SINCLAIR LEWIS AT 100

Papers Presented at a Centennial Conference

St. Cloud State University
St. Cloud, Minnesota
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PREFACE

Sinclair Lewis would have been both flattered and edified by the conference that marked the centennial of his birth and by these papers presented on that occasion. He craved attention and acceptance, of course, and the fact that over 100 teachers, writers, scholars, students, and readers from across the nation would gather in Minnesota on a frigid weekend in February to discuss him and his work would have pleased him no end. But he also would have learned a great deal about himself that he might not have anticipated: that readers find both pleasure and stimulus for serious thought in even the most labored productions of his declining years; that still more obscure works such as his essays, reviews, and his short fiction can be taken seriously by scholars; that feminists and victims of prejudice find much to praise in his writing; that his vision of the midwestern small town lives on in, of all things, the work of a radio comedian.

Those who attended that conference at St. Cloud State University, just down the street from a place Lewis often visited, his brother Claude's home, were likewise pleased—and a bit surprised perhaps—that Lewis and his work could be approached from so many different angles so fruitfully. This collection is presented not to shore up Lewis's place in the canon of American letters or to stimulate a sweeping reappraisal of his work; rather, its more modest hope is that readers will better understand the forces which drove Lewis and which resulted in his wide readership, will see the major novels—Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth—in a new light and from new perspectives, and will be motivated to delve further into Lewis's work.

These papers are published essentially as they were delivered at the conference. My editorial changes are few in number and minor in impact; their primary purpose is to regularize handling of names, titles, and conventions of citation. In many instances, the latter has involved incorporating the recent MLA convention of parenthetical documentation, except when such citations would have left a text gracelessly cluttered.

That this collection appeared at all is a tribute to the foresight and cooperation of many. Dean John Berling of the SCSU Learning Resources Center and Tom MacGillivray of the SCSU Foundation generously provided funds for printing and distribution. A grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission made possible the participation of many of the scholars represented here. The university's president, Brendan McDonald, supported all aspects of the project with time, encouragement, and resources. Members of the Sinclair Lewis Centennial Committee devoted long hours to planning and conducting the conference. Finally, Lisa Rarick and Carol Behne typed the entire manuscript, while cheerfully deciphering the bad handwriting and indulging the moods of a querulous editor.

Michael Connaughton
Conference Coordinator

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"YOURS SINCERELY, SINCLAIR LEVY": LEWIS AND THE JEWS

Barry Gross
Michigan State University

My best friend from high school is now a writer, famous enough to be the subject of a forthcoming study. "What did you read," his biographer asks me, "back then in the fifties, back there in the Bronx?"

We read everything, but especially we read American fiction. Ours was probably the last high school class taught to believe that there was an American literary tradition to inherit, a literal blood line to join, the last class taught to believe in cultural continuity, to admire and respect literary elders. Ours was also probably the last class taught to believe that there was no higher calling than art: those of us not so blessed—and it was a matter of being blessed—as to be able to produce it, those of us who could not, alas, be novelists, could at least spend out lives teaching it—preaching it, really—could be critics, and not critics as scourges or excoriators, but as explicators, transmitters, celebrators, champions.

Some of our reading was work. Anything written before 1900 was, by definition, work. Anything written after 1900 by Henry James, Edith Wharton, William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser was also work. Anything written in or about the nineteen thirties--the heaviness one could almost touch, the grayness one could almost smell—was work: the Depression was, after all, depressing, and we were fifteen! Fifteen, we loved the twenties. Maybe because ours too was a post-war decade, maybe because ours too was a Republican president, maybe because ours too was an affluent time, maybe just because of all those wonderful novels, the twenties wasn't work, the twenties was love.

But there was a problem for us in the Class of '55 at the Bronx High School of Science: we were Jewish. There were, of course, no Jewish novels to read, but that wasn't the problem: better than anyone else could know, we, the first-and second-generation American born, knew that our parents and grandparents had been far too busy in the twenties moving from the Lower East Side to the Bronx and Brooklyn where we were born to have written novels. It was too soon for them to have done so, but

we would correct that imbalance, write and teach the novels, and nothing in our education, formal or informal, ever suggested to us that in wanting to do literature we were being presumptuous, that maybe English was a field into which we should fear—or, at least, hesitate—to tread because our parents or grandparents didn't speak it. No one recounted for us the story of how Ludwig Lewisohn could not get a job teaching American civilization at Harvard, no one pointed out to us that at Columbia there was one Lionel Trilling and at Hopkins one Earl Wasserman and at Cornell one Meyer Abrams and at Harvard one Harry Levin and that all the way out there in Montana—Montana!—there was one Leslie Fiedler. No, the problem was not that the American literature we loved was Judenrein—the problem was that it wasn't, that when Jews did appear in the novels of the twenties they were almost always, though in varying degrees, unpleasant.

For a Jewish reader, a Jewish character, however minor, looms absurdly large, a casual anti-Semetic slur, however easy and reasonable to dismiss as innocuous social reflex, reverberates for pages and pages. It may not be right and it may not be fair, but it is unavoidable. Anyone who identifies him or herself as a member of any group that is or has been slighted knows that the wary and guarded eye notices that word—"Jew," "Negro," whatever—half a page away and that a warning bell, a persistent and insistent uh-oh, immediately goes off. So we had this problem, we Jewish kids who loved the American writers of the twenties so much, because we were also the last class taught that writers were to be loved, and not just as artists but as people, that writers, because they did what they did, were a race apart, that good writers were good people and great writers were great people. This problem—their Jewish problem but our American problem—threatened to spoil everything.

Did Fitzgerald, our darling, have to notice, as narrator of The Beautiful and Damned, "two young Jewish men talking in loud voices and craning their necks here and there in fatuous supercilious glances"? Did Anthony Patch have to notice "a dozen Jewish names on a line of stores [and] in the door of each . . . a dark little man watching the passers with intent eyes—eyes gleaming with suspicion, with pride, with clarity, with cupidity, with comprehension. New York—[Anthony] could not dissociate it . . . from the slow, upward creep of this people—the little stores, growing, expanding, consolidating, moving, watched over with hawk's eyes and a bee's attention to detail—they slathered out on all sides"? Did Anthony's rival for Gloria, Joseph Bloeckman, have to be a "stoutening, ruddy Jew" whose "nostrils [are] overwide" and

who speaks "with a little too evident assurance"? Did he have to be "overdressed," did he have to affect an "inappropriate facetiousness . . . in ties"? Did his hands have to advertise themselves with too many "heavy rings" and "the raw glow of a manicure"? And then there was Meyer Wolfsteim in The Great Gatsby, whom Edith Wharton absolutely adored as that "perfect Jew." Fitzgerald should not, of course, be blamed for Wharton's Jewish problem--see, for instance, her "pushy little Jew" Rosedale in The House of Mirth--but maybe he should be blamed for Nick Carraway's. Nick acts as if he's lunching with Cryano de Bergerac: it is not enough for Nick to describe Wolfsheim as "a small, flat-nosed Jew [with] two fine growths of hair . . . luxuriat[ing] in either nostril"; he goes on to describe Wolfsheim as "cover[ing] Gatsby with his expressive nose," as "flash[ing] [his nose] at us indignantly," as "turn[ing] his nostrils . . . to me in an interested way," and he was Wolfsheim's "tragic nose . . . trembling."

What happened to otherwise fine writers when they had to describe a Jewish face? What was Willa Cather thinking of when she had to describe Louie Marsellus in The Professor's House?

> Louie's eyes were vividly blue, like hot sapphires, but the rest of his face had little color--he was a rather mackerel-tinted man. Only his eyes, and his quick, impetuous movements, gave out the zest for life with which he was always bubbling. There was nothing Semitic about his countenance except for his nose--that took the lead. It was not at all an unpleasing feature, but it grew out of his face with masterful strength, well-rooted, like a vigorous oak-tree growing out of a hill-side.

And Cather rather liked her Louie! At least she liked him more than did the Professor, to whom Louie's "zest for life" too often resulted in "heedless enthusiasm that made him often say untactful things" and a tendency to "pick up a dinner party and walk off with it"--Louie pauses in his boasting just long enough "to have some intercourse with the roast beef before it was taken away." Professor St. Peter had "cultivated [Louie] as a stranger in town, because he was unusual and exotic, but without in the least wishing to adopt anyone so foreign into the family circle"--"One likes the florid style," the professor told his wife, "or one doesn't," and the professor doesn't--but his daughter married the Jew, and, the professor believes, "both she and her mother had changed . . . and hardened [and] Louie . . . had done the damage."

John Dos Passos' Jews in Three Soldiers were even more unattractive: Eisenstein, "a little man of thirty with an ash-colored face and a shiny Jewish nose" whose "sallow face [contracts] into a curious spasm" when he speaks in his "feeble, squeaky, . . . nasal

voice"; Stern, who also has "a sallow face" and "curious lips for a Jew [?]." In Manhattan Transfer the Jew most in evidence was the slimy and sinister broadway producer Harry Goldweiser, a source of obvious physical discomfort to Dos Passos: "The curve of Harry Goldweiser's nose merges directly into the curve of his bald forehead, his big rump bulges over the edges of a triangular gilt stool." He is even more repulsive to Ellen, who feels his "eyes measur[ing] her face like antennae," who "feels his words press against her body, nudge in the hollows where her dress clings; she can hardly breathe for fear of listening to him. . . . She feels helpless, caught like a fly in his sticky trickling sentences. . . . His eyes are full of furtive spiderlike industry weaving a warm sweet choking net about her face and neck." When "the back of his hand brushes against hers she clenches her fist, . . . drawing it away from the hot determined pudginess of his hand." It was not surprising, therefore—painful, but not surprising—that when Ellen needed an abortion she visited—who else?—Dr. Abrams, "a short broad man with a face like a rat. . . . Short doll-hands the color of the flesh of a mushroom hang at his sides. He hunches his shoulders in a bow. . . . He heaves a hissing sigh and . . . looks in her eyes with black steel eyes like gimlets."

Jake Barnes was almost as obsessed with Robert Cohn's nose in The Sun Also Rises as Nick Carraway was with Meyer Wolfsheim's: getting "his nose permanently flattened" in a match at Princeton," Jake Says, "increased Cohn's distaste for boxing, but [also] gave him a certain satisfaction of some strange sort, and it certainly improved his nose. . . . I always had a suspicion that perhaps Robert Cohn had never been middleweight boxing champion, and that perhaps a horse had stepped on his face, or maybe that his mother had been frightened or seen something, or that he had, maybe, bumped into something as a young child." But unlike Wolfsheim, Cohn—never, by the way, Robert, but always Cohn or Robert Cohn—was a major character and Hemingway never let the reader forget that Cohn was a Jew, not an unattractive character who happened to be a Jew but a character who was unattractive because he was a Jew. Jake derides Cohn's "hard, Jewish, stubborn streak," Cohn's gazing at Brett "as his compatriot must have looked when he saw the promised land, . . . that look of eager, deserving expectation," Cohn's "air of superior knowledge" (so "superior and Jewish," Bill Gorton adds). Although Brett has had many lovers, Jake only "hated Cohn," felt "unforgivingly jealous" only of Cohn, and Bill understands why: "How did you ever happen to know this fellow anyway?" he asks Jake; "Haven't you got some more Jewish friends you could bring along?" Indeed, Bill is as appalled at Brett's breach of etiquette as Jake is: "What

bloody fool things people do. Why didn't she go off with some of her own people?" When Jake asks Brett what the Count was like, all she has to answer is "He's quite one of us. . . . Oh, quite. No doubt. One can always tell." Robert Cohn, however, just isn't quite one of them, no doubt about it, and they can always tell. Mike Campbell, the main Jew-baiter, speaks for them all when he berates Cohn: "Do you think you amount to something, Cohn? Go away. Go away, for God's sake. Take that sad Jewish face away." After all, as Mike explains, "Brett's had affairs with men before . . . but they weren't ever Jews, and they didn't come and hang about afterward." Jake, who admits to the reader that he "liked to see [Mike] hurt Cohn," has an antipathy to Cohn similar to his homophobia and, apparently, for similar reasons: "Somehow they [homosexuals] always made me angry," Jake says. "I know they are supposed to be amusing and you should be tolerant but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure." It is this irrational anger at what everyone in The Sun Also Rises takes to be Jewish superiority that stimulates Bill's outrageous over-reaction to Cohn's gaffe at the bullfight: it was bad enough that Cohn asked if one can bet on a bullfight—"You don't need any economic interest" was Jake's barely veiled anti-Semitic rejoinder—but when Cohn says he is "afraid [he] may be bored" by the bullfight Bill—decent, even-tempered Bill—positively explodes: "He's got this Jewish superiority so strong that he thinks the only emotion he'll get out of the fight will be being bored . . . That kike!"

Later, when we learned to read more carefully, to listen more critically, some of their Jewish problems did not seem nearly so severe (Cather's, at least in The Professor's House; Fitzgerald's Bloeckman is much more appealing than the apparent hero Anthony Patch, and then, of course, there's Monroe Stahr in The Last Tycoon), some were as severe as they first seemed (Dos Passos', alas), and some (Hemingway's) were even more severe than that first reading suggested. But that first time round they all caused pain and made us wonder where we were in the American literary tradition. But then there was Sinclair Lewis—and not minor Lewis, but the Lewis of his three major novels: Main Street, Babbitt, and Arrowsmith.

When the word "Jew" leapt off the page in Main Street it did so for clear and unequivocal reasons. We understood that Jews were part of the wide, cosmopolitan world that was not Gopher Prairie: Minneapolis, with its "liquor warehouses, Hebraic clothing shops, and lodging houses"; Chicago, where Carol is exposed to "symphonies and violin recitals and chamber music, . . . theater and classical dancing, [and] a certified

Studio Party, with beer, cigarettes, bobbed hair, and a Russian Jewess who sang the Internationale"; and New York, where Carol's sociology instructor "had lived among poets and socialists and Jews." We diagnosed the two village viruses—provincialism and prejudice—by treating Gopher Prairie's attitudes toward Jews as symptomatic: we knew that Gopher Prairie parties were provincial because their entertainment consisted of "stunts: one Jewish, one Irish, one juvenile, and Nat Hicks's parody of Mark Anthony's funeral oration," and we knew that Chautauqua entertainment—"Jewish stories, Irish stories, German stories, Chinese stories, and Tennessee mountaineer stories"—was no different; we knew that Lewis meant to ridicule Will's aunt and uncle when he has them believe that "Jews are . . . always peddlers or pantsmakers" and that Lewis meant to condemn Percy Bresnahan as a bigot when he has Bresnahan accuse Carol of "talking like a New York Jew" when she expresses an interest in the Bolshevik revolution.

We knew that Lewis wanted us to understand that the world of Zenith in Babbitt was wider and larger than the world of Gopher Prairie in Main Street: Zenith has Jews as members of and actors in its social landscape. Of four union officials "one resembled a testy and prosperous grocer, one a Yankee carpenter, one a soda-clerk, and one a Russian Jewish actor [who] quoted Kautsky, Gene Debs, and Abraham Lincoln." The young workers who jeer at one of Babbitt's speeches are "for the most part foreigners, Jews, Swedes, Irishmen, Italians." One of the "boys" in Babbitt's lunch circle at the Zenith Athletic Club is Sidney Finkelstein, the ladies'-ready-to-wear buyer at the local department store, who is no better and no worse than Babbitt or any of his other bourgeois and materialistic friends, identical even in his prejudices, as his own thoughtless and innocuous anti-Semitism makes clear:

> "I always say—and believe me, I base it on a pretty fairly extensive mercantile experience—the best is the cheapest in the long run. Of course if a fellow wants to be a Jew about it, he can get cheap junk, but in the long run, the cheapest thing is the best you can get! Now you take here just the other day: I got a new top for my old boat and some upholstery, and I paid out a hundred and twenty-six fifty, and of course a lot of fellows would say that was too much—Lord, if the Old Folks—they live in one of these hick towns up-state and they simply can't get into the way a city fellow's mind works, and then, of course, they're Jews, and they'd lie right down and die if they knew Sid had anted up a hundred and twenty-six bones."

And in Arrowsmith there was Max Gottlieb, if not the hero of the novel then certainly the novel's—and the hero's—conscience. No American writer had given a Jew such a positive prominent place in a novel before and no non-Jewish one has since,

except Fitzgerald in The Last Tycoon. The difference, however, is instructive: Monroe Stahr is Jewish only because Fitzgerald tells us he is—because his real-life source, Irving Thalberg, was—but Fitzgerald makes no real attempt to connect Stahr's greatness with his Jewishness; Lewis, on the other hand, never lets us forget that Gottlieb is Jewish--it is his dominant and persistent identity in a way it's never Stahr's. Moreover, Gottlieb is not a great man who happens to be a Jew; he is a great man because he is a Jew.

"Max Gottlieb was a German Jew" is how Lewis introduces him to us. He left Germany because he was "often . . . infuriated by discrimination against Jews." He comes to the United States because he believes that America . . . could never become . . . anti-Semitic." At his first post in America, however, "no one . . . regarded him as other than a cranky Jew." At the University of Winnemac where Martin Arrowsmith becomes his student and disciple he is "hated by his colleagues, who were respectful to his face, uncomfortable in feeling his ironic power, but privily joyous to call him Mephisto, Diabolist, Killjoy, Pessimist, Destructive Critic, Flippant Cynic, Scientific Bounder Lacking in Dignity and Seriousness, Intellectual Snob, Pacifist, Anarchist, Atheist, Jew." At Hunzicker's Pharmaceutical Company "the young technical experts resented what [Gottlieb] considered his jolly thrust at their commercialism, [resented] his mathematical enthusiasms . . . viewed him as an old bore, muttered of him as a Jew." At the McGurk Institute he is regarded, once war breaks out, "not as the great and impersonal immunologist but as a suspect German Jew."

Lewis's understanding of the major impulse behind anti-Semitism and how it expresses itself is, I think, remarkable: he understood that anti-Semites thought and used "Jew" not just as the last item in a list or as one epithet out of many but as the comprehensive category which includes and subsumes everything else of which someone is considered "guilty," that to call someone "Jew" in that particular tone of voice is to say it all, is to constitute, in just three letters, a whole bill of particulars, an arraignment. But *if* Gottlieb makes people uncomfortable because of his criticism and his standards and his irony and his questioning and his independence and his intellectuality and his skepticism, deficiencies his accusers label "Jewish," those are the strengths with which Lewis endows Gottlieb and for which he and Martin so passionately love him. They constitute "Max Gottlieb's truth" which Martin "preaches to himself, as Max Gottlieb had once preached to him, the loyalty of dissent, the faith of being very doubtful, the gospel of not believing gospels, the wisdom *of admitting* the probable

ignorance of one's self and of everybody else." They comprise the famous "prayer of the scientist" which Martin utters so devoutly:

> 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!

But Max Gottlieb was not just the flip side of the Robert Cohn coin, the Jew who really was superior and who used his superiority benignly: Lewis made him poignantly, even pathetically, human in his isolation and in his longing for mundane companionship and ordinary love. As a Jew among suspicious or jealous Gentiles he has never had a colleague "to whom he could talk without suspicion or caution." He finds no solace in his Gentile wife, "thick and slow-moving and mute—at sixty she had not learned to speak easy English and her German was of the small-town bourgeois who pay their debts and over-eat and grow red." His son "is a wild thing and a distress," never moreso than when he lets his Gentile classmates believe "that he was from pure and probably noble German stock" and not of the "Jewis blood" about which Gottlieb is "alternately proud and amiably sardonic." Martin Arrowsmith learns too late how profoundly Max Gottlieb longs for him, how deeply he yearns for Martin to be colleague, companion, son: standing on the deck as his boat pulls away from the shore Martin sees on the pier "a lean tall figure running—but so feebly, so shakily— . . . Max Gottlieb peering for [him], tentatively raising his thin arm in greeting, not finding [him] at the rail, and turning sadly away"; when Martin returns to America he finds Gottlieb's "memory gone . . . all his English forgotten," his eyes "clouded with ungovernable tears," the man forever "sunk into . . . darkness."

Later, when Mark Schorer's biography of Lewis came out, we discovered that the positive feelings toward Jews and detestation of anti-Semitism that we detected in Main Street and Babbitt and Arrowsmith were not just literary devices or methods of characterization but were intrinsic characteristics of Lewis. Can one imagine Dos Passos addressing, as Lewis did, the Sunday Afternoon Club of the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston, Illinois and using the occasion to attack the anti-Semitism of Henry Ford? Can one imagine Hemingway refusing—as Lewis did—to stay at the best hotel in Bermuda because the hotel was known to discriminate against Jews? Can one imagine Fitzgerald replying to a letter from the German producer who held the

European rights to his work as Lewis did? Told that he would have to provide "evidence of Aryan descent if the Reich Theater Chamber was to allow a production of [Dodsworth]," Lewis answered, "Who knows what ancestors [I] may have had in the last few hundred years? [I] really [am] as ignorant of them as even Hitler of his. In answering please use [my] proper legal name," and he signed the letter, "Yours Sincerely, Sinclair Levy."

But we didn't know about that then. All we knew was what we read in Main Street and Babbitt and Arrowsmith: not one indignant, trembling, tragic, hairy-nostriled, tree-trunk of a nose; no loud or boasting, florid or affected, squeaky or nasal voices; no mackerel-tinted, mushroom-colored, sallow skin; no suspicious hawk's eyes; no hissing or slathering or trickling or choking; no producers or parvenus; no gangsters; no abortionists; no kikes. Just Jews, and not all of them wonderful—after all, how many Max Gottliebs can any group produce? "Normal" Jews, even mediocre Jews—the aforementioned Sidney Finkelstein in Babbitt, the "polite" and "industrious" Dr. Aaron Shultheis in Arrowsmith "who had been born to a synagogue in Russia but who was now the most zealous high-church Episcopalian in Yonkers."

