culture; he suggested that there is an integrity in Europe and a solidarity of family life not often to be found in America, but he concluded that like Antaeus, Americans must continually renew contact with their native soil, just as Hayden Chart is rescued from pursuing the wrong grail by the irreverent American wholesomeness of Roxanna.[69] The occasional flashes of satire in the book about Americans

living abroad, the satiric portrait of the character of Lorenzo Lundsgard, the confused and poorly conceived love interest in the novel, all should be forgotten and subjugated to Lewis' one great conclusion about Americans abroad, although unfortunately he himself did not do this in the novel. Only thus can the book be understood in relation to Lewis' career as a commentator upon American life.

However, even this conclusion, except as it appears specifically in the passages quoted above, is implicit in the novel. World So Wide was again Lewis telling a story, and the character of Roxanna Eldritch, although imperfectly presented, is the romantic symbol of the American Girl whom Lewis perhaps loved more than any other (e.g., Leora of Arrowsmith).[70] In the same way Hayden Chart is the last in the line of Lewis' nonconformists, nor does he differ so much from the first in that line, Mr. Wrenn, who, like Hayden, went to Europe to find those mysterious and elusive things "culture" and "adventure," which in Sinclair Lewis' vocabulary had always been merely synonyms for freedom, happiness, fulfillment.

And thus Lewis ended his career just as he began it. He himself seems to have found only freedom in his own life, for happiness and fulfillment have almost never been the lot of men like he, idealists, reformers, romantics, visionaries - the men who have been at the source of all human progress and much of its happiness, but who find this happiness

only rarely for themselves. Alexander Manson, Lewis' constant companion in his last year of life, summarized it perfectly:

> Sinclair Lewis . . . during his last year, was a restless, lonely man, constantly looking for something he couldn't find, or, if he found it, no longer wanting it. Even in his writing he had turned from the novel form that made him famous, to poetry, and his last completed works were verse. His one consistency was that he remained indisputably American; the country that he had satirized and criticized so long was still his great love.[71]

But before he died Lewis turned from his poetry, the poetry with which he had launched his writing career as a composer of lyrics and children's verses, and just before his death was again planning a novel whose theme was to be, in Lewis' own words, "the middle class, that prisoner of the barbarian twentieth century."[72] This proposed novel was never even to receive a title, however, for on December 31, 1950, Sinclair Lewis suffered a stroke and was taken to the hospital in a coma. He lingered for ten days and then, on January 10, 1951, died suddenly, quietly,[73] alone except for doctors and nurses. His last words were, "I am happy. God bless you all."[74] In accordance with his will, his ashes were returned to America and buried in the family graveyard in Sauk Center, Minnesota.[75] And so Sinclair Lewis came home to stay, and perhaps his greatest tribute was uttered not by the critics or the newspapers but by the mayor of the town, who said, on first hearing of Lewis' death:

> "All of us love him; we were proud to call him our own no matter what he wrote.
> "We were a little put out when Main Street first came out, but we soon forgot it. We soon saw the humor of his writings and were happy that we were a part of them. . . . A truly great man as he was never really dies. He'll live on not only in his books but in the hearts of the people who knew him here."[76]

Yes, Sinclair Lewis will live on in the memory of his readers and friends and in American literature, which in this century would not have been complete without him and his books, Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, Dodsworth, It Can't Happen Here, Kingsblood Royal, books that are the record of a great writer and a great nation in what is perhaps its greatest age.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

1. William Dubois, "The Artist from Sauk Center," N.Y. Times Book Rev., XCII (April 18, 1943), sec. vii, p. 1.

2. Howard Mumford Jones, "Sinclair Lewis and the Do-Gooders," SRL, XXVI (April 24, 1943), 6.

3. Lewis' earlier satire on organizations was especially noticeable in Babbitt, where he mocked Rotary and all of Babbitt's other organizational activities, and hinted that they had considerable influence in making Babbitt the slave-man that he was. This satire also appeared in Elmer Gantry, where Lewis' attack was directed chiefly at religious and moral groups, and in Ann Vickers, where Lewis struck at charitable organizations. All this was a prelude to Gideon Planish, as was also Lewis' short story "Proper Gander," SatEvePost, CCVIII (July 13, 1935), 18ff., which was a good-natured satire on politics, Washington lobbies and lobbyists, crooked congressmen, professional propagandists, and Washington's love for long names and titles. It is evident, then, that in Gideon Planish, Lewis was working with material already familiar to him.

4. The description in the novel of Gideon's life as a college professor is especially interesting in view of Lewis' own recent experience at that time as a college teacher. In 1940, Lewis seems to have gotten the desire to taste academic life, a desire which was fulfilled when he taught an advanced writing class for a short time in 1940 at the University of Wisconsin. For further information on this matter see Kirk Bates, "Meet Professor Sinclair Lewis," Milwaukee Journal, Nov. 1, 1940 (used as a clipping in the Yale Collection); Margaret Waterman, "Sinclair Lewis as Teacher," Coll. Eng., XIII (Nov., 1951), 87-90; and especially Anon., "Professor Lewis," Time, XXXVI (Nov. 18, 1940), 56, which has the most complete account of Lewis at Wisconsin.

5. Sinclair Lewis, Gideon Planish (N.Y., 1943), p. 164.

6. Jack Alexander, "Rover Girl in Europe," SatEvePost, CCXII (May 25, 1940), 116.

7. Ibid., p. 115.

8. Stolberg, p. 456.

9. Alexander, p. 115.

10. Ibid., p. 115.

11. Among the critics who attacked Gieon Planish for its one-sidedness were Jones, Clifton Fadiman, "Return of Mr. Lewis," New Yorker, XIX (April 24, 1943), 76; Maxwell Geismar, "Young Mr. Lewis and Old Dos Passos," Amer. Merc., LVI (May, 1943), 624-8; George Mayberry, "Too Late for Herpicide," New Republ., CVIII (April 26, 1943), 570; Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review," Nation, CLVI (May 8, 1943), 675-6; and J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," N.Y. Times Book Rev., XCIII (Oct. 31, 1943), sec. vii., p. 2, col. 2.

12. Anon., "Fun With Fund-Raising," Time, XLI (April 19, 1943), 98.

13. Trilling, p. 675.

14. Adams, p. 2.

15. Fadiman, p. 76.

16. Even critics who greeted Gideon Planish with hostility concurred in this (e.g., Fadiman, Trilling).

17. Geismar, Last of the Provincials, pp. 137-9.

18. Geismar, "Young Mr. Lewis and Old Dos Passos," p. 625.

19. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis," Pub. Wkly., CLIX (Jan. 27, 1951), 527.

20. Alexander Manson and Helen Camp, "The Last Days of Sinclair Lewis," Sat Eve Post, CCXXIII (March 31, 1951), 111.

21. In addition to Lewis' two marriages as the background for Cass Timberlane, there might be added his friendship for Marcella Powers, a young New York literary agent for whom Lewis had written the play "Angela Is Twenty-Two" (Manson cites this fact). The anonymous review of Cass Timberlane, "Laureate of the Booboisie," Time, XLVI (Oct. 8, 1945), 108, suggested that Lewis' frienship with Miss Powers may have resulted in the central situation of the novel, an older man married to a younger woman; while Barnaby Conrad, who was Lewis' secretary for six months before Lewis left for Europe in 1949, noted in his article "Communication," Yale Lit. Mag., CXVIII (March, 1951), 5, that one of the factors in Lewis' increasing loneliness in his last years was the marriage of a young woman (whom Conrad did not name but who was probably Miss Powers) whom Lewis had been interested in for ten years, to a

younger man. Despite all this evidence, it is impossible to correlate Cass Timberlane with Lewis' personal life until more information is available.

22. Sinclair Lewis, Cass Timberlane (N.Y., 1945), pp. 9-10.

23. Ibid., p. 146.

24. Ibid., pp. 316-7. The passages quoted and, in fact, the general tone of the novel lead the reader to suspect that Lewis was not in this book quite the staunch feminist he had once been. However, Lewis' view of women in Cass Timberlane was not a betrayal of earlier opinions, but rather a qualification of them. Lewis still believed in the woman's right to equality in all things, including sex, but there is in this novel at the same time a note of disappointment that modern woman has not lived up to the high hopes Lewis once had for her. As regards the sections in Cass Timberlane where Lewis attacked the domination of married life by women, they were only an extension of what he had implied in Dodsworth, many years before. Perhaps the best statement of Lewis' thoughts on the place of women in modern society is the report in the N.Y. Times, XCI (Nov. 20, 1941), p. 36, col. 2, of a debate between Sinclair Lewis and Lewis Browne on the question "Has the Modern Woman Made Good?" in which Lewis took the Negative side.