Not to have been included at all in Sinclair Lewis's America would have been for us disastrous, for he was the most inclusive, the most comprehensive, and, despite his renown as a satirist, the most generous of American novelists, but to have been included in such multiple and various ways when everywhere else we looked in the novels of the twenties we saw Jews who were aberrations of one sort or another, to have one's Jewish outsidedness treated as a source of ethical and intellectual strength when everywhere else we looked in the novels of the twenties we saw Jewish outsidedness treated as a source of gaucherie and social climbing, to know that anti-Semitism was always and only being used to ridicule the anti-Semite when everywhere else we looked in the novels of the twenties we saw anti-Semitism used to ridicule the Jew. . . . We felt that Lewis legitimized us, naturalized us, that Lewis conferred upon us, to borrow *that* evocative phrase Nick Carraway uses when he suddenly feels like a native, feels that he belongs, the freedom of the neighborhood.

SINCLAIR LEWIS, DRINK, AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

Roger Forseth
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I

Mark Schorer, in Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, quotes an anonymous punster who characterized the novelist as "an alcoholite at the altar" (399). The witticism captures nicely a major aspect of the American literary scene since Jack London. This scene—the writer as reverent and heroic drunk—has been neglected or abused or misunderstood by literary commentators. And when it is taken up, it is almost invariably dealt with superficially. Critics continue to cite respectfully an article by the psychiatrist Donald W. Goodwin that appeared fifteen years ago in the Journal of the American Medical Association, beginning: "Alcoholism is unevenly distributed among groups. More men than women are alcoholic, more Irishmen than Jews, more bartenders than bishops. The group, however, with possibly a higher rate of alcoholism than any other consists of famous American writers" (86).[1] Most of the critical literature on the writer and alcoholism is no more serious or enlightening than is Goodwin's generalization. Moreover, useful clinical literature on the writer and alcoholism is practically non-existent. The usual literary treatment of the subject may most charitably be described as a "drunkologue." Alfred Kazin and Bob Dunham, evoking the lurid images of Hemingway's "Giant Killer" and Jack London's "white logic," do little more than string together a series of anecdotes that are of no use in assessing the effect drink has on particular imaginative writers.[2] These critics do not enlighten; they merely point their fingers.

Alcoholic writers—like all writers—are by definition master rhetoricians who are inordinately persuasive at convincing the laity that they are anything but what in fact they really are: drunks. And since alcohol addiction takes so many behavioral forms, the unsystematic observer is likely to be deflected from closely examining the author's actual behavior. Sinclair Lewis, for example, appears to have about equally divided his waking hours after the publication of Main Street (1920) between writing and drinking, carefully and ritualistically separating the two. The situation, however, is not so simple, for Lewis's avocation, that is, drinking, had a vital—though often

indirect--effect on his vocation. Indeed, one detects in the perfectibilitarian compulsions of Carol Kennicott, in the moral (if satirical) miniaturizing of the worlds of George Babbitt and Sam Dodsworth, in the, at turns, savage and moving dissections of the professions of Elmer Gantry and Martin Arrowsmith, a vision that is at once utopian and anti-utopian. Concurrently one finds a sense of almost sentimental compassion for those very characters and situations that have just been savaged. These contrary impulses are central to the alcoholic whose addiction remains unresolved: to feel remorse for that which has just been destroyed. Again and again we find this, in fact, to be as true of Lewis's life as it is of his art.

I wish to emphasize, however, that it remains to be seen whether drink is necessarily bad for art--even where the artist is a compulsive drinker. A distinction must be made between the devastation of personal lives and the realizations of art. Dick Diver in Tender Is The Night and Julian English in Appointment In Samarra and the Consul in Under The Volcano are marvelous creations that could only have been drawn by alcoholics.[3] The personal calamity is sublimated into the positive creative act; in Edmund Wilson's words, the "victim of a malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a superhuman art which everybody has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs" (240). Wilson's observation helps to keep matters in perspective by focusing on the serious art, not the sensational life. Truman Capote once said, with his characteristic exaggeration, that "I don't know a single writer . . . who isn't an alcoholic" (Dunham 29), but more revealingly he also wrote, "I'm an alcoholic. I'm a drug addict. I'm homosexual. I'm a genius" (261). The order here is important, especially for so self-conscious a stylist as Capote; his anguish epitomizes the problem before us. Sinclair Lewis was not so obviously the stylist that Truman Capote was, but nevertheless his mythic world is one of the great creations of American literature. The part that his alcoholism played in this creation is yet to be explored. I intend to begin that exploration now.

II

Mark Schorer's biography and the various memoirs and published gossip supply a great deal of detail about Lewis's behavior, but display little insight into his alcoholism or into the disease of alcoholism in general. Indeed, with regard to Lewis's drinking Schorer's book reminds one of what once was said of E. K. Chamber's life of Coleridge: "Coleridge with the Coleridge that matters left out" (Bernbaum 70). Concerning Lewis's alcoholism, at any rate, Frederick Manfred is precisely right: "Mark Schorer missed

him" (Lundquist, "Frederick Manfred Talks" 5). One must reluctantly conclude that literary people, among others, do not seem to know very much about the nature of alcoholism.

The common misconception persists that "alcohol abuse is predominantly a problem of older, unmotivated, Skid Row males living in the deteriorated areas of the city. In fact, approximately 95% of alcohol abusers are not in this category but rather, are young to middle-aged men and women most of whom are functioning in employment and in families. On the basis of a recent national survey . . . the highest proportion of heavy drinkers in the United States is found among men aged 30 to 34 and 45 to 49" (Peter Miller 1). And Vernon E. Johnson states in I'll Quit Tomorrow that the "most significant characteristics of the disease are that it is primary, progressive, chronic, and fatal. But it can be arrested. The progress of alcoholism can be stopped, and the patient can be recovered. Not cured, but recovered" (1).

Another characteristic of alcoholism that cannot be ignored is the phenomenon of denial: denial by the victim and by his family and friends.[4] Since the disease manifests itself in ways that allow its reality, its control over its victim, indeed, its very existence in specific cases to be denied, people tend to avoid squarely facing the problem. Thus the columnist Richard Cohen wrote in exasperation shortly after the death of Peter Lawford: "I take it that Peter Lawford's death was, as they say, alcohol-related. I say 'I take it' because nowhere was it written, although everywhere it was suggested. It was as if a man had died of bullet holes and not of being shot" (10A). It must also be understood that it is a primary disease; that is, it is not the result or side effect or secondary symptom or off-shoot of some other problem such as poverty, great wealth, overwork, excessive leisure, personal ugliness, marital strife, disgusting family background, loneliness, sexual dysfunction, or bad breath. Other primary diseases—depression, for example, or diabetes or schizophrenia—may also be present, though these cannot be effectively treated until the drinking is dealt with.

Finally, the extension of the disease into the family is a characteristic well known to counselors and clinicians. Non-alcoholic family members characteristically take on some of the destructive behavior of the alcoholic himself: denying the existence of a problem until that is no longer possible, rationalizing the problem when denial is no longer possible, and blaming all but the real cause when rationalization is no longer possible. The result for the family is to contemplate a little world gone bad, a world of confusion and fear and anger, of darkened hopes and ultimately of despair.

There is a solution and, on the evidence, only one: the acceptance by the alcoholic of his alcoholism, and his giving up the hope altogether of ever drinking normally again. And, further, the frank and complete acceptance of this reality by his family and friends (Anderson).[5]

III

In that monument to bad taste, Upon The Death of Lord Hastings, John Dryden celebrates the small pox that was the cause of his subject's death:

> Was there no milder way but the Small Pox,
> The very Filth'ness of Pandora's Box?
> So many Spots, like naeves, our Venus soil?
> One Jewel set off with so many a Foil?
> Blisters with pride swell'd; which th'row's flesh did sprout
> Like Rose-buds, stuck i' th' Lily-skin about.
> Each little Pimple had a Tear in it,
> To wail the fault its rising did commit:
> Who, Rebel-like, with their own Lord at strife,
> Thus made on Insurrection 'gainst his life.
> Or were these Gems sent to adorn his Skin,
> The Cab'net of a richer Soul within?
>
> (1.53-64)

There is a good deal of similarly pointless specificity in the accounts of Lewis's alcoholic behavior: accounts that neither describe the actual progression of his disease nor expose the primitive treatment he received.[6] The following episode from Schorer illustrates this point. The bracketed portion was omitted from the printed edition, and the opportunity was missed to show vividly the extent of Lewis's addiction and the response to it.

> [Lewis] arrived . . . waving a bottle of Scotch. . . . His first words were, "Soda, Roger [Burlingame]! Soda, Ann [Watkins]!" This was the prelude to the by now familiar drinking pattern: he would have a drink, excuse himself and sleep briefly in his room, reappear, burst into brilliant talk for a time, slowly blur, retire again, and so on and on in this extraordinary repetition which continued without alteration for twenty-four hours. Sleep did not always come so readily. [Ramon] Guthrie has a story . . . about an occasion when he arrived at Twin Farms to find Lewis on the verge of delirium tremens. Lewis begged him to call a Woodstock doctor; he needed a dose of chloral hydrate, a hypnotic that would, with one application, prevent the seizure and put the patient to sleep. . . . [The doctor arrived and obliged, and for a few minutes Lewis was quiet in his bedroom while Guthrie and the doctor conversed below, but presently called for another dose. The surprised doctor gave it to him. He waited for a while longer and presently Lewis appeared once more, asking for still another. This was no less astonishing, but the doctor submitted to the demand and now] Lewis at last fell asleep. (620; 1177)[7]

Yet in the face of overwhelming evidence Lewis's illness is often denied. In an otherwise sensitive appreciation Dale Warren allows himself to be taken in by Lewis's denial of his affliction: "On these two occasions Red drank milk. Where was the marathon drinker I heard so much about? Dorothy had told me that Red drank because he wanted to, not because he couldn't help it; that he could go on the wagon as easily as turning off the electric light" (62). We have no reason to doubt Dorothy Thompson said this; but we have every reason to doubt that she really believed it. Thus, not only do we get a wealth of unattractive detail, we also get typically vigorous denial of the disease from otherwise perceptive commentators and friends. In addition, and somewhat gratuitously, we are treated to what is perceived apparently as related unattractiveness.

A favorite recurring—and tedious—image is Dorothy Thompson's recollection that "[s]ometimes when he came to [her] . . . in the night, drunk and demanding, [he] exuded an odor . . . that was like rotting weeds" (Schorer 588; Sheean 208).[8] Indeed, there is such a quantity of similarly unpleasant detail that it would appear only necessary to assert Lewis's alcoholism, were one not presented with the following, from one of his most perceptive commentators: "Drink did not seem to be an uncontrollable habit for Lewis and there is some doubt, at least in the strict medical sense of the term, that he was an alcoholic" (Lundquist, Sinclair Lewis 22). But the crucial fact for the alcoholic is not the pattern of drinking, or the control or lack of control, or the specific behavior while drunk or on the wagon; rather it is the compulsion, the unresolved obsession with drink in all its forms and manifestations—as idea as well as fact.

It is frequently observed that Lewis had long periods of sobriety, particularly when he was living in Duluth (1944-46), and it is an observation he carefully cultivated. Betty Stevens, a former student whom he invited to visit him at this time, tells us:

> *He opened* the liquor cabinet in the dining room where there were all kinds and brands of liquor, artistically arranged. "Would you like to have a drink?" he asked. "I keep this for friends, never drink at all. Used to be a drunk, you know," he added, matter of factly. . . .
>
> "I'm going to have to leave about 8. Have to go to that dreadful woman's for dinner. . . . " He shuddered. "She's a temperance worker in this part of the country, but she's a secret drunk. I've seen her falling down drunk in New York. I wouldn't say a word if she were just a plain drunk--but such a hypocrite." (22)

I do not doubt for a moment that he meant consciously what he says about hypocrisy. Yet his research assistant during his stay in Duluth confirms Lewis's custom of "drinking from a flask of brandy before breakfast at the start of each day" (Greve).[9] Judging from the evidence I have seen, his drinking appears to have been carefully controlled at this time—according to Schorer he never drank in public while living in Duluth—but secretly drink he did. What must be kept centrally in mind, at all events, is that an alcoholic who is drinking or who has temporarily stopped drinking, or is "controlling" his drinking, is nonetheless obsessed with alcohol. He is thinking about it all the time. He is also concealing this preoccupation in one way or another. The result is emotional as well as behavioral dishonesty: in the end a fatal flaw for a writer.

The destructiveness of Lewis' affliction can be seen in the extraordinary series of letters he sent to his first wife during their initial separation in 1925. A few quotations give the flavor:

> You have of late become extraordinarily bullying. You give me orders, grimly, as though I were a drunken private and you a colonel. Your theory has been that you had to do this because I was drinking so much that I was no longer dependable; and for that theory you have had vast justification. But actually the fact is that by your assuming this stringent leadership you have deprived me of self-government; actually when I am by myself, given enough time and leisure to realize my problems, I straighten up and take charge of the show quite satisfactorily.
>
> And that is what, just now, I must and will do, for a period which may be only a few weeks, and may be forever.

The spurious logic continues:

> The second feature is that more and more you want to have a settled life with intelligent but definitely respectable neighbors. . . . I must have a time now of going to heaven or hell in my own way, unguided, unbossed, unbullied. . . .
>
> However low your opinion of me at this moment . . . you must admit that I am glad in every possible way to have you conduct your own life absolutely as you desire, providing only that such conduct of it shall not imply the bossing of my life. . . .
>
> . . . I really do love you better than anybody else in the world, but . . . not even by you can I any longer be bullied.

In two succeeding letters he concludes his rationalizations:

> I am convinced as ever that it must be a long while before we even see each other. This resolution may break down, but I hold it firmly now, for

the reason that once we are together, it becomes impossible to think independently, plan boldly. We'll be bullying each other. . . .

. . . unless the two Hawks, you and I, are left free to fly absolutely as we desire, without even explanations one to the other, there will be [a divorce]. . . . Complete independence. I must no longer lie, shift, ask permission, resent orders, await your plans. I must run my life and at any cost. . . . If I fall in love with some girl, it must be my business . . . here in this little flat with all I want to drink . . . with the chance to get as drunk as I want and nobody to criticize, I have been drinking incomparably less. It's I, now, who am the boss. . . . All my life, whether in relation to my father, my university, my bosses on jobs, or to you, I have functioned better, more surely and resolutely, when I have been in charge, not bullied by someone else. . . . Let yourself be free. You have your chance! . . . You have your chance of freedom. (Schorer, Lewis 428-33)

The counterpoint here of "bully" and "freedom" demonstrates an accomplishment of all alcoholics I have known: a mastery of the rhetoric if not the logic of libertarianism. The rhetoric of Lewis in these letters is the rhetoric of the classic alcoholic determined to protect his addiction to the exclusion of all else, to the exclusion of his wife, his child, and of all those obligations that are, to the healthy, normal person, self-evident.

The effect of the illness on his second wife, Dorothy Thompson, can be most touchingly seen in this letter she wrote to Francis Perkins, one month after Lewis's death:

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for the note to me, especially the one to Michael. It accomplished what nothing else has done—it gave him the relief of tears. For the first time someone testified to Michael of his Father's love and faith in him. That, which he wanted more than anything else, Hal withheld for reasons you will perhaps understand. Hal was a most repressed soul in many respects. He hardly knew Michael, and perhaps my attempts to change this situation only worsened it. No one more wanted love than he, or more needed it, and no one more often doubted and rejected it. He was a tragic personality in the deepest sense of the word. Of course his death tore open innumerable old wounds. I felt, what I always felt with him, again that sense of having been a total failue, of having betrayed his hopes, and added to his sorrows. It was, of course, the drinking that finally drove me to a frantic attempt at survival by isolation. It wrecked our relationship as man and woman. Hal did not like pity, but the bleeding pity I always felt for him, at all times and under all circumstances, was a deep and ineradicable form of love. . . .

His end . . . was like a Greek tragedy. He relapsed into drinking after years of abstinence, after a book he was writing was thrown into the waste-paper basket as utterly unworthy. . . . Realizing that he had to abstain or die, he cut it out all but entirely[—]an occasional glass of watered wine.

> But now nature took the most hideous revenge. The sudden withdrawal sent him, first gradually, [t]hen with striking finality, into an acute delirium tremens[—]something that had never happened in all his years of drinking. He never recovered from the unconscious delirium.[10]

A powerful human document, and one infused with confusion and rationalization and error. Dorothy Thompson takes moral responsibility for a condition for which she is in no way accountable. Sinclair Lewis died of drink. He lived his life in a state of unresolved alcoholism. For that illness no one is morally accountable. He did not "used to be a drunk." He was always a drunk. This central fact must be accepted—accepted not with contempt or derision but with sympathy, indeed with the scriptural sense of charity, but it must be accepted. Only then can one see Sinclair Lewis as he really was; and from there, one is tempted to add, his literary achievement as it really is.

IV

What significance does the acceptance of Sinclair Lewis's alcoholism have for the calibration of his literary achievement? All biographical applications to art are in the last analysis speculative, but by applying what we know of his affliction to his work we may gain some insight. Lewis did not—unlike Fitzgerald, for example, or John O'Hara—obsessively concern himself with the subject of drinking. Unlike Hemingway, Lewis did not treat drinking as an art form. While it is true that Elmer Gantry begins with the memorable sentence, "Elmer Gantry was drunk," and goes pretty much downhill from there, we do not get an anatomy of alcoholic destruction in the manner of, say, Joseph B. Chapin in John O'Hara's Ten North Frederick. Lewis, the alcoholic writer, does not often write about obsessive behavior.

What is critically interesting is not the explicit treatment of drinking in Lewis's work but rather what I take to be the effect of the emotional poverty associated with unresolved alcoholism. In this respect the difference between his development of Carol Kennicott in Main Street and Jimmy Marshland in Cass Timberlane is revealing. His treatment of women in and out of his books gradually becomes truncated—a form of emotional impoverishment particularly associated with addiction. Earlier in this essay I examined Lewis's letters to Grace at the time of their first separation in 1925. Twenty years later he summed up what had become his settled opinion: "Many American males confuse their wives and the policeman on the beat" (Cass Timberlane 286). Lewis uses the rhetoric of oppression here; what he really seems to mean is he does not want anyone interfering with his drinking. Apparently just to make things absolutely clear,

Lewis discharged, as it were, his debt to the three principal women in his life in a single passage at the beginning of Cass Timberlane:

> [Cass] was abnormally conscious of the universal and multiple revolution just then, in the early 1940s, from sulfa drugs and surrealism and semantics to Hitler, but he was irritated by all the Voices, by the radio prophets and the newspaper-column philosophers. . . . And ever since his divorce from the costly and clattering Blanche, he had been lonely. Could Jinny Marshland cure his loneliness, his confusions in the skyrocketing world? . . .
>
> Why should a charming girl, probably a dancer to phonographs, have any desire to cure the loneliness of forty-year-old single gentlemen? There was tenderness and loyalty in Jinny, he felt, but what would she want with a judge whom she would find out not to be a judge at all but another gaunt and early-middle-aged man who played the flute? (13-14)

These are the words of a man—of Lewis in the mind of Cass—who cannot commit himself emotionally, who is looking for ways to hold back. Lewis seems to have intended such awkwardness as a reflection of manly charm, but the effect is emptiness of feeling.

But the saddest and most revealing example of Lewis's obsessive and unresolved rage against women is not in his fiction, but in the account by Frederick Manfred of his visit to Lewis in Duluth in 1946 when Lewis was sixty-one years old. Manfred reproduces the following monologue:

> "Yes, Dorothy was a great gal. A wonderful gal. If only she hadn't been so damn bossy. . . . But . . . she was being what she was, she just had to be bossy. Too bossy. That poor fellow she's married to now, I sure pity him. I know exactly what he's going through. . . .
>
> Why don't you leave us poor little fellows alone? We're only trying to get along the best we can. In our little way. . . .
>
> [L]et us have some freedom. So we get a chance to grow up . . ."

Warming to his subject, he continues:

> "You know how a man is in the morning. After he's washed the sleep out of his eyes, and is sipping at his coffee, why, he slowly starts getting a few ideas on how he's to face the day. Ideas at that time are very delicate and uncertain. They need to be encouraged. They need warmth and love. Gentle love. So here he is, the poor sucker, warming his hands around his cup of coffee, savoring it, feeling the warmth of it rising in his nostrils, and slowly but surely becoming aware of a few timid little morning notions in his head, and vaguely hoping that these little timid creatures may grow up . . . when all of a sudden his hag of a wife has to mention some horrible personal defect of his, some trivial little thing that sticks him in the soft spot, that only she could know because she dresses and undresses on the opposite side of the bed from him. And Wheeet! Gone are the little timid

embryo ideas for that day. How that man has refrained from poisoning her is beyond me. Beyond me. No, most modern American women are ruined."

And his rage concludes:

"American women are like that. Killers of talent. Unless it's talent that helps them obtain power. But the minute it's talent that they can't control or understand, why, stab, stab, stab, they've got to prick the balloon." (176-77)

This outburst is clear illustration of an alcoholic (whether sober or drunk) accumulating unresolved feelings of resentment and hostility, and then suddenly giving uncontrolled vent to them.[11] Most non-alcoholics would not let the process of resentment go on in anything like this fashion.