25. Cass Timberlane, p. 335. This passage is another statement of what Lewis had already said in Ann Vickers, but with one great difference. Where in the former novel he had freely condoned the breaking of social laws for true love, in Cass Timberlane he questioned it. He did not explicitly revoke his earlier convictions on the matter, as is evident in the story of Virga Vay and Allan Cedar in the "Assemblage of Hugbands and Wives" sections, but he did suggest that there is entirely too much promiscuity not stemming from true love, but as in the case of Bradd and Jinny, from animal appetite and the desire to "experiment." In this way, Cass Timberlane is much closer to the main line of Lewis' moral code than Ann Vickers.

26. Cass Timberlane, pp. 353-4. Lewis never seems to have completely escaped from loneliness. It had haunted him as a boy in Sauk Center; it had followed him to Yale. It is one of the most frequent themes in his early short stories and in many of the later ones. Even at the height of his fame he was never completely free of it. It may have been one or the causes of his constant traveling from place to place. Dorothy Thompson, "Sinclair Lewis: A Postcript," p. 73, said of him: "I think one of the most

tragic facets of his nature was his disbelief in his own capacity to evoke love from others. He hurt others, very often out of this frustration." This may explain why Lewis, despite his amiability, was never able to keep friends for very long, with the exception of a few. This loneliness, as Harrison Smith (one of Lewis' few life-long friends; another was Carl Van Doren) noted in "Sinclair Lewis, Remembrance of the Past," p. 37, was intensified after the dissolution of Lewis' second marriage, for Lewis drove all but his very dearest friends away from him because of his inability to endure the ordinary social amenities of casual conversation. Barnaby Conrad, "Communication," p. 5, stated that other factors which added to Lewis' loneliness in his last years were, besides his devorce and the marriage of Marcella Powers, the death of his older son Wells in the war, and the adverse critical reception of his last five novels. Conrad also documented Lewis' furious temper, which he always regretted, too late. Perhaps the best account of Lewis' character, personality, and loneliness in the final year of his life is that written by his secretary-companion Alexander Manson, "The Last Days of Sinclair Lewis." For a man who loved life and people as much as Lewis did, his loneliness and inability to keep friends is truly a paradox and a tragedy.

27. The similarity of Main Street and Cass Timberlane was noted by "A Female Admirer," in the essay "Sinclair Lewis, A Comparison," Atlantic, CLXXVII (Feb., 1946), 159-60; Charles Poore, "The Kingdom of Sinclair Lewis," N.Y. Times, Book Rev., XCV (Oct. 7, 1945), sec. vii, pp. 1, 30; and Philip Wylie, "Sinclair Lewis," Amer. Merc., LXI (Nov., 1945), 629-32; while Diana Trilling, "Of Husbands and Wives," Nation, CLXI (Oct. 13, 1945), 382, compared the marriage of Cass and Jinny to the marriage of Martin Arrowsmith and Leora, concluding that the latter was much closer to the American ideal and much better portrayed.

28. "A Female Admirer," p. 159, pointed out all these similarities.

29. Poore, pp. 1, 30.

30. Wylie, p. 630.

31. In this, the present writer differs with "A Female Admirer."

32. In this, the present writer differs with Poore.

33. In this, the present writer most emphatically disagrees with Wylie, who wrote that the main theme of Cass Timberlane was the triumph of Jinny's infantilism over Cass'

maturity, and that Lewis' real purpose in writing the book and in ending it happily was to subtly destroy the ideal of love. Wylie's article, however, like most of his other writing, is as misguided as it is provoking.