Though Lewis's words might well seem those of a man out of control, because they are from a masterfully articulate wordsmith, they precisely reflect, in diction and intensity, his deepest feelings at that time, and there is, I believe, more raw, concentrated passion here than in all Cass Timberlane. Cass Timberlane is a very disappointing book precisely because, unlike the diatribe in his Duluth home told to us by Manfred, Lewis was just going through the motions. The depiction of the relationship between Jinny and Cass is a good story told with a great deal of skill, but it is an exercise and no more. Listen to the language of love:

He hated jealousy and all its rotten fruits, as he had seen them in court, hated that sour suspiciousness which ferments in love, yet over a girl to whom he had once said just fourteen words, he was mildly homicidal toward an imaginary young man.

"I seem to be falling in love," he thought profoundly. (37)

Or:

He ended his brooding with a cry that made Cleo leap protesting into the air:

"I do love that girl so!" (47)

Or:

As they drove up to Miss Hatter's he wound up all the tinsel of his thoughts in one bright ball and tossed it to her: "I certainly have enjoyed this evening!"

She answered with equal poesy, "So have I!"

He tentatively kissed her hand. She could not have noticed it, for

she said only, "You'll come to our party, week from Thursday, then?"

"Yes, sweet, Good night." (51)

Or finally:

> Cass saw Jinny daily, and he was disconsolate in discovering that the course of true love runs in curlicues. (111)

It is difficult to determine what Sinclair Lewis is doing here, but whatever it is there is no demonstration of affection, merely an assertion of it. And in the end we do not care what becomes of Jinny and Cass because their world and their concerns are not real. There is no emotional risk in Cass Timberlane, and where there is no risk there is no emotional power.

How refreshing it is, then, to turn back twenty-five years to Main Street. It has, as Constance Rourke put it, "the fabulous touch" (284). Perhaps the most difficult imaginative feat for the reader today is to see the book for what it really is. It is so overlayed with subsequent impressions and judgments—not the least of them the author's own—that its original substance and charm are in danger of being lost. Arthur Mizener's comment may be taken as representative:

> Sinclair Lewis' attack on Main Street is only partly successful, but not because Lewis doubted that Main Street's stupid provincialism could be defeated. What limited Lewis' success was his inability to imagine with any effectiveness a cultivated community with which to replace Main Street; he had an inadequate sense of life. (122)

But it is George H. Douglas and not Mizener who is correct: "it is a gentle book, full of optimism and naivete" (339), not mainly a satire at all. For Main Street is essentially a courtship novel, and as I was rereading it Jane Austen's Emma, of all things, kept coming to mind. For all the obvious differences between these two books, a brief comparison does shed light. Will Kennicott and George Knightly in their bucolic manliness are remarkably patient and understanding, and they crack down at precisely the right moment. Carol and Emma are silly as only intelligent and healthy people can be when their minds and bodies have too little to work with. I will not drive the comparison further than it deserves, but it does shift the emphasis from satire to manners.

Indeed, the real courtship in Main Street is not between Carol and Will—that is over almost before the book begins—but between Carol and Gopher Prairie, and a marvelous courtship it is before Carol is domesticated! Construed thus the novel consists of a series of episodes concentrically arranged to form a community; the various

facets of this community then chip away at Carol's rampant individualism, weathering rather than destroying it. The courtship is more a contest than a battle, consisting of emergent compromises in which each side is momentarily under the illusion that it has won. The mediating element here, of course, is Will, but he primarily personifies the town, and the book is about Carol not just learning to love Will but learning to accept with feeling the town as well. At the end of the novel when Will speaks to Carol of "a second wooing" (421), he is speaking for Gopher Prairie, too.

Seen in this fashion the whole is indeed greater than the parts. The view embodied in Main Street of the individual and the community, of an organism consisting of complementary parts, forms the essence of the attacks on the individualistic, libertarian ethic of, for example, John Stuart Mill (142-90), whether Carol, for all her sociological reading, was aware of it or not. And it is Carol's individualism that goes through a sea-change without being dissolved ("I will go back! I will go on asking questions. I've always done it, and always failed at it, and it's all I can do" [423]). In the end she is not broken; she grows up.

I do not find Carol Kennicott unrealized. She does superbly what she is designed to do, just as Everyman and Christian do. Perhaps too many readers of Henry James have come to Main Street expecting to find Isabel Archer—who moved to Italy and regretted it. Carol serves Gopher Prairie's needs precisely because she is suitable. The fusion of the two is matrimonial and mythic. The best sentence in Cass Timberlane applies far better to Gopher Prairie and its people than to Grand Republic: "To its fugitive children, Grand Republic will forgive almost anything if they will but come back home" (384). Its essence is forgiveness--one of the most powerful of all scriptural words—not giving in. This is the conclusion that Main Street embodies, but it is a conclusion very easily lost. Indeed, Sinclair Lewis himself managed to do so in a smart-aleck article he wrote for The Nation in 1924 called "Main Street's Been Paved!"

Main Street is, then, an honest and healthy and fully realized novel, and in large part it is so because Carol Kennicott is an honest, healthy, and fully realized character. Main Street is a fine, complex novel, not simply a single-faceted satire. When Lewis wrote it he was already showing signs of alcoholism, but he was not yet consumed by his obsession, and therefore his treatment of his heroine is normal and healthy, not thin or shrill or flat. Twenty-five years and thirteen novels later Sinclair Lewis in Cass Timberlane succeeds only in completing a job. The writing has become routine; the obsession has destroyed not only the ability to deal honestly with women but also

the ability to feel and thus to write with emotional conviction. The effort that is Cass Timberlane is not to be despised but it is not art; it is therapy.[12]

NOTES

[1]See Dunham 30; Roulston 157. Psychiatrists have not been effective in the treatment of alcoholism.

[2]In addition to the articles by Kazin and Dunham, see the 1978 Writer's Digest survey, "Booze and the Writer." More thoughtful accounts are to be found in Hackett, Hall, Hyde, Leonard, and especially Newlove. For a sound historical survey, see Lender and Martin.

[3]Under The Volcano is the only novel to receive, I think, anything like serious critical attention with regard to the alcoholism theme; see Hill and Gilmore. Day's biography, Malcolm Lowry, is, to my mind, even more harrowing and tragic than the novel.

[4]For the classic analysis of denial, see Anna Freud, The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense, especially chapters 6 and 7.

[5]I wish to thank Greg Anderson, Program Director of the Miller-Dwan West Treatment Center of Duluth, Minnesota, for his expert guidance concerning the subject of the treatment of alcoholism. For a fuller discussion of the clinical aspects of alcoholism, see my "'Alcoholite at the Altar': Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination," Modern Fiction Studies, Fall, 1985 (forthcoming).

[6]In addition to Schorer and the unpublished documents on which he relies, the principal sources of information on Lewis's drinking are the two books by Grace Hegger Lewis, Dr. Claude Lewis, Sanders, Sheean, and Thompson. Of the numerous anecdotal accounts, Breasted, Cerf, Perry Miller, and Woodward are especially useful.

[7]The passage in brackets is from a typescript copy of Schorer that is in Special Collections, Wilson Library, The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. I wish to thank Theresa Wolner, Research Assistant, Special Collections, for permission to quote from the Schorer typescript.

[8]cf. Barnaby Conrad: "I noticed his breath smelled like photographic negatives" (43).

[9]Edward Greve, associate professor of library science at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, served as research assistant to Sinclair Lewis during his stay in Duluth,

1945-46.

[10]From an unpublished letter, 9 February 1951, in the Sinclair Lewis collection at Macalester College. I wish to thank Jean Archibald, Director of the Library, for permission to quote from this letter.

[11]In conversation (February 7, 1985) Frederick Manfred told me that Lewis's performance was an attempt at humor. If so, it is clearly humor that got out of hand.

[12]I wish to thank my wife Grace Bahr Forseth for her help and advice. Portions of this essay were read at the American Culture Association Conference, University of Minnesota, Duluth, 22 March 1985.

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DODSWORTH AND WORLD SO WIDE: SINCLAIR LEWIS'S EUROPEAN/AMERICAN DILEMMA

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Throughout his lifetime, Sinclair Lewis felt an attraction for Europe. Not the modern Europe of trains and cars and heavy industry, but the romantic Europe of literature: Scott's Midlands, Tennyson's Camelot, and Dickens' London. Lewis was fascinated by this Europe, yet at the same time was proud of being an American. America to him was a young, bustling country, vulgar and vigorous, where the desire to get ahead and make money seemed to outweigh any other considerations. Europe, on the other hand, represented an area of the world burdened with history, but also concerned with gracious living, intelligent conversation, and an interest in many different aspects of civilization. In Dodsworth, the novel that marked the end of the most productive period of his career, and World So Wide, his last novel, Lewis explored his ambivalent feelings toward Europe and America in an attempt to discover where, if anywhere, he truly felt at home.

Lewis's interest in Europe, particularly England, began when he was quite young. Considered an odd child by many of his neighbors, he had few friends to play with (Schorer 20-21), and often turned to the books in his father's library, especially Malory and British writers of the nineteenth century such as Scott, Dickens, and Tennyson (Schorer 24-25, Fadiman 47). Lewis was fascinated by the simpler, more romantic era portrayed by these authors and the ideal code of chivalry. As he told Clifton Fadiman, he was disappointed when he found out that "there were no knights in Minnesota" (47).

Yet as he grew up, Lewis was caught up in the excitement of his age: the widespread use of cars, the coming of airplanes, the growth of booming industrial cities. He even made the hero of his second adult novel, The Trail of the Hawk, a barnstorming pilot whose feats of skill and courage were to be echoed several years later by Charles Lindbergh. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James may have complained about the paucity of literary material in America, but Lewis obviously found a lot in the American scene worth writing about. He was interested in America's pioneer past and how cities

had grown from rough settlements in such a short time. Many of his early heroes and heroines sense an affinity with the pioneers: Carl Ericson of The Trail of the Hawk feels himself a "spiritual descendant" of the pioneers (121); Milt Daggett in Free Air virtually blazes a trail as he drives across the west in his "bug"; and Arrowsmith, the medical pioneer, has a story that begins with his courageous grandmother driving across the prairie in a covered wagon.

But despite his glowing expectations for Europe and America, Lewis was constantly disappointed in the reality that he saw. This may have contributed to his overwhelming urge to travel, to find a place which would live up to his hopes. His early attempts were not successful: he felt like a hick and an outsider at Yale, he saw the utopian community of Helicon Hall dissolve as an impractical scene, and his early trips to England as a penniless student in a cattle boat were not romantic, but hard, dirty work. Lewis felt a deep affection and patriotism for America and often said that it was the greatest country in the world. He was a believer in the American dream and all it signifies in terms of the ideals of American democracy--life, liberty, and particularly the pursuit of happiness. Yet this idealism was too often frustrated, for the America he saw offered opportunity, but not always to blacks or women; offered education, but men like Elmer Gantry and Gideon Planish could twist it to their own materialistic uses; and offered justice, but not always to prisoners or Indians. In his Nobel Prize speech of 1930, Lewis spoke of America as "my own greatly beloved land" (SLR 4), but also as a country which "with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures" (SLR 6).

This conflict between the real and the ideal which existed in Lewis's life also contributed to his fictional technique. In his most successful novels Lewis's ironic effects are the result of his realistic presentation of American life in the context of American ideals. Thus in Main Street, for example, the friendly small town that Carol moves into is actually suspicious of new ideas and new people and not so friendly to outsiders like Carol and Miles Bjornstam. During the 1920's, Lewis focused primarily on the failings of American society to live up to the democratic and Christian principles on which it was founded. Europe, when mentioned at all, is used as a vehicle to show the narrow-mindedness of some Americans. They view Europe suspiciously for its radical ideas of Shaw and Wells or dismiss it as second rate compared to America. Elmer Gantry, during a trip to London, complains, "No git up and git to these foreigners. Certainly does make a fellow glad he's an American" (Gantry 405). A few of Lewis's

early characters, such as Professor Frazier in The Trail of the Hawk, Dr. Bruno Zechlin of Elmer Gantry, Arrowsmith, and Dr. Gottlieb, appreciate the intellectual achievements of Europe, but they are an unpopular minority and are ostracized by solid, middle-class citizens.

It was not until Dodsworth in 1929 that Lewis seriously confronted his conflicting feelings about America and Europe and attempted to resolve them. The idealized, literary Europe that fascinated Lewis is reflected in Sam Dodsworth's first glimpse of the coast of England:

> Mother England! Land of his ancestors; land of the only kings who, to an America schoolboy, had been genuine monarchs. . . . land where still, for the never quite matured Sammy Dodsworth, Coeur de Lion went riding . . . where Oliver Twist still crept through evil alleys, where Falstaff's belly-laugh discommoded the godly. . . . Mother England! Home! (47).

But Lewis learned--and Dodsworth, to his dismay, did, too—that England was not really like that. The English were just as concerned about rising prices, new car models, and paved roads as were people in the United States. And yet (again, this ambivalence exists throughout the novel), there were castles and titles and little amenities which made English life seem just a bit more civilized to Dodsworth. In the course of the novel Dodsworth will act out what Dick Wagenaar called Lewis's "constant tension between an intellectual awareness of fact and an emotional need for fancy" (232).

Sam's trip abroad can be seen as an awakening, not only to new cultures, but also to new varieties of experience, both emotional and social. It is as though Lewis wrote a bildungsroman of a middle aged man who finally grows up emotionally. At the same time, Sam also matures in his relationship with his own country. At first Dodsworth says little when Fran and her admirers attack America. He even feels ignorant when asked questions about America that he doesn't know how to answer. Only once during his first stay in England does he speak up for his country and then rather in amazement as he realizes that up until then he has just "sort of taken it for granted" (83). He is unsure of himself as an American and as a husband. He plays the role of father/protector for the charming Mrs. Dodsworth, virtually abdicating his role as lover and companion. At Lady Ouston's, Fran defends America as vigorously as he does and momentarily reverts to the feelings of a loving American wife. She even tells him, "Sam Dodsworth, if you ever catch me trying to be anything but a woolly American, will you beat me? (85). However, her resolve to be a "woolly American," which supported Sam, does not last very long and Dodsworth again is uncertain of his

feelings for his country. This confusion is intensified at a dinner arranged for him by a group of expatriate American businessmen. They assure him of their love for America, but desire to stay in Europe as long as they possibly can, at least until America becomes civilized. Of course what they admire about Europe, besides its lack of Prohibition, is that "Paris and London have become two of the nicest American cities" (98).

Fran involves herself in the social scenes of Paris, Montreaux, and Berlin, hoping to become accepted as a European, not as a vulgar American. Dodsworth, on the other hand, finds Europe a place to reassess himself as an American. He slowly and painfully learns something of Europe, but even more about himself as a person rather than just as an American businessman. In Europe Sam is no longer forced to accept the values of everyone else and can contemplate what values are really important to him. He knows that there is a middle ground of decent American values of democracy and justice which are ignored by the snide expatriates and snobbish Europeans and exaggerated and given only lip service by his booster friends in Zenith. This middle ground which Sam hopes to locate is symbolized by the Sans Souci Gardens, a housing development which he hopes will combine the American know-how of building and modern appliances with the precepts of good architecture and decoration from both Europe and America. As Dodsworth's marriage crumbles and he feels cut off from automobile manufacturing, this housing scheme becomes his vision for the future. He feels it will give him a chance to unite the best of European and American ideas and make him feel like a man with many creative years ahead of him.

But despite this bright vision, Lewis leaves the ending of Dodsworth ambiguous. Sam has taken a giant step towards maturity in leaving Fran for Edith. The closing words of the novel, however, leave us in doubt as to Sam's future: "He was, indeed, so confidently happy that he completely forgot Fran and he did not yearn over her, for almost two days" (377). Dodsworth is almost as much a captive of history as Europe is, and it is hard to tell whether he can escape his past and make a creative new life for himself either in Europe or America.

In the novels that Lewis wrote after Dodsworth, Europe is less remote and romantic and more similar in outlook, with many of the same problems as the United States. Ann Vickers is so moved by the plight of slum children in London that she resolves to become a social worker. Europe seems to contain as many gangsters and corrupt political has-beens as Chicago, for even the deposed Buzz Windrip ends up in Paris to live out his days with "the ex-king of Greece, Kerensky, the Russian Grand Dukes,

Jimmy Walker, and a few ex-presidents from South America and Cuba" (ICHH 421). Even two of Lewis's rather simple-minded middle class heroes, Myron Weagle and Fred Cornplow, feel comfortable enough to travel to Europe.

In the 1930's and 1940's, as Lewis's vision of the world became darker, his novels seem to alternate between attacking current problems such as fascism and racial prejudice and ignoring the modern world as much as possible. The new generation about whom Carol Kennicott and George Babbitt had expressed such high hopes had become the Cornplow children of The Prodigal Parents. In It Can't Happen Here and Kingsblood Royal Lewis went so far as to write two very bleak visions of the United States. A subsequent novel, The God-Seeker, was Lewis's one escape to the past, and there he found the modern problems of racial and class hatred as well.

In his final novel, World So Wide, Lewis returned to a comparison of the Untied States and Europe in order to see if there was any place that had at least an approximation of the ideals that he cherished. World So Wide is a reworking of Dodsworth with a younger hero, Hayden Chart. The parallels to Dodsworth are many: both men are separated from their irritating wives, Sam by divorce, Hayden by his wife's death; they both find European, especially Italian, culture fascinating and soothing to their nerves; they both visit landmarks to take their minds off problems; and they both fall in love with sophisticated American women who have become European in attitude. But Chart's story contains some variations on Dodsworth's themes. Hayden is a younger Sam Dodsworth given a second chance at life. Chart's not too well-beloved wife is killed in an automobile accident, so he is burdened only with her memory, not her physical presence. After the accident, Chart examines the altered circumstances of his comfortable life in the ironically named city of Newlife and finds the pattern of his life now to be strangely meaningless. He seems to be suffering from a modern malaise. "It was a dream of life in which he had been busy and important and well-bedded and well-fed and had glowingly possessed everything except friends and contentment and any reason for living: a dream, a fable, a caricature of grandeur" (30). Chart holds out the hope that in Europe he may find a new meaning for his life.

Unlike Dodsworth, who at least began his European travels with the expectation of seeing interesting places, Chart's journey in the world starts at the low point of his life. He suffers from the same sort of mental depression Dodsworth had after Fran left him. He drifts, ostensibly studying architecture, in order to keep his thoughts on the European past rather than his own past. While in Florence, Chart becomes

a part of an American expatriate colony, which, with other English-speaking groups, guards against foreigners—Italians and also other Americans who are not willing to settle into this nice conservative enclave. These expatriates no longer want challenges from life; they want only to live within their circle, discussing what is wrong with America, "and, all in all, unknowingly all, do nothing but wait for death" (95). It is here that Chart meets Sam Dodsworth who has not been able to make a home again for himself in the Untied States. Sam explains, "well, we tried to go back and live in the States, in Zenith, but we're kind of spoiled for it. Everybody is so damn busy making money there that you can't find anybody to talk with, unless you're willing to pay for it by busting your gut playing golf" (46-47). Yet Sam is not toally happy in Europe either. Both Dodsworth and Chart are escaping responsibility in trusting to Europe to provide them with a meaningful and interesting life. They are both creative, vigorous men, but Sam has given in to self-pity instead of making use of his talents. Hayden is on the verge of making the same mistake. From experience Sam warns him, "Don't stay in Italy too long—or anywhere else abroad. It gets you" (46). Lewis likened this desire to tarry in Europe with an "opulent mistress" (121) who may be fascinating for a while, but will leave you with nothing but memories. Professor Perry Miller, who became friendly with Lewis shortly before the latter's death, noted that Lewis had unwittingly become like Dodsworth. "He had not mastered Dodsworth: he had presented him, and now was compelled to re-enact him" (31). Dodsworth here speaks for Lewis as he warns Chart, the man he might have been, not to repeat his mistakes.

Chart may intellectually understand his danger, but emotionally he is not ready to act on it. It is not until he receives an epiphany in an American church in Florence that Chart recognizes the truth of Dodsworth's words. In the church, Hayden feels at one with the American community and with America itself: "He knew then that he was unalterably an American; he knew what a special and mystical experience it is, 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" (121). This vision is what eventually gives Chart the desire to go home and escape the "sleeping-draught" (139) of Europe. In resisting temptation and choosing to return to America, Chart is a symbol of the active, creative life. To intensify this, he also marries a woman who makes him feel like an American, "not a bookish nonentity studying in an alien and indifferent land, but a man, a boss, a friend, citizen, a person of heart

and welcome" (205).

In his review of World So Wide, Lewis Gannett noted that "Sinclair Lewis Never Doubted that America Was Home" (1). This sentiment certainly applied to Hayden Chart, but does it really apply to Lewis? James Lundquist speculates that in giving Hayden Chart a hopeful future with a loving wife, Lewis was, in effect, rewriting the ending of his life as he would have liked (13). In having Hayden choose to return to America and acknowledge his identity as an American, Lewis is again indulging in wish fulfillment. I think that Lewis may have also wanted to do this, but unlike Hayden, he was unable to ignore the faults he saw in American society in order to embrace his country wholeheartedly. "I love America," he told Perry Miller shortly before his death, "I love it, but I don't like it" (31). This is why World So Wide fails to achieve the greatness of his best novels. Instead of confronting his true feelings, Lewis is here satisfied with simple wish fulfillment. The happy ending, while it may have satisfied Lewis emotionally, is too facile and does not have the emotional and psychological truth that the ambiguous ending of Dodsworth has.

Sinclair Lewis, particularly in Dodsworth and World So Wide, intellectually and emotionally examined various countries to see which one came closest to his vision of democratic ideals. Although America offered hope to many, Lewis felt that too often it came up depressingly short in justice and equality. In Dodsworth, Lewis's hero asks what makes a great country and where America is lacking. Dodsworth learns many faults about his country, and becomes ambivalent about its greatness. In World So Wide many of the same questions are asked and America is shown to have a least as many faults as it did in 1929. Hayden Chart, after his emotional experience in the American church, believes that these problems are not really important. He feels that the American spirit, which includes the same hopes that Lewis had, is greater than any amount of faults. Lewis, in his final novel, offers this solution to his ambivalent feelings about America, but his heart is not in it. He remained, as Dorothy Thompson called him, a disappointed democrat until his death in Florence, Italy in 1951.

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MISUSED LANGUAGE: THE NARRATOR'S SATIRIC FUNCTION IN SINCLAIR LEWIS'S BABBITT

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In his influential essay on Sinclair Lewis, Mark Schorer argued that any strengths Lewis's novels possessed were, paradoxically, a product of the very narrowness of the author's artistic vision. Drawing on the commonly-held assumption that Lewis lacked "spiritual gifts," Schorer reasoned that what one observes throughout Lewis's work is an "absence of conflict between genuine orders of value," an absence caused by the author's own spiritual confusion ("Method" 57). Yet out of this weakness on Lewis's part, Schorer went on to add, ironically "arises again the whole impression of bare brutality which is, after all, the essential social observation" (54). Lewis's power as a writer, according to Schorer, resulted from his portrayal of a fictional world that is vivid, but only because of a simplistic approach to his subject matter, itself a reflection of his limitations as a writer. If his presentation of life strikes us as brilliant, it does so only because it lacks that necessary complexity which a better, more competent realist presumably would have included.

It is not surprising Schorer should attempt to explain Lewis's appeal as a novelist on the basis of what he could only construe as his weaknesses; readers familiar with his Sinclair Lewis: An American Life will recall the summary dismissal of Lewis in that volume as "one of the worst writers in modern American Literature" (813), a remark made in seeming disregard of the extent to which Lewis's work as satire must of necessity involve a degree of distortion;[1] characters and issues have to be oversimplified and distorted to some extent—and hence, in the literal sense appear "unrealistic"—if the satiric message is to be conveyed to the reader with sufficient force to have the desired effect. Schorer, like so many other critics, tended to view Lewis as if he were a realist alone, and pronounced him an inferior writer accordingly.[2] In doing so Schorer was, of course, both right and wrong. Undeniably, characters possessing mature and well-developed sensibilities are but infrequently encountered in Lewis's work. But to say this is not to label either work or author as flawed; the same could be said of Gulliver's Travels or The Rape of the Lock. Furthermore, this characteristic can be

found in virtually all satire from Juvenal to Waugh, the success of which in large part results from our ability to perceive a satiric work as "unrealistic," recognizing that no satire can be fair to all sides and contain every possible shading and still be called satire.

In Babbitt, generally considered Lewis's most successful satiric work, the reader, ever conscious of the absence of spiritual concerns in the world of Zenith, is never allowed to forget that if this sphere of human activity is conspicuously missing, it is not because Lewis himself was spiritually sterile or one-dimensional in his approach to his subject matter. If we witness no overt conflict between "orders of value" within the novel, it is because as far as Lewis is concerned, twentieth-century American men and women have lost sight of any such conflict, and are aware only of the lower, materialistic order, any sense of higher, spiritual preoccupations having long ago been lost. This absence of a legitimate spiritual life to his characters constitutes in the main Lewis's satiric message. Throughout Babbitt, Lewis drives this point home relentlessly, through the use of devices that are in no way accidentally employed. We are repeatedly reminded that the preoccupation with mundane and materialistic concerns all but totally consumes the mental energies of modern Americans and leaves them in a state of complete befuddlement whenever they are called upon to respond to larger philosophical, moral, or spiritual issues of life.

At the same time, a satire's effectiveness is also dependent on the reader's never being allowed to lose sight of a moral standard or some ideal of conduct against which the satire's characters and their behavior can be constantly measured. Interestingly enough, there is no clearly-defined moral standard given us within the novel, at least none in the form of a comparatively enlightened character, say, who articulates a recognizably superior point of view against which the other characters could be evaluated. Within Zenith itself, there is next to no concern with spiritual issues. With the possible exception of Seneca Doane, who appears but twice in the book, and comments only briefly on the insidious effects of standardization, there is no Clarissa to drive the satiric point home in Babbitt, or for that matter any major figure of true sensitivity or intelligence. In spite of this, Lewis is able to remind us in an ingenious way of legitimate values and concerns, forgotten though they may be by virtually all the inhabitants of this world. While our awareness of Lewis's satiric purpose proceeds in large part from the negative example of Babbitt himself, it is also substantiated at key points by the narrator as well, who on certain occasions deviates from strict,

objective, descriptive reporting to enter into an apparently sympathetic identification with Babbitt's values, in contexts so absurd that we are forced to see the values themselves as false. The reader, perhaps recalling Wayne Booth's reminder that "we are alerted [to irony] whenever we notice an unmistakable confict between the beliefs expressed [in this case, by the principal character and, obliquely, by the narrator] and the beliefs we hold and suspect the author of holding" (73), sees these aspects of the narration as ironic and responds accordingly.

In the opening sections of the book, for example, the narrator's approach to Babbitt and his environment is constantly shifting. Passages of more or less straightforward description alternate with sentences and paragraphs wherein certain words, normally used to describe activities and pursuits of genuine spiritual, intellectual, or aesthetic importance, are applied inappropriately, in connection with trivial, domestic, or otherwise inconsequential issues. In the opening paragraphs we are told, without apparent irony on the narrator's part, that the buildings of Zenith "aspired" to the sky. Recognition that the verb "aspire" means "to have an earnest desire . . . for something high and good" makes it impossible for us to remain oblivious to the irony in the buildings being "neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings" (5). Lewis's point, that religious significance has been perversely assigned to a materialistic pursuit, is reinforced by the narrator's misuse of a word normally thought of as being applicable only to certain higher regions of human concern.

Most of these misused words appear in the first seven chapters, and coincide roughly with the structure of the novel as originally conceived: that is, the tracing of a 24-hour day in Babbitt's life. As one proceeds through the opening sections, it is possible to form two lists, the one consisting of words whose use appears generally inappropriate and inflated, given the contexts in which they appear, the other a subgroup of words that have traditionally—and properly—been utilized in circumstances peculiar to religious or spiritual states of being.

Examples abound: Babbitt sleeps on a mattress termed "triumphant" (15), and is "proud" of an alarm-clock the narrator describes as a "rich device" (7); the articles in his bathroom provide a "sensational exhibit" (8); wiping his face on the guest towel is a "dismaying thing" (9); Babbitt's clothes are an "adornment" (11); dressing is a series of "crises" (11); spectacles are "wonder-working" and possess "character" (11); changing the contents of his suit is, again, "sensational" (11); he experiences "panting tension" (7) over the starting of a neighbour's car; his yard "delighted" him because it was "perfec-

tion, and made him also perfect" (8). As businessmen, Babbitt and his friends also know "by passionate instinct" that their system is "perfect" (24); Babbitt "admired" a gas-pump (26), the districts of Zenith (28), his office (31), mechanical devices (58), and a movie theatre (129). Racing streetcars in a "rare game and valiant" (28). Starting his car is of "epochal" significance, driving a "romantic adventure" (47), parking the car a "virile" adventure "masterfully" executed (29). He sees his office as a "sure lovely thing" he had "created" (31) and is "stimulated" accordingly; the writing of an ad is "artistic creation" (34); quitting smoking is an act of "heroism" (35), a "crusading passion" which he "ecstatically" attempts (36) by "courageously" hiding his cigar-box (44). Not surprisingly, his preparations for bed are a "tremendous" undertaking (81) as well.

Within the subgroup, in addition to the above examples, we learn that Babbitt was a "pious" motorist (7). He and his family, "devotees of the Great God Motor" (19), discuss cars with "ardor" (63), and motoring, along with golf and bridge, are "sacred" sports (56); mechanical devices are generally "symbols of truth and beauty," and he and a customer "worship" machinery together (58). His "god" was modern appliances (8); the contents of his pockets are of "eternal importance, like baseball or the Republican Party" (11-12); looking at a skyscraper, Babbitt sees "Integrity" and "decision" in the building, and he "beheld" it with "reverence," inspired by the rhythm of the city" and seeing the building "as a temple-spire of the religion of business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men" (14-15); he hums a popular song "as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble" (15). The archidiaconal Howard Littlefield serves Babbitt as a "spiritual example" who "confirmed the business men in the faith" by relating "the confessions of reformed radicals" (24) and by adding to their labours "an aroma of sanctity" (25); Babbitt "rejoiced" (35) over an advertisement he had written; he considers a Realtor a "seer," and his ability to guess the direction of city growth "vision" (38). The men in the washroom at the athletic club are bent in "religious prostration before their own images" (50). As far as his intellectual interests are concerned, Babbitt is a "devotee" of comic strips, the reading of which is a "rite" (64). Other rites include preparing for bed (81), going to a ballgame (128), and the "drinking of cocktails," which was "as canonical a rite as the mxing" (94) of them; doubting the worth of his dinner party is a momentary "sacrilege" (89) from which he "repented," if only temporarily.

In the above examples, it is apparent that all the words in question are being misused in a specific way: all are somehow too large for their referents, and are normally

reserved for more significant contexts than those in which they are appearing. One should not be "pious" about motoring, or "proud" of a simple alarm-clock; the events and objects in question are, by general consent, considered too trivial to justify such intense responses.

Importantly, the narrator himself gives no overt indicating that he personally regards his choice of words as inappropriate; there is no indication he is being consciously sarcastic. Not only does Babbitt regard deviations from his morning routine as "crises"; the narrator appears to as well. Resulting from this, the reader comes to see that if the narrator does not seem aware his language is inflated, it is because in one sense it is not. However inappropriate may be their use in strict semantic terms, there is a way in which these words are being used accurately. Babbitt is "inspired," in a manner of speaking, by the city; business is a type of religion as far as he is concerned, insofar as it is capable of eliciting an "awe" of sorts from him. In short, these mundane issues have taken on an aura of vast importance to Babbitt, whatever we might think of their actual significance. Through this method, Lewis succeeds in creating, from this contrast, that response in the reader which I believe is essential to successful satire: a simultaneous recognition both of the extent to which the particular depiction is absurd, viewed by rational standards, together with the realization that, however exaggerated the scene might be, it is nonetheless lamentably true in the sense that it is an accurate reproduction of some people's responses.

Babbitt's entire society is presented to us, partly through this stylistic device, as a kind of satiric fantasy world where spiritual terms, having been cut off completely from their original contexts, are misused as a matter of course, the words themselves having remained even though the states of being they once described have been forgotten. Herein, of course, lies the distortion, in the strict realistic sense at least: no society has lost sight of the importance of the life of the spirit quite as completely as has the Zenith of Babbitt, nor could such a society ever exist exactly as Lewis had depicted it. Nevertheless, Lewis is portraying a world where certain attitudes and preoccupations which we easily recognize around us have become totally dominant, to the exclusion of all other qualifying concerns. Our society is in many respects similar to Babbitt's though it may not be identical to it. What we do possess is at least some sense of the spiritual life, and we are reminded of it in part through the narrator's obvious misuse of certain terms, the mere mention of which is enough to recall the values those terms properly describe. In short, when told Babbitt was a "pious" motorist

whose god was modern appliances, we cannot help but be reminded of true piety, recalling that it defines a state of "reverence toward God," realizing that modern appliances are not a fitting object of such a response, and recognizing wherein Babbitt is deficient, our critical faculty having been reinforced and sharpened. It is the misused word, so obviously out of context, which gives us the necessary reference-point or perspective Schorer thought non-existent in Lewis. Through this device Lewis is able early in the book to make us see exactly what is wrong with Babbitt before events proceed in earnest and Babbitt begins to move and act in this world. Having once prepared us to see Babbitt in this way, then, Lewis diminishes greatly the misuse of words in the narration, as Babbitt's own utterances--the discussion of "education" with Ted, the speech before the Real Estate Board, etc.—increasingly speak for themselves.

Interspersed with the above are passages of generally realistic description, where words entirely appropriate to the scene being described are employed. Factories have "sooted" windows; tenements are "colored like mud." As far as Babbitt's appearance is concerned, his face is "babyish"; an "unromantic" man with "thick legs," he walks down the "hard, clean, unused-looking hall into the bathroom," his face "petulent" and "sleep-swollen" (8). Here, the words Lewis chooses do not strike us as incongruous, misleading, or out of palce. Their purpose is, of course, to depict with as much photographic vividness and accuracy as possible the drab and often ugly underlying reality of Zenith that Babbitt and his friends, actually afraid of what such drabness says about their socity, prefer to ignore. These passages also serve to heighten our sense of the contrast between Babbitt's illusions of his society's greatness and its actual worth.

Babbitt's growing frustration and discontent with his life—the major complicating factor around which the novel revolves—is ultimately caused by his society itself, whose only criterion for determining worth is that of physical size, be it that of a house, a car, or a bank-account. We need hardly be told that "Babbitt respected bigness in anything; in mountains, jewels, muscles, wealth, or words" (29). Naturally, what security and peace of mind Babbitt is able to receive from such a society can be at best only tenuous, and we are given numerous indications of his deep, underlying dissatisfactions with life, a dissatisfaction brought about by the failure of the material world to bring him anything but temporary fulfillment. Hints that a genuine crisis is impending are given throughout the early chapters of the book: Babbitt's admission to Paul that he is not "entirely satisfied" (52), his boredom with his silly, artificial friends, his vague sense of Dante's worth and of his own inability to penetrate the world of which Dante

was a part, and his dissatisfaction with his wife, all contribute to his ennui. But the full extent of his unhappiness is only acknowledged following the imprisonment of Paul for the attempted murder of his shrewish wife Zilla.

Babbitt's reaction to Paul's imprisonment is important, not simply because it represents a turning-point in his life, or even because it sparks his rebellion and subsequent ostracism from established society. Rather, it represents the first time he has had to confront directly the moral emptiness of his society which Lewis first brought to our attention early in the novel. Simply put, Babbitt's material possessions fail to provide him with succor in his hour of spiritual turmoil; his alarm-clock and cigar-lighter can bring him no peace of mind as he wrestles with larger aspects of his existence for the first time. His frustration finally comes to a head in the wake of his enforced separation from Paul because such separation wrenches him from the one feeble link with the spiritual world that had itself been sufficient to stave off complete despair. Now, alone in his house, able to articulate for the first time that human life cut off from such sources of fulfillment "was meaningless," he begins to formulate questions about his raison d'etre:

> He was thinking. It was coming to him that perhaps all life as he knew it and vigorously practiced it was futile; that heaven as portrayed by the Reverend Dr. John Jennison Drew was neither probable nor very interesting; that he hadn't much pleasure out of making money; that it was of doubtful worth to rear children merely that they might rear children who would rear children. (221)

Babbitt's final question—"What was it all about? What did he want?—may sound comical and adolescent, and the reader might conclude it was not meant to be taken seriously. However, I believe Lewis intended we see it simultaneously as puerile and important. "Babyish" Babbitt, although forty-six, is only now asking legitimate questions about the meaning of life which he should have asked himself decades ago. Lewis's point, of course, is that only when such questions are asked can one's values ever hope to be sharpened. And indeed, Babbitt does seem vaguely to understand this and be on the threshold of a major discovery, for he asks further "What did he want? Wealth? Social position? Travel? Servants? Yes, but only incidentally" (my emphasis, 221). Here, to Babbitt's credit, he has for the first time seen the comparative unimportance of material and societal values, has recognized that dedication to a materialistic life-style can bring with it only incidental and passing satisfaction, and has acknowledged that there may be superior areas of activity open to man. But, unfortunately, he can

go no further. Babbitt's society has so dominated him that his capacity to develop spiritually has been stunted: like an unused muscle, Babbitt's ability to think of philosophical or spiritual issues has atrophied, in part because the terms once used to describe these states have long ago lost their rightful meanings. If we respond "piously" to a car or with "reverence" to an office-building, we are left in the position of neither knowing how to respond in situations which legitimately call for piety and reverence, nor of having words at our disposal to define or frame—and thus give clarity to—such responses. All that is left is a vague sense of something indefinably missing from one's life. Babbitt's state is similar to that of a blind man who, though dimly cogniscent of a realm of reality forever beyond his perception, has no true notion of what that realm could be like.

Thus, Babbitt can proceed no further because he lacks both the mental equipment and the verbal tools to describe his discovery. He can conceive of the significance of his friendship with Paul, but only in the most obvious physical sense, trained as he has always been to evaluate aspects of his life in physical terms. Accordingly, he can only define his need as for "the [physical] presence of Paul Riesling." This being impossible to attain, it is not surprising that he should stumble "into the admission that he wanted the fairy girl—[but as before] in the flesh" (221). While one can sympathize with Babbitt's loneliness, it is plain that he still ought to be able to see that Paul's incarceration and the resulting geographical separation that takes place need not spell the end of their friendship. However, unable to proceed from there, unable to fathom friendship as an abstract state of being independent of the friend's physical proximity to him, all he can do is dedicate himself to search for a <u>physical</u> substitute for Paul in the person of a flesh-and-blood fairy child, who was herself nothing more than a child's symbol of romance, adventure and freedom in the first place. Here again, able only to conceive the meaning of human relationships in physical terms, he proceeds to enter into vulgar and unsatisfying sexual encounters which leave him even more frustrated than before. As far as other aspects of his "rebellion" are concerned, every rebellious gesture is enacted on a superficial level. Where before he spent his days at the office, now he goes to the movies; where before his evenings were more or less sober and domestic, he now cavorts drunkenly with the "Bunch": throughout, his inner mental attitude remains fundamentally unchanged. Even when Babbitt is at his most publicly rebellious, Lewis is quick to remind us that he still instinctively "hated the scoundrels who were obstructing the pleasant ways of prosperity" (252).

The novel ends with Babbitt unable to move beyond his discovery that "he could never run away from Zenith and family and office, because in his own brain he bore the office and the family and every street and disquiet and illusion of Zenith" (242), his capacity for development squelched by the exclusively materialistic society in which he lived. Pathetically whimpering that he has been "licked . . . to a finish" (316), he passes on the torch to his preposterous son Ted. Babbitt's respect for Ted's adolescent impulsiveness—eloping with the brainless and movie-mad girl next door—surely constitutes Lewis's final satiric shot. Unable as ever to distinguish meaningful from trivial human behavior because he still lacks the terms necessary to make such distinctions, he construes Ted's act as a manifestation of genuine self-reliance, and the novel ends with every indication that the future generation will be even more vulgar and materialistic, and just as ignorant of the life of the spirit as Babbitt's has been.

NOTES

[1]Although Schorer's assessment of Lewis's abilities did soften, and appears almost sympathetic in his "Afterword" to the Signet edition of Babbitt, even here Schorer's main critical contention remains that Lewis's power and appeal is more the result of sociological, historical and other "extra-literary" factors than it is a product of his aesthetic or satiric skills.

[2]At the same time, Lewis himself cannot be said to have helped matters much, for he continued to insist throughout his life that he was a realist. See Feinberg 63.

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MAIN STREET COMES TO TENNESSEE: A SOUTHERN RENDITION OF "THE REVOLT FROM THE VILLAGE"

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Main Street achieved veritable best-seller status and vaulted Sinclair Lewis into literary prominence in 1920.[1] Assessing its impact, Mark Schorer has remarked: "No reader was indifferent. . . . Whether or not the individual reader saw himself in the book, America in general found that a new image of itself had suddenly been thrust upon it" (269). Schorer further claimed that Lewis "was an extraordinary influence, the major figure, probably, in what is called the liberation of modern American literature" (811). "With Main Street," Anthony Channell Hilfer has stated, "the revolt from the village became official, public, almost institutional. Main Street was not only a sociological novel but a sociological event" (158).

Such generous accolades indeed seem valid, for with the popularity Main Street enjoyed, other American writers, aspiring to capitalize on Lewis's success, viewed his novel as a liberating stimulus and thereby created their own satiric versions of Carol Kennicott and Gopher Prairie. In so doing, they fulfilled English novelist John Galsworthy's prediction in a letter to Lewis in 1920 that ". . . your book may well start a national mood toward Main Streets and other odd places of national life" (Schorer 274).[2] Chief among these aspirants was T. S. Stribling, a Tennessee critical realist who has been aptly called a "disciple of Sinclair Lewis" (Holman 22). Between 1922 and 1934, Stribling published seven novels set in provincial southern locales and exhibiting in varying degrees features of the Lewisian mode, from small-town disparagement, to Babbittry and boosterism, to the commercialization of religious life.[3]

In the 1920s Stribling published three novels that undeniably draw on the Lewis legacy—Birthright (1922), Teeftallow (1926), and Bright Metal (1928)—each a graphically engaging work of iconoclastic social realism exposing the underside of southern village life after the manner of Main Street. Of the three, Bright Metal is the most conspicuously conscious imitation of Lewis's novel; in fact, it is probably the best of several southern renditions of Main Street that appeared in the 1920s.[4] The purpose of this paper will be to examine Bright Metal in some detail, pointing out the novel's

many similarities to Main Street. Yet, despite the overwhelming internal evidence that Bright Metal is an authentic imitation of Main Street, Stribling never publicly acknowledged that Lewis's novel was his chief literary source and even categorically denied ever having read any of Lewis's works (Laughing Stock 182-83).[5]

In spite of this denial, contemporary reviewers of Bright Metal generally noted that Stribling's novel was another Main Street. Clifton P. Fadiman indicated that Agatha Pomeroy, the central character, was "Carol Kennicott, except that she is set in the Tennessee Hills instead of Gopher Prairie" (222). Maristan Chapman, in the Saturday Review of Literature, stated that "Bright Metal, like Mr. Stribling's other novels, is of the Main Street school, which deals with complaint without suggestion of remedy, but in craftsmanship it shows a great advance" (211).[6]

Set in and around the village of Lanesburg, Tennessee, likely the fictional counterpart of Clifton, Tennessee, Stribling's life-long home, Bright Metal focuses on a provincial hill culture, a society not unlike Gopher Prairie in its opposition to the cultivating influences of the outside world. The society the novel treats consists principally of bigoted, narrow-minded, crassly materialistic, culturally backward, religiously fanatical people. Intolerant of lifestyles not conforming to their own, the inhabitants of Lanesburg accept lawlessness and political chicanery as desirable practices.