34. Mary Colum, "Sinclair Lewis' New Thesis Novel," SRL, XXVIII (Oct. 6, 1945), 8-9.

35. Diana Trilling, pp. 381-2 and Edward Weeks, "Married Love," Atlantic, CLXXXVI (Oct., 1945), 141.

36. Colum, p. 9, and Trilling, p. 382.

37. Even some of the hostile critics (e.g., Weeks, Colum) admitted these things.

38. With reference to this and for a review of many of Lewis' opinions on the changes in Main Street, on race prejudice, on marriage, and on current literature, see S.J. Woolf, "Sinclair Lewis Is Back on Main Street," an interview with Lewis published in the N. Y. Times Mag., XCV (Oct. 28, 1945), pp. 13, 41-2. The most outstanding item in this interview was Lewis' feeling that the people of Main Street have changed, progressed, become more sophisticated. He believed that the smugness had largely gone, and that both horizons and ideas had been enlarged. For a factual report on the changes in Sauk Center, see Henry Grunwald's excellent article "Main Street, 1947," Life, XXII (June 23, 1947), 100ff. It is also interesting to note in Cass Timberlane that Lewis seems to have returned to his earlier prejudice against New York, for he pictured it as a noisy, bewildering, expensive place, quite inferior to Grand Republic, Minnesota. This same prejudice also came into the early pages of Kingsblood Royal, in Lewis' satiric description of a New York family traveling through Minnesota.

39. Maxwell Geismar, Last of the Provincials, p. 140.

40. Sinclair Lewis replaced Bennett Cerf as the book critic for Esquire beginning in June, 1945, and continued to write for that periodical for several months. His most important review was the first, concerning Richard Wright's Black Boy. In regard to Lewis' attack on DeVoto, it was written in reply to DeVoto's article "They Turned Their Backs on America," an excerpt from his Literary Fallacy, printed in SRL, XXVII (April 8, 1944), 5-8. This essay had as its thesis the belief that the writers of the 1920's, including Lewis, had failed to live up to the challenge and the future of post World War I America. Lewis replied to DeVoto's essay in an article called "Fools, Liars, and Mr. DeVoto," SRL, XXVII (April 15, 1944), 9-12, which began: "I denounce Mr. Bernard DeVoto as a fool and a tedious

and egotistical fool, as a liar and a pompous and boresome liar." Lewis went on to attack not only DeVoto's literary creed, but also his character, personality, and physical appearance in terms so completely unrestrained that they far exceed the most bitter satire in any of his books. Much of Lewis' attack was unquestionably in very poor taste, but it does prove one thing - with the right inspiration, Sinclair Lewis could still pen a mighty line. Kingsblood Royal was to be further proof of this.

41. For details of the financial success of Cass Timberlane, see Richard Mealand, "Books into Films," Pub. Wkly. CXLVII (April 21, 1945), 1664.

42. Sinclair Lewis, "Gentlemen, This Is Revolution," originally printed in Esquire, June, 1945, reprinted in Maule and Cane, pp. 148-53. The excerpt here is quoted from Maule and Cane, p. 150.

43. Perhaps the most notable previous mention by Lewis of the Negro had been in It Can't Happen Here, where he had been careful to show how persecution of minority groups, especially the Jew and the Negro, was one of the first acts of native Fascism.

44. Sinclair Lewis, Kingsblood Royal (N. Y., 1947), p. 348.

45. Quoted in Anon., "America's Angry Man," Newsweek, XXIX (May 26, 1947), 102.

46. Quoted in Clifton Fadiman, "The American Problem," SRL, XXX (May 24, 1947), 9.

47. Edward Weeks, "Dark Blood," Atlantic, CLXXIX (June, 1947), 124, contended in this reviewof Kingsblood Royal that this was Lewis' main purpose in the novel.

48. Fadiman, p. 9.

49. Margaret Marshall, "Notes by the Way," Nation, CLXIV (June 7, 1947), 689.

50. Among the contemporary reviewers who questioned the basic plot device of the book, Neil's discovery and admission of his Negro blood, were Marshall, Bucklin Moon, "Big Red," New Repub., CXVI (May 26, 1947), 26-7; Malcolm Cowley, "Problem Novel," New Yorker, XXIII (May 24, 1947), 100-1; and Charles Poore, "Trouble in Grand Republic, Minnesota," N.Y. Times Book Rev., XCVI (May 25, 1947), sec. vii, p. 1, but at the same time not one of these critics denied the essential truth in the book or its total effect.