Using the "revolt from the village" paradigm he had employed in Birthright and Teeftallow, his two previous novels in the Main Street tradition, Stribling satirized in Bright Metal some of the same defects of provincial, middle-class life that Lewis had likewise regarded as reprehensible. In so doing, he closely approximates the central structural strategy Lewis had employed in Main Street; namely, an intruder plot, a device wherein the author directs his criticism of narrow-mindedness and its by-products from the perspective of a cultured, sophisticated outsider, a young, well-educated, idealistic woman, who, through her marriage to a small-town native, is thrust into a manner of existence vastly different than she anticipated. To be sure, the youthful cosmopolite-intruder falls victim to acute culture shock, the effects of which are readily noticeable because Agatha Howland Pomeroy, Stribling's intruder-protagonist, like Lewis's Carol Kennicott, has been nurtured in a liberal, urban environment. In fact, Agatha's formative years generally resemble Carol's. Sharing the heroine of Main Street's artistic sensibility and penchant for cultural pursuits, Agatha, after completing her formal education, migrates to New York City, hoping to become an

actress. Once there, she joins a Greenwich Village cult, a group that exposes her to avant garde artistic and intellectual fads. Later she marries John Calhoun Pomeroy, a Tennessee hillman cast in virtually the same mold as Carol's spouse, Dr. Will Kennicott, and finds him compulsively complacent, unyieldingly pragmatic, and annoyingly impetuous--unnerving idiosyncracies attributable to his provincial background.

Like Carol Kennicott, Agatha's exposure to the severely limited and bigoted way of life of a small, uncultivated hill town disillusions her. And in much the same manner as Lewis's Carol, Agatha seems to perceive only the drab, unsightly aspects of her home in the Tennessee hills. Instead of discovering Lane County, Tennessee, to be "a colourful region, a land of colonial mansions, or handsome men and beautiful dark-eyed women, of antique courtesy and overflowing hospitality" (Bright Metal 3), a view epitomizing a popular literary stereotype of the South, Agatha observes a dismally depressing environment, about which she feels immediate aversion, a reaction not unlike the one Carol experiences when viewing the ugly, shabby buildings of Gopher Prairie for the first time. In describing Agatha's initial impression, Stribling writes:

> The silos which dotted the northern landscape disappeared from the scene; the brightly painted farm houses gave way to more or less neglected and weather-worn buildings. The very farms themselves ceased to be contiguous acres under cultivation but lapsed into clearings in the woods with here a deserted field given over to weeds and gullies and there a corn patch in a new ground, with corn ripening amid stumps and skeletons of deadened trees.
>
> The very forests themselves wore an air of desolation. The larger trees had been cut away for lumber and cross ties. Leaving the small growth strewn with stumps, piles of chopped-off branches and long chips. (21)

Like her prototype Carol, Agatha is not only repulsed by her initial exposure to the drab, uninviting surroundings of the countryside but by the bigoted and apathetic attitudes of the people. Yet possessing innocent idealism and a reformist spirit, Agatha attempts to bring about changes to correct some of the undesirable conditions she finds in Lanesburg and its environs. Whereas in Main Street Carol becomes the prime mover of a reform campaign to increase the meager wages of the Scandinavian hired servants, Agatha channels her energy into reforms to aid the town's black inhabitants, another oppressed minority whom the white villagers treat unfairly and cruelly. The injustice of racial oppression is compounded because local politicians, dishonest and materialistic, work openly to perpetuate the inequities existing in the community.

Like Carol, who attempts to engage the sympathies of the ladies of Gopher Prairie, chiefly members of the Jolly Seventeen and of the Thanatopsis Club, two prominent

women's organizations, Agatha also turns to a local woman's club, the Ladies Christian Workers Society, to try to gain support for her own reforms. But Agatha's efforts, like Carol's, meet solid resistance; in short, the respectable ladies, because of their deep-rooted bigotry and unflagging allegiance to the status quo, remain apathetic, refusing to lend any sustained assistance to her reform measures. What we see here, then, is that Stribling has duplicated a plot situation, with only slight modifications, that Lewis had charted first in Main Street. In both novels the plot's outcome is the same: reforms go unrealized, and the heroines experience defeat and disillusionment.

Another parallel that Bright Metal shares with Main Street involves the dull, strained relationships that Carol and Agatha have with their provincial in-laws. in both novels, the heroines' in-laws blatantly exhibit attitudes common to the village mentality—cruelty, prejudice, lack of cultural refinement, pettiness, narrow-mindedness, and staunch fundamentalist religious beliefs. Whittier and Bessie Smail, Doc Kennicott's uncle and aunt in Main Street, contribute substantially to Carol's dissatisfaction with Gopher Prairie. Outspoken, domineering, and contemptuously critical, the Smails are unreasonably intolerant of Carol's liberal views. They even seem to find self-satisfaction from baiting Carol into talking about her "newfangled ideas" so that they can smugly ridicule them. The Smails not only mock her nonconformist views but frequently meddle in her private affairs as well. Furthermore, Aunt Bessie sometimes spies on Carol and spreads scandalous gossip about her.

Agatha's relationship with her in-laws, the Pomeroys, bears a close resemblance to the scenario featuring Carol and the Smails. As in Main Street, the relationship between the liberal, sensitive urbanite and a puritanical, complacent family in Bright Metal results in an inevitable and irreconcilable conflict. Like Carol's in-laws, Agatha's exhibit all the despicable traits germane to provincial society and are prime targets for Stribling's satire. Like the Smails, the Pomeroys are steadfast believers in fundamentalist doctrine. But even more so than Carol's in-laws, they rely on the Bible as the main shaping influence behind their pietistic attitudes. Parilee Pomeroy, Agatha's sister-in-law, a woman thoroughly indoctrinated in fundamentalism, narrowly interprets most natural occurrences as having providential meanings. For instance, finding out the university will not grant her a degree because she has failed a biology examination covering material on evolution, material antithetical to her fundamentalist beliefs, Parilee rationalizes her disappointment to Agatha, lamenting that her failure was only "God's plan to teach me humility" (193).

To an even greater extent than Parilee, Mrs. Pomeroy, Agatha's mother-in-law, exemplifies the intractable, narrow temperament of the Tennessee hills. Similar to the Widow Bogart and Bessie Smail in Main Street, Mrs. Pomeroy proves to be petty and obnoxious. An unreserved critic of anything not conforming to her own insular beliefs, she is obsessively suspicious of Agatha and of the liberal Northern society from which she came. Possessing neither tact nor humility, Mrs. Pomeroy, like Carol Kennicott's relatives-in-law, rarely turns away from an opportunity for taunting Agatha. To illustrate, on the morning just after Agatha has moved into the Pomeroy household, she innocently violates hill propriety by befriending the Negro cook, whom she respectfully addresses as "Mrs. Coltrane" and whom she offers to assist with the breakfast dishes. Mrs. Pomeroy sharply reproves Agatha's indiscretion, exclaiming, "Why, Aga'thy! . . . 'nobody calls 'em mister or mizzis—I declare you Yankees are such funny folks!" (47).

As was true for Carol in Main Street, Agatha becomes thoroughly disenchanted by the pettiness, crudity, and inhumanity she observes all around her. While the small-minded views of her husband and his family contribute significantly to her bewilderment, she discovers other unsettling revelations about hill culture which disturb her, including a doctor who never attended medical school and who allows his patients to prescribe cures for their ailments; a poor-white farmer who has killed a man because a fly speck created a two-dollar discrepancy in his account book; and a fanatical preacher who frightens children by exhorting that unless they submit to God's will, they will surely suffer eternal damnation.

Victims of village intransigence, both Carol Kennicott and Agatha Pomeroy feel trapped by marriages that have thrust them into a barbarous, insensitive, dull, ultra-conservative culture. Even so, both discover similar outlets from their frustration. Keenly sensitive to beauty, they are attracted in a Wordsworthian manner to the loveliness and exurberance of natural settings. Carol finds temporary satisfaction, observing the tranquility associated with the coming of spring to the fields and prairie lands on the outskirts of Gopher Prairie; Agatha similarly turns to nature, which affords her occasional reprive from the ugliness and disorder of Tennessee hill country society. And such escapes renew Agatha's despondent spirit. While driving along the countryside one afternoon, she finds vicarious release, watching the unrestrained mobility of a soaring hawk, a stark counterpoint to her own felt-sense of entrapment:

> A hawk took her attention. It hung high above a cottonfield on narrow

> teetering wings. . . . Under the spell of the outdoors the girl tried to fancy how the Autumn day must appear to the hawk, to be waveringly balanced high up in currents of air, to scrutinize the cotton rows which were immensely magnified, and get to have a feeling of distance so that what was seen in minute detail appeared far below; a paradox of the senses. . . . As these fantasies filled the girl her arms and dorsal muscles tensed unconsciously with the effort of imaginary flight. (125-26)

Carol Kennicott and Agatha Pomeroy likewise find temporary respite from the village mentality through forming alliances with older men similarly disenchanted with the dullness, vulgarity, and complacency of provincial life. In both Main Street and Bright Metal, a middle-aged lawyer with progressive ideas and literary interests serves as one of the primary confidants of the heroine. In both novels, moreover, the character of the lawyer serves as a psychological sounding board to the heroine, one who, like her, is aware of the enervating conditions of the village.

Guy Pollock, the bachelor attorney and the first of Gopher Prairie's rebels in whom Carol confides, is an outsider. A person of diverse intellectual and cultural interests, he joins Carol's coterie who discuss and analyze the village's deficiencies. yet having lived in Gopher Prairie for most of his adult life, he has repressed much of his former idealism, becoming instead a cynic and skeptic. As he admits to Carol, he has been stricken by one of most dreaded of all diseases, the "village virus," which he describes as "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" (155-56). While sympathetic with Carol's plans for making Gopher Prairie a beautiful and cultured town, Pollock ultimately sells out to respectability, conforming to the dictates of the village.

Like Guy Pollock, Buckingham Sharp in Bright Metal is a lawyer and trusted advisor to the heroine. Sharp, too, is an outsider. Having lived in Lanesburg a number of years, he is still regarded suspiciously by the people. As a Democrat in a largely Republican county, he expediently succumbs to the "village virus." Wishing to preserve his lucrative legal practice, he refrains from being too outspoken on political matters. Moreover, a pragmatist and materialist who appears supportive of Agatha's program for political reform—to find, in her words, "a group of honest intellectual candidates" (147) to oppose the corrupt and incompetent incumbents—Sharp, at the same time, seems dubious about Agatha's design for eliminating political corruption. Sharp does

agree to run against A. Ham Tweedy, one of the unscrupulous Republican office-holders, but in making this decision, Sharp, so Stribling implies, does so with the knowledge he probably cannot defeat his opponent. Therefore, his entry into politics, while apparently well intentioned, is actually more than anything else an empty gesture to appease Agatha. A victim of the "village virus," like Guy Pollock, Stribling's attorney is, in fact, a hypocrite and timeserver, afraid to transgress the rigid standards of village conformity.

Carol Kennicott and Agatha Pomeroy also confide in men whose intelligence, independence, and cynicism have alienated them from their respective village societies. Miles Bjornstam, the cynical handyman whom most of Gopher Prairie's residents regard as "slightly insane" and whom they scornfully call the "Red Swede" because of his non-conformist, broad-minded views, becomes one of Carol's most trusted friends. A sensitively perceptive observer, one astutely alert to sham and hypocrisy, Bjornstam entertains no illusions about the foibles of the townspeople. Finding in Carol a kindred spirit, he jeers at the materialistic, smugly complacent villagers who believe that "everybody who doesn't love the bankers and the Grand Old Republican Party is an anarchist" (115).

The character of Bjornstam's cynical persuasion in Bright Metal is Colonel Samuel Edward Honeycutt Brierly-Thornton. A persistent critic of Lane County society, a gentleman who laments that the aristocratic ideals of the Old South have been vulgarized by poor-white yeomen who came into prominence after the Civil War, Brierly-Thornton, an ex-Confederate army officer, feels contempt for the new breed of crude, opportunistic hillmen, like Calhoun Pomeroy, Agatha's husband, and A. Ham Tweedy, a corrupt politican, both of whom place their personal interests ahead of the welfare of the community and who flagrantly violate the law. Furthermore, he caustically points out that the hillman's depravity derives from his "peasant-minded" heritage. Stribling's village cynic is also a confidant to Agatha, and like Lewis's Miles Bjornstam, one of the few townspeople who shares her denunciation of hill provinciality and consequently one to whom she can comfortably turn for consolation and understanding.

Agatha Pomeroy's relationship with men similarly repeats another plot pattern in Main Street. Like Carol Kennicott, Agatha has an extramarital love affair with a sensitive young man whom the townspeople treat with cruelty and disdain. Agatha's lover resembles Erik Valborg, the youthful, effeminate tailor's apprentice in Main Street. Like Erik, a social pariah derided by the villagers for his effeminateness, occupa-

tion, stylish clothes, and intellectual interests, Risdale Balus, Agatha's lover, does not fit into the pattern of village respectability. The inhabitants of Lanesburg, especially Agatha's husband, despise and harass him, not only because of his poor-white status but because of his carefree, unambitious nature and inquiring mind.

In spite of widespread hostility and condemnation, both Lewis's Carol and Stribling's Agatha attempt to shield their young male friends from the "village virus." In addition, both women regard their young admirers idealistically and exhibit a sincere concern for their welfare. To Carol, Erik seems like a Greek god, "with . . . curving Grecian lips and . . . serious eyes" (332) and like "Keats—sensitive to silken things" (339). On a psychological plane, Carol's perception is not difficult to understand. After all, she is getting older and seems to envision her relationship with Erik as a means for reviving her former freedom and lost youth. And while Carol would probably like to leave her dull, practical-minded husband and run away with Erik, she never does so.

In Bright Metal Stribling follows a similar plot line in treating Agatha's romanticization of her lover, Risdale Balus, whom she describes as exhibiting "a kind of animal watchfulness in his face, an unclouded brilliance in his eyes, that reminds [one] of a stag, in a deep wood with dew on the leaves and a bed of moss underfoot" (81). On other occasions, she feels attracted to his "pan-like face" (183) and likewise regards him as "a whole-souled Pan who would live everywhere as fully as the accidents of life allowed" (234-35). In Risdale, Agatha perceives (as did Carol Kennicott in Erik) the possibility of defying village mores, restoring the sense of independence she had enjoyed before her marriage. In him, moreover, she finds a provincial who seems to understand, accept, and support her nonconformist ideas and mannerisms. On the other hand, Agatha respects Risdale's individuality too; she does not try to coerce or mold him any more than Carol tries to coerce or mold Erik.

The romantic dimension of Agatha and Risdale's relationship develops under conditions reminiscent of the Carol Kennicott-Erik Valborg affair, though it is carried much further. Agatha considers her affair with the young rustic as a means for discovering the affection and understanding that the confining lifestyle of the village has denied her. In contrast to the Carol-Erik affair, which never progresses beyond the petting stage, the romantic interlude of Agatha and Risdale culminates in sexual intercourse. And like Carol's romance in Main Street, Agatha's terminates as abruptly as it had begun when she realizes she is pregnant with her husband's child. Accepting her conflict with the village is irremediable, she, again following the pattern of Carol, leaves her

husband but soon returns, seemingly resigned to sacrifice her individuality and to submit to the conformist ethic of the village.

Thus Bright Metal and Main Street conclude on a similar note, the implication being that the heroines' decision to return and conform may be motivated by essentially the same optimistic considerations. At the end of Main Street, even though the imperfections of the village still exist, Carol confidently believes that eventual improvement may be found in the generation her child represents. In like manner, cognizant at the end of Bright Metal of the continued existence of social turmoil in Lane County, Tennessee, her adopted home, Agatha seems determined to accept life as she has found it. In returning to her husband and a society she has rated as repressive and backward, Agatha asserts her faith in progress, the basic human capacity for change and improvement. Not as explicit as Lewis had been at the end of Main Street in forecasting the defeat of the "village virus," Stribling nevertheless implies this possibility through a cluster of rebirth images introduced near the end of Bright Metal. The images of "the new moon, like the end of a silver cradle, lodged in the dark lacework of the court-house trees" (453), the light rain falling, and Agatha's baby sleeping, when viewed together, convey the prospect of imminent renewal.[7]

In Bright Metal Sinclair Lewis's Main Street did indeed come to the Tennessee hills. As I have attempted to demonstrate, many similarities, particularly in characterization, structure, plot patterns, tone, and subject matter exist between these two novels which convincingly attest to Stribling's familiarity with Main Street. Character types and plot situations, closely imitating those of Main Street, have been incorporated into Bright Metal with only slight variations. It is apparent, for instance, that Agatha Pomeroy, the protagonist, is a near fascimile of Carol Kennicott. Like Carol, Agatha is a sensitive romantic in a narrow, materialistic, culturally barren environment. In addition, the Pomeroys, most notably Mrs. Pomeroy and her son Calhoun; Buckingham Sharp, the liberal, opportunistic attorney; Colonel Brierly-Thornton, the village cynic; Risdale Balus, the youthful lover of the heroine; and the petty, gossipy women of the Ladies Christian Workers Society are replicas of characters who may be found in Main Street. Besides its Lewisian character types, Bright Metal employs an intruder plot closely patterned after the structural design of Main Street. And in both novels a youthful, energetic, idealistic sophisticate undergoes a disheartening initiation into a provincial culture, temporarily withdraws from it, and then returns at a later time, mature and responsible, prepared to submit to the demands of the ruling majority.

Stribling also depicts several incidents, including a foiled reform campaign and an extramarital love affair, which present internal proof of how nearly he had echoed subject matter that Lewis had employed first. Therefore, what Stribling seems to have discovered, or more accurately rediscovered, in Main Street (recalling he had already published two novels before Bright Metal in the Main Street mode) is a liberating paradign, a sourcebook of readily familiar and functionally adaptable materials, which had been proven popularly suitable for iconoclastic purposes. In shaping his image of the southern village experience in Bright Metal, Stribling produced a Tennessee rendition of Main Street, and thus retold a story, which, by 1928, had become a nationally recognized chronicle.

NOTES

[1]Six months after publication, Main Street had sold 180,000 copies, and by the end of 1921, total sales reached 300,000. Before it appeared in a cheap edition, another 100,000 copies were sold. For comments on the book's popular reception, see Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers 123-24, and Hart, The Popular Book 236.

[2]For a general discussion of southern writers of the twenties who used the Main Street paradign in some of their novels, see my article, "The Main Street Mode in Selected Minor Southern Novels of the 1920s."

[3]See my two articles, "The Main Street Mode" and "Babbittry Southern Style: T. S. Stribling's Unfinished Cathedral," for commentaries on Stribling's use of Lewisian materials.

[4]The author of the blurb for the book jacket of Bright Metal possibly had Main Street in mind when he stated: "What Teeftallow did for the hill men, Bright Metal does for the women of the hills, but with subtler touch and with greater acuity of document. Yet Bright Metal is not a picture of one locality alone. Its incidents could take place anywhere in America; the characters, relentlessly, dramatically shown in their cupidity, intolerance, honesties, high hopes, ignorance, altruisms, laughters and pitiful heartbreaks—the characters are human and universal." In mentioning the universal aspects of Bright Metal, this writer seems to be stressing the same theme that Lewis expressed in the foreward to the first edition of Main Street.

[5]In Laughing Stock, his posthumously published autobiography, Stribling recalled a visit in 1925 or 1926 to Harcourt Brace, the publisher of Main Street, to promote

the possible publication of his own novel, Teeftallow. At the time, Harcourt asked him if he could change the style of his novel, modeling it after Sinclair Lewis; however, Stribling responded that he doubted if he could since he had never read any of Lewis's works.

[6]Other reviewers perceived the Main Street connection. Rodgers stated that "Agatha Pomeroy . . . quickly becomes a kind of Carol Kennicott among the Fundamentalists" (3). Owens, a Tennessee reviewer of Bright Metal, asserted that Stribling "has established himself as the Sinclair Lewis of Tennessee" (1).

[7]Lewis similarly uses Carol Kennicott's baby daughter at the end of Main Street to suggest that progressive change will occur by the time she becomes an adult. Carol confidently warns her husband that even though she has been defeated in her attempt to make Gopher Prairie a better place to live, the potential for improvement still exists in their children: "She led him to the nursery door, pointed out 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 2000! She may see an industrial union of the whole world, she may see aeroplanes going to Mars' " (450).

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SINCLAIR LEWIS AND J. F. POWERS: A COMPARISON OF BABBITT AND MORTE D'URBAN

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Critics and reviewers have discerned a number of similarities between the work of Sinclair Lewis and that of J. F. Powers. Powers himself, in an interview, named Lewis first among influences in his work (Malloy 21). Lewis and Powers are both mid-western in origin and outlook (Minnesotan by birth or adoption) and have a keen sense of the tension between country and city life. Each is a moralist with an interest in the religious establishment; each has a knack of satirical caricature, an ear for idiom, an eye for paradox. Certain stylistic features of Powers' work show he must have studied Lewis in some detail. It should prove interesting, therefore, to compare Powers' only novel to date, the National Book Award winning Morte D'Urban, with Babbitt, which preceded it in publication by forty years, and is part of our literary heritage.

We might begin by examining some stylistic details which, though insignificant in themselves, show Powers paying his respects to the older writer, and at the same time demonstrate his ability to profit from what he has observed. Both writers like to make lists. For instance, we learn that "Babbitt was not an analyst of women, except as to their tastes in Furnished Houses to Rent. He divided them into Real Ladies, Working Women, Old Cranks, and Flying Chickens" (Babbitt 104). When Father Urban arrives at St. Clement's Hill in central Minnesota, he takes a city boy's walk about the grounds and we find him "keeping an eye out for wildlife (and seeing none), and trying to get interested in the trees, which were numerous. They could be broken down into three main groups, red oaks, evergreens, and trees" (58).

Very often the order of a list, or perhaps the absence of an item carries ironic weight. Every conceivable property of Babbitt's alarm clock is listed, except whether or not it keeps good time. The mail-box universities discussed by Babbitt and his son, Ted, teach "Short-story Writing and Improving the Memory, Motion-picture-acting and Developing the Soul-power, Banking and Spanish, Chiropody and Photography, Electrical Engineering and Window-trimming, Poultry-raising and Chemistry" (71). The dilapidated Chicago headquarters of Father Urban's Clementine Order are located

in a building whose "previous tenant, a publisher of 'sexual science' books, had prospered and moved, but the frosted glass doors still bore the words President, Sales, Editorial, Legal, and Dr. Fish" (12). This sequence wittily tells all about the pecking order in the sexual science publishing business.

Both Powers and Lewis are masters of the short descriptive phrase which fixes a character. Often the reader follows a trail of honorific qualifiers, only to find the final one undermining what has gone before. "Out of the dozen contradictory Zeniths which together make up the true and complete Zenith, none is so powerful and enduring, yet none so unfamiliar to the citizens as the small, still, dry, polite, cruel Zenith of the William Eathornes" (emphasis added; 174). An advertisement for a course of home study displays "the portrait of a young man with a pure brow, an iron jaw, silk socks, and hair like patent leather" (65). Powers' Father Excelsior, director of the Millstone Press, "when he stood up, head to one side, arms thrust down, fists clenched, seemed to be hanging from a rope" (199). Two descriptions of Father Urban's person seem written to the same recipe: "Father Urban, fifty-four, tall and handsome but a trifle loose in the jowls and red of eyes . . . " (21); "medium tall and willowy except for a slight pot" (243).

If we turn to thematic material, we are struck by the degree to which both novels focus the conflation of business and religion. The narrator describes Babbitt and his friends as "defending the evangelical churches and domestic brightness and sound business" (59). When Babbitt is called in to consult on the condition of the Sunday School, his judgement is: "I think if you analyze the needs of the school, in fact, going right at it as if it were a merchandising problem, of course the one fundamental need is growth" (176). This judgement fits with Father Urban's when he fills in at Saint Monica's parish. He takes a census, steps up the tempo of social activity, and tries to persuade the bishop to let him build a new church. We know that his own self-interest is involved here, but at most we get a whiff of spiritual self-indulgence, whereas Babbitt's contact with Banker Eathorne joins them in the political corruption of the Traction Company's real estate dealings. The translation of spiritual values into dollars and cents terms, a central theme of Morte D'Urban, is touched on several times in Babbitt. We learn there that Mike Monday, the Prophet with a Punch, "has converted over two hundred thousand lost and priceless souls at an average cost of less than ten dollars a head" (83). Before we even meet Father Urban, we overhear him preaching the following commercial:

> "But Father," I said to our Father Provincial the other day, "do you mean to tell me I'm to go out and say to these good people: 'For nineteen cents a day, my friends, you can clothe, feed, and educate a young man for the priesthood'?" "That is so, Father Urban," he said. "We have the figures to prove it." (10)

When Father Urban and Billy Cosgrove kneel at our Lady's Grotto and drink from the spring, Billy suggests that the water might be bottled and Urban asks him if he thinks it would pay. Galled by a superior's nit-picking on another occasion, Father Urban sardonically recalls an evaluation of the church as a business organization: "For the life of him, Father Urban couldn't see how the Catholic Church (among large corporations) could be rated second only to Standard Oil in efficiency, as Time had reported a few years back" (117).

Language is another aspect of importance to both novels. Both Babbitt and Father Urban are country boys who have been at some pains to leave country ways of speaking behind them. When Babbitt is off his guard he falls into a more dialectal English. Pontificating among the guests at his own dinner party, he remarks, "Fellow's own fault if he doesn't show the initiative to up and beat it to the city, like we done – did" (99). With Ted in the moving scene at the end of the novel, he calls up a rustic figure. "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" (319). Urban, though smoother and more linguistically aware than Babbitt, had to endure the persecutions of a drama teacher in seminary who made fun of his Illinois drawl, "denied him the best parts in plays, and never stopped trying to cast him as a yokel" (82). Both Babbitt and Urban follow oratory as one of the high roads to American social advancement. Babbitt's speechmaking on behalf of Lucas Prout for mayor brought him "a fame enduring for weeks . . . and he raged through the campaign, renowned not only in the Seventh and Eighth Wards but even in parts of the Sixteenth" (146). Urban moves his audiences less by bombast than by the manipulative craft of the contemporary media. His heroes are Billy Graham and Fulton Sheen. Every now and then, however, he gets carried away on the wings of his own oratory, as in this excerpt from a mission sermon:

> . . . I beg you keep your rivers and lakes unpolluted. If swamps there be, drain them, for God's sake and yours, and do not wait. Where swamps were before, let there be gardens and orchards. Gardens and orchards and parks! How does your garden grow? With the silverbells and cockleshells of faith, hope, and charity? Rid your gardens of the ragweed of covetousness, the dandelions of pride, the crabgrass of indifference! And clear your orchards of the rusty tin cans and broken glass of avarice, the old rubber tires of

self-indulgence! (169)

Despite the considerable rhetorical gifts which Urban and Babbitt possess, the reader notices weakness in their logic. Contradiction dogs Babbitt's most ordinary remarks, as in this panegyric on the real estate business:

> . . . if there's one thing that I stand for in the real-estate circles of Zenith, it is that we ought to always speak of each other only in the friendliest terms and institute a spirit of brotherhood and cooperation, and so I certainly can't suppose and I can't imagine my hating any realtor, not even that dirty, fourflushing society sneak, Cecil Rountree! (70)

I have elsewhere analyzed one of Urban's sermons to show how the examples entirely contradict the thrust of his argument ("Relationships" 139-40). The intended and actual results of the showy mission he conducts at Saint Monica's Church reveal a similar contradiction:

> The mission had ended. Many, however, had risen not to leave but to kneel and pray, Father Urban knew, and were now impeding the progress of others trying to leave and putting them in a bad light for trying to do so. This was the one thing about his missions (and there was always much more of it on closing nights) that troubled him. Why should the very first fruits of his week's sowing be confusion, self-righteousness, and animosity in the pews? (170)

Of course, as throughout the novel, Powers intends that the appropriate biblical gloss come to the reader's mind (in this case, "By their fruits ye shall know them" from the Sermon on the Mount).

Contradiction and confusion are indeed the stuff of the two worlds within which Babbitt and Father Urban move. We have heard Babbitt's narrator remarking that the true Zenith is composed of some dozen contradictory Zeniths. The life web of Zenith's most ordinary citizens is composed of strands of contradiction, so as to make it appear that they progress not so much in spite of paradox as by means of it. Consider how Babbitt's daughter and her suitor are enabled to marry.

> Verona and Kenneth Escot appeared really to be engaged. In his newspaper Escott had conducted a pure-food crusade against commission-houses. As a result he had been given an excellent job in a commission-house, and he was making a salary on which he could marry, and denouncing irresponsible reporters who wrote stories criticizing commission-houses without knowing what they were talking about. (248)

Considered in isolation, this is an amusing instance of the satiric pen at work. In massive doses, however, it establishes an inescapable fact of Zenith life, subverting the motives

and coloring the actions of an entire society. The ambience of paradox partly explains Babbitt's inability to follow a consistent moral course. When we ask what it is that makes the world of Zenith this way, we find the author silent. Perhaps the closest he comes to explaining is in a passing reference to Babbitt's "hundred generations of peasant ancestors" (129), with its hint that western society has sold its birthright for a mess of technological pottage it is physically, emotionally, and spiritually unprepared to digest.

It is when we compare and contrast the sources of contradiction in the two novels that they are seen to diverge. If contradiction (and thus confusion) is inherent to the world of Zenith—in the air, as it were—the contradictions and confusions that Urban has to deal with are almost all of his own making, and may be traced to his determination to serve both God and mammon (once again the appropriate gloss is from the Sermon on the Mount). Nor, for all his verbal sophistication, does Urban appear to be alive to the irony in the famous passage from the parable of the Unjust Steward: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). Otherwise, why would he have so much trouble with the passage at the Zimmerman's?

The reader who looks for them will see a mounting series of contradictions and confusions throughout the first half of the book, culminating in Urban's surrealistic foray into the neighboring diocese of Osterbothenburg. Immediately following his adventures there he suffers the blow on the head which is ultimately to bring him to his senses. The series of contradictory incidents which take up the chapters immediately following his blow on the head, such as the loss of Mrs. Thwaites and Billy Cosgrove as patrons, and his humiliating abandonment on Belleisle by Sally Hopwood, are mostly the mechanical unwindings of devices set in motion by Urban himself in his earlier service of mammon—which then come into conflict with his renewed priestly vocation.

The crucial difference between the two books is that contradiction and confusion are *pandemic* to the world of Babbitt, whereas the world of Morte D'Urban has God surely in his heaven, though much obscured by circumambient razzle dazzle. Father Urban is himself responsible for creating or inviting contradiction and confusion through his paradoxical attempts to serve both God and mammon. And he is ultimately saved through an infusion of grace, and because he cooperates with the grace that comes to him when the divine power finally enters his personal history. After the sacramentally parodic, but efficient, blow to his head administered by a golf ball struck by the bishop

of the diocese, he gradually abjures mammon.

We may conclude with a few remarks about the structure of the two novels. Each has been termed "episodic" by critics worthy of respect, yet each is infused with an underlying dynamic form to which the reader responds, even if only vaguely aware of what is at work. What is crucial to the reader's experience of Babbitt is that somehow Lewis engages our sympathies without in any way concealing his protagonist's moral blemishes. As readers we find ourselves hoping that Babbitt will come to see himself as he is and perhaps work his way through to a significant character change. Given the world of Zenith, any true change in Babbitt's character can only lead to tragic consequences, and indeed that would appear to be the terminus toward which the final third of the novel is heading. But Babbitt lacks the strength of mind and character either to penetrate the confusions and contradictions of Zenith or to break out of the mesh in which he is entangled. No sooner is he on the outs with his fellows than he is frantic to get back in. And so when he avails himself of Myra Babbitt's appendicitis to crawl back inside the standardized society of Zenith Boosters, from which he had been painfully distancing himself, we feel a certain relief on his behalf, coupled with a disappointment that he should have failed this test that he was destined to fail all along. But if he has failed the test of tragedy, he has yet succeeded very nicely in reaccommodating himself to the skewed world of Zenith in which he lives. For this reason it seems to me that the novel qualifies as a comedy—though of the bitter sort—the bitterness arising from unattainable hopes for Babbitt's tragic fulfillment which are raised before the reader and partly acceded to by him against his better judgement. Some readers have felt that Babbitt's final injunction to his son Ted "to carry things on further" (319) sounds a note of real change, but I, for one, doubt that Ted is destined for a road much different from his father's.

Lewis and Powers are alike in that their characters inhabit worlds that have been radically cut off from the past. There appears to be no hope for a character like Babbitt, but there is for Father Urban, since for Powers God "rides time like riding a river," to borrow a phrase from Hopkins, and the church along with the sacramental system it administers has successfully bridged the gap between the medieval and modern worlds. This is not to say that the everyday experience of a Father Urban may not include absurdities as great as those Babbitt experiences. Powers remarks on this in the interview cited earlier.

Here we are, Christians, and here we have the clergy who are descended

> spiritually from the apostles. But you know how we have to live if we are not going to be certified as nuts. You are the pastor of a big parish with people making money in (from the viewpoint of the Middle Ages, or even a hundred years ago) very odd ways. They do not do anything with their heads. They do not do anything with their hands. (12)

The apparent episodic nature of Morte D'Urban arises not so much from the fact that eight of its fifteen chapters were first published as short stories (four in The New Yorker alone) as from its adherence to a rather rigid symbolic scheme, the religious significance of which is obscured by what mght be called the "babbittry" of its superficial action. Since I have written about this elsewhere, I will not go into the matter in detail ("Structure"). Suffice it to say that Father Urban, in his role of "everypriest," a symbolic Peter and Paul, three times denies Christ, at which point he is struck down by a divinely guided missile. After three days in the hospital (symbolic of Paul after being struck down on the road to Damascus) he comes forth a changed man—not egregiously changed, but sufficiently changed to cooperate with the grace that has been transmitted through this oddball parody of the sacrament of ordination (it is the bishop's club which has propelled the golfball). He now works three acts of corporal and spiritual mercy which balance off his previous denials, confirm his new spiritual orientation and, paradoxically, deprive him of the very worldly dignity and influence we earlier saw him working so assiduously to build up. The death of Urban announced in the title is primarily a dying to this world, and a simultaneous spiritual rebirth, but it is also a premonition of physical death, presaged by a series of physical ailments connected to the change in his spiritual life.

Despite the diminution of energy and the loss of influence which characterize Father Urban as the reader bids him farewell, I do not hesitate to describe the ending as upbeat. It is triumphantly comic in contrast to the pessimistic comedy of Babbitt, and holds out its own hope for the protagonist and for the reader who assents to its orthodox Christian view of the world. Structurally, I see these novels as two comic rebellions, each working out its own reaccommodation in such a way as to imply a distinct world view. Under the circumstances it is of considerable interest to trace the influence of Lewis on Powers, and to note the similarities in style and thought between the two.

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SINCLAIR LEWIS: HIS REPUTATION IN HUNGARY

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I: Before World War II

Already well known all over Europe, Sinclair Lewis became an instant celebrity in 1930 as the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. No wonder that his popularity in Hungary reached its peak shortly after; though, with four of his novels already available in translation, he was by no means unknown in that Central-European country. Press reactions to the decision of the Nobel Prize Committee depended on the political stand of respective papers; Social Democratic and liberal papers gave high praise to the decision while the conservative press was considerably more subdued in its approval.

In 1930 Lewis did not figure among the first fourteen on a list of most-read foreign writers in Hungary. In 1934, however, obviously because of his increased prestige as a Nobel Prize winner, statistics show him third in a bestseller list, preceded only by John Galsworthy, whose Forsyte Saga was fashionable among middle-class readers at that time, and by Jack London for whom his immensely popular dog-stories easily secured the first place (Horváth 53).

By 1934 almost all of Lewis's important novels had at least one, some even several, editions in Hungarian. The first to be translated was Babbitt, an excellent choice given its significance in the author's oeuvre. The 1926 edition had to be reprinted the following year because of readers' demand. The insignificant novel Mantrap reached Hungary in 1927 and was reprinted in 1929, only to disappear from the bookmarket for good. Quite different was the fortune of Arrowsmith, translated by Aladár Schöpflin, an excellent and sensitive literary critic, in 1928. The novel became an immediate success and had to be reprinted in 1929; this was to be only the first in a long series of reprints in the years to come, lasting to our days. The year 1929 also saw the Hungarian Dodsworth, in the interpretation of one of the country's top translators, Tivadar Szinnai, who also translated, among others, Walter Scott and H. G. Wells. All through the thirties, Arrowsmith and Dodsworth were competing for popularity on the Hungarian

bookmarket, while Babbitt seemed to have lost its impact on the public after its initial success.

Surprisingly, Lewis's first major novel, Main Street, had to wait ten years for a Hungarian translation, but then in 1930, the year of the Nobel Prize, A. Schöpflin produced a remarkable Hungarian version. After Lewis had been given the Nobel Prize, a few early, rather insignificant novels reached the public. Our Mr. Wrenn opened up this series in 1931, translated by a popular critic and translator, Marcell Benedek. It was followed by Free Air and The Job in 1933. Ann Vickers also appeared in 1933, the same year as the original in the United States, a sure sign of the author's popularity. In the thirties almost each year was signalled by at least one new Lewis novel in Hungarian: in 1934, Work of Art; in 1936, The Trail of the Hawk and It Can't Happen Here; the latter was reprinted in 1939. The Prodigal Parent in 1938 and Bethel Merriday in 1940 round up the list. Lewis's only significant novel not translated before World War II was Elmer Gantry. In a country where churches played a dominant role in political life the publication of that book was unthinkable.

The thirties were not only rich in translation; critics, too, demonstrated an increasing interest in Sinclair Lewis. Furthermore, the reading public displayed a genuine curiosity in the rapidly unfolding literary activity in America. Already in 1929 Ágota Fedák prepared a dissertation on Lewis at the University of Budapest. Numerous articles appeared on the Nobel Prize winner, not all of them appreciative. As a matter of fact, as early as 1934, László Országh praised Lewis not so much for literary merits as for the sociological competence of his novels ("Lewis" 7-12). The question of the artistic value of the novelist's oeuvre became an early issue in Hungary. Arrowsmith drew the most comments; it was reviewed by a wide range of papers, including medical journals, and conservative Roman Catholic as well as liberal magazines. The large number of shorter and longer articles on individual novels indicates interest but not necessarily insight.

Some of the few writings worth mentioning appeared in the liberal periodical Nyugat, dedicated to the promotion of West-European literature and culture in Hungary. A few of the essays in Nyugat are relevant to the Hungarian readers' attitude to Sinclair Lewis. In 1935 György Bálint put his finger on the reason for Lewis's appeal. In a review of a collection of American short stories, edited by the Hungarian-American József Reményi, Bálint deplores the editor's neglect of Dreiser and Lewis (326-28). In Bálint's view, the Hungarian public most appreciates American literature when the

content is unmistakably American and, consequently, unmistakably not British. Reményi, however, based his choice on artistic merits and excluded Dreiser and Lewis as falling short of such criteria. By declaring those two Americans unartistic, says Bálint, Reményi excluded the very authors whose short stories could have best satisfied the readers' curiosity about America. Hungarian readers' interest in the United States coincided with the realization of the existence of an independent American literature all over Europe, a result of America's cultural coming of age.

At that time scholarship on America was in an embryonic stage everywhere; consequently, the scarcity of critical writings of any merit on Lewis comes as no surprise. It is fortunate that the most outstanding and talented young Hungarian critic of the pre-war period, Antal Szerb, a victim of the Holocaust, left us three writings which offer exceptional insight into a literature that was just being recognized, and which was to play a leading role in twentieth-century world literature. In 1928, preceding Lewis's Nobel Prize, Szerb published an article on American books, analyzing their message about America ("Amerikai" 287-91). Before it really happened, perceptive Szerb already observed with alarm the process of the Americanization of Europe: the eager imitation of the worst features of the American way of life. Szerb was apprehensive that American materialistic and anti-intellectual attitudes would overtake Europe. On the other hand, he also noticed the remarkable upsurge of significant new talents on the American literary scene and greeted with great joy the birth of Greenwich Village, "the American Montparnasse," as a promise of the future. Two years before the Nobel prize, Szerb considered Sinclair Lewis the most significant American writer of the period: his Main Street presented the typical American small town and Babbitt gave a name to the American national disease. In an original concept, Szerb compared Babbittism to Oblomovism, the Russian national disease in the nineteenth century. In his perception, Lewis and the other young Americans of his generation were engaged in a Romantic rebellion against provincialism, anti-intellectualism, and conformism, against the average American. Szerb considered Zenith a wonderful name for the all-American city, a telling symbol of the average American's naive delusion about living on the top of the world.

A few years later, in 1935, Szerb included a chapter on twentieth century American novelists in his treatise on the novel and on the changes the genre underwent in the early twentieth century ("Hetkoznapok" 565-87). In this analysis Szerb points to a peculiar mixtue of national pride and of torturing self-flagellation as the main character-

istic of early twentieth-century American literature. Furthermore, he attributes the great outburst of talent in the early century to the melting pot character of the American nation. In Szerb's view, American projects the future of mankind with its great danger: the eclipse of the individual. Paradoxically, emphasizes the Hungarian critic, there is no dictatorship in America trying to crush the individual; it withers away all by itself in the hostile, money-oriented environment. With Main Street, Lewis helped Europeans discover the true nature of American society, says Szerb. Analyzing Babbitt, the critic strongly emphasizes the hero's attempt to escape; also, he introduces an excellent term to describe this characteristic feature of many American novels (e.g. Huckleberry Finn). He calls it "vital escape." The term itself is closely connected with Szerb's own theory of the modern novel. He compared the history of the novel to a freedom fight; the modern novel, in his view, concentrates on the liberation of the spirit from tyranny, with each nation's novelists fighting against the respective nation's worst vices. "The vital escape" in American literature constitutes a rebellion against conformism and against the Puritan repression of the joy in life. Also, Szerb has an explanation for Lewis's popularity; very much like Dickens, Lewis is neither a typical petty bourgeois, nor is he radically different from that type.