51. Fadiman, p. 10.

52. Moon, pp. 26-7.

53. George J. Becker, "Apostle to the Philistines," Am. Scholar, XXI (Autumn, 1952), 430.

54. Poore, p. 1.

55. Vincent Sheean, in his review of Kingsblood Royal, "Sinclair Lewis," Commonweal, XLVI (June 6, 1947), 192, stated this opinion, as did most of the other critics. Sheean's article is probably the best review of the novel, while probably the most unfair and ill-advised commentary on it and on Lewis' career as a whole was Warren Beck's essay, "How Good is Sinclair Lewis?" Coll. Eng., LX (Jan., 1948), 173-80, in which he concluded that Lewis' reputation was the most "extravagantly inflated" in contemporary American fiction. For a reply to Beck, see Russell Ames, "Sinclair Lewis Again," Coll. Eng., X (Nov., 1948), 77-80.

56. Anon., Pub. Wkly., CLIX (Jan. 27, 1941), 527.

57. Although only the last twenty pages of The God-Seeker are directly concerned with the founding of this labor union, there seems to be a cerain residue all through the book of a part or parts of Lewis' unfinished labor novel. For example, Aaron Gadd, the hero of the book, was also the name of the hero of one of Lewis' early labor novel outlines. In this particular plan, the labor book was to trace three generations of American radicals, beginning with a frontiers-man (which Aaron Gadd is, more or less, in The God-Seeker). Also, it may be significant that Gadd's nickname is "Neighbor," one of the proposed titles for the unfinished labor novel, referred to several times by Lewis in his letters to Harcourt. Finally, the very title of the novel, The God-Seeker, is reminiscent of another of Lewis' projected labor novel titles, "The Man Who Sought God."

58. Howard Mumford Jones, "Mission in Minnesota," SRL, XXXII (March 12, 1949), 11, notes this.

59. Both Jones and Margaret Marshall, "Notes by the Way," Nation, CLXVIII (April 2, 1949), 394, concur in this opinion.

60. David Daiches, "Mr. Lewis' Accent on the Positive," N.Y. Times Book Rev., XCVIII (March 6, 1949), sec. vii, p. 29, points this out.

61. For an example of a short story by Lewis in the 1930's which was a rather good-natured satire on religion, see "Onward, Sons of Ingersoll," Scribners, XCVIII (Aug., 1935), 65-73.

62. Sinclair Lewis, The God-Seeker (N.Y., 1949), pp. 266-73. These pages contain the full text of Black Wolf's tract. The summary cited is condensed from this.

63. Anon., Pub. Wkly, CLIX (Jan. 27, 1951), 527. This reference gives the sale of The God-Seeker as 31,785, while even the unimportant Bethel Merriday sold 63,000.

64. The source of these statements is Manson, "The Last Days of Sinclair Lewis."

65. This fact was wisely noted by two critics, Serge Hughes, "From Main Street to World So Wide," Commonweal, LIII (April 6, 1951), 648-50, and Malcolm Cowley, "The Last Flight from Main Street," N.Y. Times Book Rev., C (March 25, 1951), sec. vii, pp. 1, 16.

66. Hughes, p. 650.

67. Sinclair Lewis, World So Wide (N. Y., 1951), pp. 96-7.

68. Ibid., pp. 120-1.

69. Howard Mumford Jones, "Exiles in Florence," SRL, XXXIV (March 31, 1951), 20, points this out.

70. The best discussion of World So Wide as an example of Lewis the story-teller and a good survey of Lewis' career from this viewpoint is C. Hartley Grattan's "Sinclair Lewis: The Work of a Lifetime," New Repub., CXXV (April 2, 1951), 19-20. Compare this with Anthony West's review of World So Wide in the New Yorker, XXVII (April 28, 1951), 114, 117, in which West concludes that only Lewis' books of the 1920's will attain permanence.

71. Manson, p. 27.

72. Anon., "Sinclair Lewis, 65, Dies in Rome Clinic," N.Y. Times, C(Jan. 11, 1951), p. 1, col. 2.

73. Manson, p. 112.

74. N. Y. Times, p. 1.

75. Manson, p. 112.

76. Quoted in N.Y. Times, C (Jan. 11, 1951), p. 25, col. 3. For another fine tribute to Lewis by one of his readers, see Harold Kastner, "On Losing a Friend," a letter printed in SRL, XXXIV (March 3, 1951), 25.

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