It is this quality which in later years frustrated Szerb in Lewis's novels. In 1941 in a chapter on twentieth century American literature in his history of world literature, he turned once more to Lewis in a shortened version of earlier relevant passages (9). This time Szerb starts his discussion of Lewis with a parallel to Dickens and to what he calls the English writer's "serene realism" (943-44). In 1941, Szerb was much less appreciative of Lewis's accomplishment than he had been in the twenties and thirties. A frustrated and disillusioned Szerb had to admit that Lewis's novels, fresh and new in the twenties and thirties, sounded outdated only a decade later, probably because of the novelist's inability to portray complex psychological problems. Evidently, when Lewis's first books appeared, Szerb discovered in them with great curiosity America; once the excitement of discovery was over, Lewis had little appeal for the poetically inclined Szerb's artistic temperament. Szerb's change of heart about Lewis in 1941 coincides with the decline of interest in him in his native land: by 1942, in Alfred Kazin's judgment, the novelist's importance was over.

II. After World War II

After World War II the Hungarian literary scene changed radically. With the Soviets taking over complete control of the country's political, economic and cultural life, with the nationalization of the publishing houses, Soviet cultural policies became the rule in Hungary. From 1945 to 1948 there was a brief transitional period of coalition government. During these years publishing houses were still privately owned. They were trying to satisfy public desire to catch up with the latest developments on the American literary scene. At the same time, in order to make profit, they wanted to stay with old-time acquaintances. Sinclair Lewis was a perfectly safe choice; in consequence, he remained a major figure on the book market through these years. In 1947 Cass Timberlane appeared; so did Elmer Gantry. With its anti-church emphasis the latter soon became the favorite of Marxist reviewers. Also for obvious political reasons, Kingsblood Royal, published in 1948, just one year after the original, achieved high visibility.

In 1948, the year of the complete takeover of power by the Communists, the circulation of American books began to drop and continued to decline in the following years. Nationalized publishing houses in all East-European countries dutifully followed the Soviet example. Fortunately for Lewis's career in that part of the world, Soviet critics consider the novelist's artistic deficiencies secondary to what they describe as the writer's valid criticism of the "evils" in American society. It is interesting to note that Kingsblood Royal was published in the Soviet Union in an edition of 165,000 copies as compared to the 15,000 of Babbitt and the 30,000 of Arrowsmith (Friedberg 189). Because of Soviet tolerance for Lewis, he stayed on the extremely restricted list of publishable American authors in Hungary even in the most Stalinist years; Arrowsmith was reprinted in 1951.

After the tragic Hungarian revolution in 1956 a new trend of easing restructions favored the publishing of more American books. Soon many of Lewis's novels were reprinted: Arrowsmith, Main Street, Dodsworth, Kingsblood Royal. Babbitt and Elmer Gantry appeared in new and better translations; Gideon Planish was added to the list of novels available in Hungarian. Numerous short articles and reviews praised the American for his strident criticism of the church in Elmer Gantry and for his truthful presentation of white racism and the plight of the Black minority in Kingsblood Royal.

While scholarly interest and scholarly writings on American literature witnessed

an unparalleled bloom in Hungary in the sixties and seventies, not a single serious scholarly paper was dedicated to Sinclair Lewis. Hungarian scholars treat him with the same "snobbish" contempt—to use the term of Dickens critic Ernő Taxner-Toth—they apply to the Victorian (236). Lewis, too, is considered old-fashioned, unworthy of scholarly attention. There are only two discussions of any length worth mentioning, and they deal with him only out of necessity. Lewis played such an important role in the early century as the first American writer to receive the Nobel Prize, and his popularity in Hungary in the thirties was such that he cannot be omitted from any survey of American literature in that country. Both discussions concentrate on works favored by Marxist-oriented criticism.

For a volume of essays on the great literary figures of the twentieth century in America, Imre Keszi evaluated Lewis's career in 1962 (115-29). Keszi compared his most successful novels to Balzac's Comédie humaine. They are based on the ironical paradox of the pioneer's degeneration into a money-hunter, says he. This central issue, "the rise to fall," the "Lewisian dialectic," as the critic calls it, required a historical perspective; for this reason Lewis's novels can be considered historical fiction. Arrowsmith constitutes the only exception in the gallery of typical Lewis heroes. He does not degenerate; on the contrary, he rises to the height of dedication. Another favorite hero of Keszi's is Elmer Gantry, "the American Tartuffe." In his most radical novel, points out the critic, Lewis condemns the church as such and does not commit the typical bourgeois error of making a distinction between true and false church. More praise is forthcoming in Keszi's analysis of Kingsblood Royal. Lewis's oeuvre as such, however, does not satisfy Marxist requirements. Most American critics recognize Lewis's strength in his presentation of an extensive panorama of American society. Not so Keszi. According to him, the panorama is incomplete since the working class is not represented. Cheap and Contented Labor was never finished. The storm accompanying the publication of some excerpts in left-wing magazines scared the writer, Keszi argues. Moreover, he contends, because of his Tolstoyan view of the strength of human goodness and because of his lack of knowledge about the working class, Lewis could not have succeeded in a truthful presentation of their life.

In his history of American literature in 1967, László Országh—in agreement with contemporary American criticism—has little praise for Sinclair Lewis: a mere journalistic writer (297-332). Such lack of enthusiasm is not surprising. Even in 1934 Országh was skeptical about Lewis's merits. Brief discussions deal with the major

works: Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith and Elmer Gantry. Only two novels receive a more extensive analysis. For obvious reasons one of them is Kingsblood Royal. Országh praises the work for forcefully exposing Southern and Northern racial attitudes as well as the guilt-complex of white Americans. With its indictment of racism, Országh contends, the novel rises to the height of political persuasion. A more surprising choice for greater attention is It Can't Happen Here, a novel not published since 1939 in Hungary, probably because Communist regimes do not like references to totalitarianism. This just may have been Országh's secret reason for selecting this lesser known work for more detailed scrutiny. His comments, however, are rather harsh on U.S. conditions. The Hungarian scholar persuasively emphasizes the implied "yes" answer to the possibility of a fascist dictatorship in America. Like Jack London in The Iron Heel, Országh contends, though with less vigor, but with better documentation, Lewis points to the power of political adventurers who exploit the prejudices of American society. Furthermore, Országh draws attention to the frequency of violence in American society, and concludes that all the potentials for a police state are present in the United States.

In his overall summary Országh seems to agree with Imre Keszi. He, too, contends that the picture of American society is incomplete because Lewis has nothing to say about the working class. The similarity of their conclusions is obvious and so is the reason: the silent pressure of the official Marxist line on their appreciation.

The same holds true of a long overdue Hungarian monograph on Sinclair Lewis. Unfortunately, Péter Balabán's Sinclair Lewis világa [The World of Sinclair Lewis], published in 1983, falls short of expectations. Balabán, the Hungarian translator of Babbitt, produced a disappointingly dull and unexciting book about a novelist who from 1926 to the present never disappeared from the bookmarket in Hungary. No coherent picture emerges from Balabán's presentation of the man or his career or his world. As a matter of fact, the books reads like a series of rather incoherent pieces held together by one single Marxist-inspired unifying concern: Lewis's involvement with left-wing persons, events and causes. Even in this respect, Balabán fails to achieve his goal. He dedicates a full chapter to the American writer's relationship to the labor movement and the working class; his material, however, is so thin that it does not justify a chapter by any standards. Also, most of it consists of a repetition of Keszi's findings.

There is no adequate analysis of the novels, and the plot summaries miss the point most of the time. Neither Lewis nor his canon come alive. A discussion of the

serious dichotomy between realism and romanticism in the novels is neglected, nor are the distinctive periods in Lewis's career sharply defined. As to his world, which should have been the focus of attention since the monograph appeared in a series presenting writers and their world, Balabán really misses the point. Due probably to his lack of understanding of the American experience in general, and of the American experience of Lewis's transitional period in particular, Balabán fails to convey a sense of that world to his Hungarian readers. Also, it is disappointing that the translator of Babbitt should omit discussing American English.

According to the bibliography of American critical works presented at the end of his book, Balabán is familiar with the most significant scholarship in the field, but he uses it sparingly and rather haphazardly in his book. The most disappointing shortcoming of the monograph is the incomplete list of Lewis's works translated into Hungarian. Such a list could have been easily compiled.

Balaban's concluding chapter contains his original comments, as he tries to assess Lewis's fame and relevance today. He is sadly mistaken in his belief that presently Lewis is a high priority in American scholarship. The major part of this last chapter discusses the problem of Lewis's relevance in modern America: e.g., consumer society, status symbols, role of advertisements, export of the American way of life. Balabán's most detailed comments concern religion: Elmer Gantry today. With references to contemporary issues of American magazines, the Hungarian critic presents an impressive list: gurus, cults, creationists, new fundamentalists, the electronic church, the Moral Majority. In all this, Balabán's emphasis is on the money-making aspect. Graciously though, at the end, he admits that Ameica does not have a monopoly on human weaknesses after all.

Even with this recent monograph published close to the centenary, Antal Szerb's scattered and rather brief remarks on Sinclair Lewis in the twenties, thirties and forties constitute Hungary's only original contribution to Sinclair Lewis scholarship. On the other hand, readers remained faithful. It is also rewarding to note that in spite of, or perhaps because of, the critics' and reviewers' praise for some politically appealing novels, the average reader still prefers the early favorites, which, of course, are also the worthiest. A good point for readers' sanity! Main Street and Arrowsmith seem to compete in the number of reprints. The number of reprints, rather than that of copies, can be a more useful guide about demand for a particular novel. It is Communist policy to reprint a popular book, in order to please the public, while limiting the number

of copies and by this simple tactic to reduce its availability. With all that, Lewis is still one of the most published American novelists in Hungary, equalled and surpassed only by Twain, London, Steinbeck and Hemingway, quite a respectable company. the centenary year of 1985 is sure to produce a series of commemorative articles and probably some new reprints of old favorites.

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BABBITT'S DANCE: TECHNOLOGY, POWER, AND ART IN THE NOVELS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

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For Sinclair Lewis:

Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives . . .

W. H. Auden
"In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

When the English writer Arnold Bennett published reflections upon his visit to America in Your United States in 1912, he carried forward a tradition begun by such European sojourners as Crevecouer, Trollope, and Tocqueville of asserting truths about American life not yet wholly apparent to the native citizens themselves. On a train passing through the industrial section of Toledo, Ohio, Bennett described the panorama before him as a fascinating combination of aesthetic and industrial values, calling it "one of the finest and most poetical views I have ever seen" (qtd. in Stillgoe 80). Noting Bennett's observation, cultural historian John R. Stillgoe reminds us that the technological vista which Bennett so admired "was new, built within perhaps two decades. Mystery, not age, made it romantic; power, not purpose, made it inspiring" (81).

In the years immediately following Bennett's observation, American writers were increasingly to concern themselves with reading the contradictory messages of the burgeoning new technology. Henry Adams, in his autobiography posthumously published in 1918, had sardonically studied the purposeless power of the new age of dynamos and contrasted what he saw as its insolent meaninglessness with the rich mystery of the medieval age of faith. As another version of the social antennae of the race, Sinclair Lewis was among the first of American novelists to respond fully to the mystery and

power of an emerging technological America. Throughout his novels runs the sense of a bewildering quickening to American life, a protean formlessness which subliminally invited the shaping and purposeful imagination of the aspiring individual.

Such individuals emerge in Lewis's early romances like The Trail of the Hawk (1915) and Free Air (1919). In both novels the protagonists' claim to a place in the new industrial society is based upon their being creative technologists, students of the same scientific and engineering skills which had made folk heroes of Edison and Ford, and which were to transform the first transatlantic flight of Charles Lindbergh in 1927 into a technological epic. Indeed, Lewis's hero, Carl Ericson of The Trail of the Hawk, a pioneering aviator from Minnesota and of Scandinavian stock, is a remarkable anticipation of Lindbergh. In these early works, Lewis initiates a pattern of combining in his main characters agrarian origins and values with the ability to mechanize successfully. Thus, Lewis absorbed perhaps the quintessential pre-industrial emblem of American individualism, the self-sufficient Jeffersonian yeoman, into the industrial present. (On the larger implications of this conjunction, see Burns.) Lewis gave the yeoman-modern his most memorable depiction in Arrowsmith (1924). Sprung from rural midwestern roots, Martin Arrowsmith, doctor, pathologist, research scientist, carries on the tradition of his pioneering forebearers into a future in which he has renounced comfortable success for a cabin-laboratory in the Vermont woods. Intimations of scientific progress in Arrowsmith are both humanized and heightened in characteristic Lewis fashion by their associations with Jeffersonian individualism and nature.

In Arrowsmith, Lewis employed, for the only time, the solitary scientist as his hero, although Frederick Manfred's speculation that Lewis's real talent may have lain in science is of more than speculative interest (55). Characteristically, Lewis was to seek out less Olympian figures than the research scientist Arrowsmith for his studies of American life in the technological present. His main characters are likely to be those who suggest a pragmatic union of values, as is revealed in their attempts to express their individualism within the social compact, as builders and makers. Correspondingly, Lewis would set his novels most often in his upper Midwest, in some version of his native Minnesota, which he described in an article in The Nation as "neither Western and violent, nor Eastern and crystallized," but which possessed, conversely, the virtues of western vigor with some claim to eastern finish ("Minnesota" 624). The Westerners with whom Lewis peoples this country resemble Easterners except for one vital difference. While the Easterner is smugly content with his material

possessions and the principles of sound Republicanism, "the Westerner, however golfocentric he may be, is not altogether satisfied . . . secretly, wistfully, he desires a beauty that he does not understand" (626). This strain of idealism which defines Lewis's Westerners seems a birthright of the region, of a land changed almost overnight from wilderness to complex, urban society:

> Seventy-five years ago—a Chippewa-haunted wilderness. Today—a complex civilization with a future which, stirring or dismayed or both, is altogether unknowable. To understand America it is merely necessary to understand Minnesota. But to understand Minnesota you must be an historian, an ethnologist, a poet, a cynic, and a graduate prophet all in one. (627)

This central conception of mid-America as process rather than product, possessed of blind energy and latent potentiality, is repeatedly thrust before the reader of Lewis's novels. We see it in the opening of Main Street, where Carol stands on a hill where Indians camped two generations ago and looks out over the mills and skyscrapers of Minneapolis and St. Paul, "the newest empire of the world," wondering at its future (28). The same sense of undirected energy and possibility is repeated in the description of Babbitt's Floral Heights suburb, labored out of the wilderness in a scant twenty years. We find it in Cass Timberlane's assertion that his city of Grand Republic "may be a new land for a new kind of people" (28), and in the city of Newlife where Lewis's final novel World So Wide opens. This protean power is asserted strongly in Lewis's Nobel acceptance speech, where he described an America of enormous mountains, prairies, cities, and wealth, and yet possessed of a bewildering social complexity ("American Fear" 17). Later, he would call the rapid rise of a new civilization in the American West "a challenge to all the resources a novelist can summon" ("A Note" 37).

Against his energized western landscapes and cityscapes, Lewis projects a great range of fictional figures, the most interesting of whom attempt, in some way, to shape and direct their own lives in rhythm to the new culture emerging from their time of restless growth and change. I have elsewhere tried to interpret Lewis's depiction of that process during the course of his career as a novelist (Love). In what follows, I would like to return to one novel, Lewis's most famous, to consider in more detail the implications of its brilliant portrayal of power and powerlessness in urban industrial America.

Babbitt is a great American novel and central to an understanding of Lewis's

thought because, among its other achievements, it depicts a central dilemma of modern times: the individual both enamored of, and helpless before, the achievements of a newly-ascendant technology. It is important in reading the novel to recognize the distinction Lewis draws between the highest accomplishments of a technological civilization, as represented by the bold new skyline of the city of Zenith, and the soft-bellied underachievers who are its inhabitants and, curiously enough—given the presence of its heroic artifacts—apparently its only inhabitants. Zenith, with its heartbeat of commerce, is a triumph of modern engineering and architecture, as the opening pages of the novel make clear. The authorial voice, free for a moment of its characteristic irony, praises the city's "clean" towers, "towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods" (5). Later in this opening scene, Babbitt is raised to a pitch of religious exaltation by gazing upon his city, his "slack chin lifted in reverence" for the shining limestone of the Second National Tower. "Integrity was in the tower, and decision. It bore its strength lightly as a tall soldier" (14). The adjectives and nouns applied to Zenith's commercial architecture here, "clean," "austere," "integrity," "decision," "strength," suggest the qualities which mark Zenith as the heroic presence of the novel. Its great new buildings are admirably and unambiguously ascendant. Rising above the low and sordid cunning of its merchant-class, the noble towers of Zenith announce the advent of a new mode of power and its transmission into a form as fine and poetical as that noted earlier by Arnold Bennett. We respond to this opening scene, even as Babbitt and the novel's narrator himself do, because it is part of our being human to wish to possess and command such power.

As that most perceptive early student of mass culture in America, T. K. Whipple, noted in his 1931 essay, "Machinery, Magic, and Art," the mechanical engineering of the time prospered because it had clearly demonstrated the communication and control of power. In so doing, it assumed the crucial human function which most modern art of the time—especially painting, music, and literature—had abandoned. The thriving pragmatic arts such as industrial design and architecture, Whipple argued, had two lessons for the fine arts: "that any art can flourish if it will satisfy a strong universal desire; and that what [humans] crave is power" (3). Following Fraser and others, Whipple traces the origin of modern art and science back to the same basic impulse which underlies primitive magic, the summoning and exercising of actual or psychological power.

In his provocative essay, Whipple compares the triumphant achievements of modern science and engineering in making use of natural resources with the potential achievements of modern art in making use of human resources, had not contemporary art turned away from its traditional role of "conceiving powerful forms and images of more than personal significance" (17).

Lewis and Babbitt, of course, are hardly guilty of the modernist excesses to which Whipple alludes. But Whipple's pairing of engineering and art, linking both with the identical human need to encompass and control power, suggests some new dimensions to Lewis's novel. Read from this perspective, Babbitt dramatizes rather remarkably the condition which Whipple cites: an ascendant technology within which the individual, deprived of the traditional function of a genuine, controlling art or mythology—to surcharge his life with meaning—is left to feed upon straw and chaff, and to wonder why he is starving to death. If Babbitt's motor-car is, as Lewis claims and demonstrates, that character's "poetry and tragedy," what profundities can he expect from it (23)? Without genuine artists, must Chum Frink, the newspaper doggerelist, be left to serve as Zenith's only interpreter? In a city, Lewis tells us, "built—it seemed—for giants," what creative vacuum has left us with only a race of midgets (6)? In the vast gulf in the America of 1922 between Zane Grey, on the one hand, and the footnotes to "The Waste Land," on the other, where is the compelling communal artist who will shape the wordless energy of urban industrial American into a more meaningful sense of expressed life for its inhabitants?

Babbitt, then, may be read as a study in personal impotence set against a cityscape full of the intimations of heroic technological power and achievement. One aspect of the curious appeal of its title character—and he seems always to have appealed to even those readers who found nothing tangible to admire in him—is his Gatsby-like capacity for wonder, the naive "passionate wonder" with which, as Lewis says, "he loved his city" (178). A major rhythmic pattern of the novel, established immediately in the opening pages, is Babbitt's mute reverence for Zenith, for the energy and creativity of his city and the technology which fashioned it, as opposed to the flaccid disorder and meaninglessness of his personal life. At one moment rendered speechless by the nobility of Zenith's skyline, he is, at the next, reduced to frustration and comic incoherence by his family at the breakfast table. The high moments of his day are those in which he is caught up and assigned a role, however minor, in the industrial drama. Driving to work, he exults for the moment as his car is "banked with four others in

a line of steel restless as cavalry, while the cross-town traffic, limousines and enormous moving-vans, and insistent motor-cycles, poured by. . . . He noted how quickly his car picked up. He felt superior and powerful, like a shuttle of polished steel darting in a vast machine" (45). Once he reaches his real-estate office, his malaise returns as he forces his attention to the ignoble art of selling houses for more than people can afford to pay for them. His ardor mounts again in an afternoon discussion with a customer about Babbitt's new cigar-lighter: "He had enormous and poetic admiration, though very little understanding, of all mechanical devices. They were his symbols of truth and beauty. Regarding each new intricate mechanism—metal lathe, two-jet carburetor, machine gun, oxyacetylene welder—he learned one good realistic-sounding phrase, and used it over and over, with a delightful feeling of being technical and initiated" (58).

Standing in his bathroom, with its "sensational exhibit" of modern gadgetry, or buying gasoline at his service station and basking in the window-display's agreeable glow of counterfeit wealth, "sparkplugs with immaculate porcelain jackets, tire-chains of gold and silver," Babbitt depicts the persistent human impulse toward meaningful ardor which he cannot find in his church, his family, his work, or his art (8, 26). As Babbitt has been freed by his technology from the toil of his pioneer grandfather, he has also been denied the experience of felt life which made his forebears competent and integrated adults.

Babbitt's love of technology cannot be dismissed as the preoccupation of an addle-headed buffoon, for it is exhibited by at least one other character whom Lewis seems to hold in high regard, that spokesman for the author's liberal heresies, Seneca Doane, who at one point argues with his houseguest, a European intellectual who decries the standardization of Zenith. Doan asserts stubbornly to his guest that "Zenith's a city with gigantic power—gigantic buildings, gigantic machines, gigantic transportation," and, while conceding that Zenith's standardization of minds must be fought against, he still admits, "sneakingly I have a notion that Zenith is a better place to live in than Manchester or Glasgow or Lyon or Berlin or Turin . . ." and insists that "'Personally, I prefer a city with a future so unknown that it excites my imagination'" (84-85). The scene between Doan and his guest is part of a cross-cutting series of simultaneous events overtly demonstrating that Zenith is possessed of a diversity and excitement worthy of the serious artist's attention (86). Similarly, Lewis later in the novel writes of "the dozen contradictory Zeniths which together make up the true and complete

Zenith" (174). The author suggests repeatedly the protean fascination of Zenith, subject to no single control, as its individual segments may be. There is a crucial distinction to be made here between the whole city and the sum of its parts. Lewis's satire is often directed against specific buildings (Babbitt's drearily standardized house or the aggressively ostentatious Zenith Athletic Club, for instance), but the city itself is a more varied and richly textured creation and partakes of a deeper expressive meaning.

Babbitt's speech to the Zenith Real Estate Board is, for all of its ignorance and foolishness, a hymn of admiration and praise no less heartfelt than Huckleberry Finn's to the river which sustains him and which he loves. But Babbitt, drained of the personal qualities which might have allowed him to interpret the industrial design and to deal with the power of Zenith on equal terms, is repeatedly driven to frustration and pettiness in his private and business life, or to escape into dreams of potency with his fairy child, or into unsatisfactory code-hero counterfeits of personal power as he heads off to the Maine woods where he wears his ridiculous, flapping khaki clothes for a week and crows of the blessings of getting back to nature.

Set against a skyline of unmatchable achievement and potentiality, Babbitt's actions throughout the novel suggest a kind of exercise in failed religion, an unconsummated ritual whereby the power of the modern industrial order is courted by the main character through the imagery and rhythm of his interactions with the city and with the physical objects of modern urban existence. Like some primitive tribesman, in Whipple's formulation, Babbitt seeks to internalize the power of his industrial deity, to release it within himself. But his efforts to convert the surrounding world of objective physical energy into his own psychological and subjective potency fail because he cannot dance his attitude successfully. And there is no one, not priest nor skald, to show him how.

As Whipple claims, "magic is the savage's engineering, his technology. It is his effort to get command of power and direct it to his own purposes" (4). In this context, Babbitt's magic is ignorant and inept, above all, formless, and hence unsuccessful. For form is the means of making power useful. This is the sardonic lesson of all those evidences of industrial engineering, all those sublime buildings and wondrous machines and technological creations which draw Babbitt's rapt admiration. Inspired by the rhythm of his city, we are told at the end of the first chapter, "he beheld the tower as a temple-spire of the religion of business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men; and as he clumped down to breakfast he whistled the ballad 'oh, by gee,

by gosh, by jingo,' as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble" (14-15). But of course it is not, and his clumsy footwork here and his nonsensical ditty are the evidence of his hieratical ineptitude. Lewis underscores the point through his own sure control of form in this passage, opening it with images of an earlier age of belief and worship suggested in the words "beheld" and "temple-spire," and in the Miltonic inversions of "a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men." Lewis then reduces this all to comic absurdity with Babbitt "clumping" down to feed his insistently corporeal self while whistling—even the words are too much for him—a popular song of glossalalial meaninglessness.

Lewis gives it all a last dig by repeating the adjective-noun inversions in "as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble" as a final ironic echoing of the more heightened use of this structure earlier in the sentence. Babbitt's failed magic here, his inchoate attempts at expression, represent on the most ingenuous level what Lewis's text successfully demonstrates on the level of accomplished artistry—the embodying of rhythm and image in an incantation for capturing the power latent in the situation. Lewis as novelist underlines Babbitt's dilemma by depicting his main character's futile attempts to shape his life—or his response to his life—into some sort of coherent form, against the background of a well-made object, the book itself. The novel messages its own medium as it proceeds, reminding us that as technology solves the problems of the physical world through intelligent and efficient design and engineering, art becomes increasingly necessary in channeling the power inherent in these developments into communicable and meaningful form.

The shadow of Thorstein Veblen falls across the novel not only in its classic depiction of "conspicuous consumption" but also in Babbitt's yearnings for the lost sense of a healthy relationship to his work and surroundings which Veblen had called "the instinct of workmanship," and had admired as a primary motivation for human behavior and the basis for a just and moral society (Instinct). Babbitt reveals vestigial shreds of this instinct, swelling with pride and loving with passion the creations of his world, yet, as Veblen had demonstrated earlier, he was prevented from recoving the lost instinct of workmanship by the intervention of an acquisitive business system which worked inexorably to separate the marketing and control of goods from those who create them. The dilemma of Babbitt's alienation in this regard is further heightened by his occupation as salesman, which Veblem had called "the most conspicuous, and perhaps the gravest, of these wasteful and industrially futile practices that are involved in the businesslike

conduct of industry" (Engineers 109).

The shadow-hero of Babbitt, the figure who never appears yet whose presence is felt most tellingly in the heroic towers of Zenith's skyline, is the consummate architect or designer. Inevitably, the result of having the triumphant designs of Zenith held before us is to draw our attention to their creator. "Form will communicate," says student of design Robert F. Pile, "irrespective of its maker's desire, because the human sensory system never stops searching out the meaning discoverable in any reality" (96). But in addition to the meaning-making proclivities of Zenith's audience, there is the further impetus toward meaning in the sense that an architecture which communicates so powerfully bespeaks a powerful motive to communicate on the part of the maker. Why, then, is this artist of the new technology withheld in Babbitt?

The question looms larger when we return to the fact that the architect-designer-builder is a figure around which Lewis fashioned a number of his novels from the beginning to the end of his career. He went on from the inventor and designer hero Carl Erickson of The Trail of the Hawk, Milt Daggett, the mechanic and embryonic engineer of Free Air, and Main Street's Carol Kennicott, the frustrated town-planner of a garden-city on the Minnesota prairies, to Sam Dodsworth, automobile manufacturer who turns his attention to designing wooded suburban versions of Carol's new community. From Dodsworth on, the builder hero continues to reappear in Lewis's novels, but in curiously diminished forms. In Work of Art (1934), Myron Weagle's hotel in a small Kansas town becomes the creation celebrated in the book's title. Lewis's historical novel The God-Seeker (1949) finds its hero turning from religion to carpentry and to the tangible benefits of building excellent woodsheds. Finally, in his last novel, World So Wide (1951), Lewis introduces an architect-hero whose dream is to build a skyscraper village, "the first solution in history of rural isolation and loneliness," a dream which is rather oddly abandoned very early in the novel (9). Thus, Lewis seems to have been compelled toward the builder-hero, but nowhere does that figure emerge in full form. Nowhere does a demonstrable and functioning mastery of the industrial order successfully match the idealism and hope of a Lewis hero. Lewis's novels give us many unrealized or fragmentary versions of this figure, but with the possible exception of Martin Arrowsmith, whose scientific achievements are less tangible than those of the architect-builder, the grand designer never fulfills the expectations suggested at the start.

But of course, Lewis's artistic achievements attain their own consequentiality,

apart from that of his fictional heroes and heroines. One measure of the artistic superiority of Babbitt in the Lewis canon may be in the author's resistance to what was for him almost an obligatory creative hero, but one whom Lewis could never make fully convincing. Babbitt's success as a novel is attributable in part to Lewis's withholding of this code-hero who compelled the author's allegiance at the same time that he defied full and convincing depiction. Lewis's self-control in this case is not total, for the insistent figure does appear in Babbitt, if only briefly at the end of the novel. He emerges in the form of Babbitt's son Ted, the rebellious would-be inventor and natural-born mechanic, who vows to follow his own talents and who suggests a more hopeful future as the new technocrat rising from the ruins of his father's life. Mercifully, though, Lewis spares us anything beyond a glimpse of Ted's future. As a teen-age husband with a movie-fan wife, an entry-level factory job, and no education, his prospects do not bear close examination.

The brilliant inversion which is Babbitt thus stands as a negative counterpoint to the great survey of American technological civilization in its rampant phase which was Lewis's own heroic fabrication in the total corpus of his novels. As a communal and vernacular artist, hence as a wielder of power in the older and traditional sense, Lewis affirms the possibility for individual control over the emerging industrial juggernaut, the sort of power sought by so many of his fictional characters. Ironically it is Lewis's antihero Babbitt who remains his indisputable contribution to the ages, and the leaderless, anonymous Zenith which joins and perhaps surpasses Main Street as his most memorable setting.

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LEWIS'S MUTED INFLUENCE AS ARTIST AND SOCIAL COMMENTATOR

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Can a novelist successfully combine social commentary with a skillful technique, or is he inclined to neglect his artistry in pursuit of the "sociological" picture? This would seem to be a pertinent question to put with regard to Sinclair Lewis. Did Lewis, bogged down in a welter of details about American "middlebrow" culture, fail to display the technical competence necessary to make his work altogether pleasurable and illuminating to read—and re-read? My answer inclines toward a "yes." Despite his narrative briskness and realistic outlook, Lewis's technical flaws as a whole mar his exhaustive account of American customs and behavior patterns to such a degree that his influence must be regarded as muted. One turns more readily to other "social" novelists as recorders of the 1920-1950 era, finding in their work a more felicitous fusion of substance and execution. He is at the same time unwilling to shrug off the Lewis contribution altogether, and it behooves him, of course, to assess the Lewis canon as fairly as possible in determining its worth and the permanence of its impact.

Indisputably, Lewis centers his work on the social scene, treating, for example, the professions of law and medicine, discussing the conduct of business, indicating the weaknesses of the ministry or of the press. The claims of reality, as he reveals, so often conflict with those of ideality, the ugly spectre of racism quickly upsetting a smug community, the presence of selfish children giving the lie to the notion of the happy, happy family. Exposing such individuals as the money-minded preacher, shallow American wife, and "professional" philanthropist, Lewis lays heavy stress on the decadence of spirit and hypocrisy of morals evident in society and indicates the unhappiness lurking beneath the exteriors of his theoretically successful protagonists, realtor George Babbitt, Judge Cass Timberlane, hotelman Myron Weagle. Chicanery infiltrates so many areas, from scientific research to the theatre. What can be said, for example, in support of the institution of marriage? Cass Timberlane provides no less than a dozen unsatisfactory examples! Even the cause of feminism, involving marriage-career tangles and single-parent problems, receives a bleak treatment (Ann Vickers). Indeed, gloomy overtones creep into American society everywhere, in social

work and education as well as in advertising and courts of law. Lewis looks upon the twenties, thirties and forties as a mean, tasteless, mechanized and altogether materialistic period; clearly, he belongs in the Mencken-Lardner circle.

His themes frequently echo those of the novelist of manners, e.g., the international contrast, social-climbing experience, the generation gap, the pitting of the independent individual against a narrow, stupid society. In many respects, in fact, Lewis's books fit into the manners pattern, offering the forms and rituals and characterizing features of the middle-middle class, its status symbols and canons of taste. Their pages are strewn with terminology like "liturgy," "credo," "social concentration camp," the "Very Rich," the "local gentry," and contain observations about proprietor-serf barriers, prosperity guaranteeing respectability, "better families" as having had money or land longer than most--"there is nothing more to the trick."

Lewis always insists upon such social density. In Work Of Art he creates the hotel world, ranging from the small-town seedy American House to the "quaint" Connecticut Inn to the Elphinstone and Pye-Charion big-city chains. About these and their inhabitants, both workers and guests, he supplies abundant detail, describing the "drummer," bill-dodger, "Greeter," chef, and manager. Bethel Merriday immerses us in the world of the theatre, moving from the summer straw-hat circuit, to the experimental university theatre, to the touring company, to the New York production. By means of his familiar incremental method, Lewis establishes the greasepaint and "gypsying" atmosphere, the roles played by apprentices, directors, producers, and stars.

Babbitt especially well exemplifies the massing effect, one produced by such devices as parallel scenes and panoramic surveys. A Babbitt dinner party, with its standardized format—Hanson's for liquor, Vecchia's for ice cream—and stress on the social hierarchy, embodies the issue of manners, one reflected also in the employment throughout the novel of the anthropological totem signs and magic slogans, the metaphysic of Service and Boosterism, the ethic of "Gotta hustle," the religion of Dr. Drew's church where everything zips, the aesthetics of Chum Frick's "poemulations," the culture of Lucile McKelvey's dilettantism, and the politics of Harding and Coolidge.

Other novels also rely on class labels and a strong sense of place. In Cass Timberlane the middle class may have become Grand Republic's aristocracy, but just behind the Wargate "peerage" lies a selling of nails across the counter to lumberjacks and halfbreeds, and the "top-drawer" Avondenes are already impoverished and fading away. The truest aristocrat in Grand Republic (as seen in Kingsblood Royal) seems to be the railroad car porter Max, the "Almanach de Gotha . . . fichuless chaperon

of Duluth and Grand Republic."

Lewis possesses a knack for catching the social nuances, as in his description of the ushering of people into proper places in the cars of a funeral procession, "in a complicated order of court precedence," or his labelling the social leaders of Nautilus (in Arrowsmith) as a "tight little garrison in a heathen town." He neatly depicts as well the "ancient religious ceremony" of the Reception Line with its fetishistic shaking of hands, or the rite of the smoking car council.

Settings receive careful attention in the novels, as the author carefully anchors down his bourgeoisie in their particular environment. The reader views George Follansbee Babbitt first in the sunporch bedroom and "regal bathroom" of his home, then at his real estate office, later at a Boosters Club luncheon at the Athletic club. Babbitt, one learns, lives in Floral Heights rather than in the McKelveys' more exclusive residential district, and he belongs to the Athletic Club rather than the Union, to the Outing Golfing and Country Club rather than the Tonawanda. Its social hierarchy notwithstanding, he worships the "wonder city" of Zenith, a metropolis presented by Lewis primarily in terms of size and number, the embodiment of materialistic society.

Lewis precisely describes the environs of cities like Zenith or Grand Republic, as also the small town of Sachem Falls and the "picturebook village" Grampion Center, concentrating particularly on their buildings, public and private. He allows us to examine Judge Timberlane's courtroom and his Victorian home, the "old Eisenherz place," as also Healey Hanson's saloon, Tanis Judique's "old-maid-and-chow" apartment, and Shorty's Fountain Cafe. Often the homes characterize their inhabitants; e.g., the "frozen" mansion of the "frozen" Mr. Eathorne, or the Pennloss house, "as neat as a shop-window and as comfortable as a hotel and no more affectionate than either."

In thus rendering the social scene, Lewis constantly relies on the satiric method. His best-known protagonist, George Babbitt, for example, is mocked for his unquestioning faith in gadgets and conviction that all professors are "Reds," is mimicked in his chauvinistic Real Estate Board address, is criticized in general for his endorsement of a wholly standardized and also slightly shoddy world. Lock up the community-socialist foreigners! Demonstrate your religious faith by organizing the Sunday School on promotional lines. Remember that "vision" means sensing which way the town will grow.

Babbitts abound in Lewis's fiction, of course: Gideon Planish, Professor of Rhetoric at Kinnikinick College; Winifred Homeward, the Talking Woman; Elmer Gantry, the rabble rousing preacher; Diantha Marl, the artsy-craftsy social leader; even Fran

Dodsworth, for whom Europe means only social advancement. All these individuals are tartly treated, as are their institutions, the rural college, sleazy resort hotel, psychiatric institute, and the upper-class wedding, "a forest of mink and broadtail."

What Lewis objects to, in sum, is the oppressively conventionalized nature of American society, the pressures which prevent one from being a liberal, an individualist, even a simple "man of good will." Zenith and Gopher Prairie and Winnemac contain a crass, boasting, narrow, all but soulless population. Society's arbiters often prove boring, even vicious: hackwriters like Ora Weagle are accepted as clever playwrights, scientific institutes reel with intrigue and power struggles, advertising men and realtors employ deceitful methods, psychiatrists are charlatans, and not much kinder things may be said about bankers and lawyers and professors. Lewis's social commentary is sprinkled with acidity, notwithstanding his own comment, made late in life, that "I wrote Babbitt not out of hatred for him, but out of love."

Though the realism of his survey (e.g., the well-described agonies of the lecture tour in Gideon Planish and rehearsals of the theatre company in Bethel Merriday) cannot be denied, yet the force of this attack on American culture is blunted by his failure to embody it in novels of undeniable artistic merit. It is difficult to overlook the many weaknesses, for they militate against the staying power of his work.

These flaws stem essentially from one source, an overdoing, an excess. For example, even if Lewis forges his indictment by means of a method that is appropriate—an accumulation of details about the middle class way of life produced by such means as parallel scenes, comic contrasts, and ranging surveys—he creates difficulties for himself in offering a too extended, sometimes too consciously structured, presentation. An instance might be the establishment in Babbitt of the Overbrook-Babbitt-McKelvey-Eathorne chain, the lower-middle, middle-middle, upper-middle and aristocratic thus too obviously juxtaposed.

The exhaustively detailed openings of the novels also establish this sense of the overdone, the reader being burdened with vast amounts of background information about the environment, family, home, locale. He learns so much about Gideon Planish's taxidermist father, Ann Vickers's father, the Superintendent of Schools, Bethel Merriday's small-town businessman father, that he concludes the fathers rather than their children will serve as the novels' protagonists. Thus, the reader often gets off to a sluggish, uncertain start.

Though Lewis's habit of focusing his novels on a central character is hardly an objectionable—or unusual—one, his often inadequate development of these figures

does trouble the reader. Even if George Babbitt temporarily rebels against the pattern of his life, even if Neil Kingsblood more permanently rebels, neither individual really changes very much in the course of his career. Bethel Merriday, Ann Vickers, Frederick Cornplow, and Cass Timberlane all undergo learning experiences, yet remain very flat characters, too. They are all surrounded, of course, by a large group of minor characters strictly of the caricature variety: Captain Waldo Dringole, the deputy warden in Ann Vickers; J. Hector Warlock, the traveling salesman of Work of Art; Friddy Spode, the pornographic novelist of Kingsblood Royal, not to mention the vast array of types in Babbitt: Vergil Gunch, Cum Frink, the Reverend Dr. Drew, Sheldon Smeeth, and the English "Booster," Sir Gerald Doak. No one of these people displays any inner motivation, no one undergoes any modification. How can one take seriously, anyway, a person named Vestal Beehouse or Opal Mudge, Jat Snood or Petal Hearth?

Lewis does wield his weapon of satire in diverse ways in his fiction, commendably diverse indeed. One finds burlesque—Babbitt's office a "pirate ship," his car driving a "perilous excursion"—and parody—of advertising lingo (the Osterud Baking Corporation, Makers of Vitavin Bread, Crisp Crunchy Crusts Jammed with Health and Yumyum), correspondence school shoptalk and ministers' spiels. One finds effective satiric darts—"Sara Cornplow had done a little communism"—and the accurate reproduction of the speech patterns of a number of the Lewis characters, too.

Once again, however, one could wish for greater subtlety, less extravagance. Flagrant labels such as the Flaver-Saver Company, Eskimo Promotion Office, and Real Old-Fashioned Home named UNEEDAREST, seem too transparent, as do some of the contrasts (e.g., the Black-White one in Kingsblood Royal), and some of the satiric portraits (e.g., the badly overdrawn Dr. Roy Drover in Cass Timberlane, supposedly a sympathetic character). Lewis inserts as well too many heavy-handed jibes—against "shirttail Nazis," Dr. Wheyfish, "the inspired diagnostician of Prospects" and the University of Winnemac, beside which institution Oxford is "a tiny theological school and Harvard a select college for young gentlemen." In general, sarcasm replaces satire, and irony is missing.

Satire, most people would agree, needs to be couched in a witty and sparkling style to be properly pungent, but such a style is seldom on display in Lewis's novels. His style can at best be described as vigorously journalistic, one treating in a slam-bang fashion the business-law-religion-theatre worlds that are his provenance. Various technical devices create this "pounding" effect: cataloguing (i.e., the ideas of the young socialists in Gideon Planish), repetition (the "to be a Negro" refrain in Kingsblood

Royal), the parenthetical comment. Instead of sharpening the satiric punch, however, they come across as ponderous. The same is true of the use of proper names like the Rosebud Movie Palace and Minniemashie House, and the much overworked habit of capitalization, all that Leading Citizen, Venerable Friend, Sterling Young Banker, Peerage of Nice Women, Urban Opportunities, Successes in Life business.

Many critics have attributed to Lewis a particular gift for mimicry, a demonstration, in the manner of Ring Lardner, of the vacuity of his characters' thoughts by means of the poverty of their speech. Lewis appears to me, however, to be remarkably inconsistent in his handling of dialogue. Would, one wonder, Babbitt be so inarticulate and grammatically careless at times, and yet so fluent, even polished, at others? Did anyone ever talk like Effie May Weagle (Work of Art) or Toni Titmus (Bethel Merriday)? Unconvincing as well are the realtors' blurbs in Babbitt, theatre jargon in Bethel Merriday, "swing-age" argot in Cass Timberlane, and the dated slang of "smokes," "dinges," "dump" and "chow" everywhere.

To be fair, one should cite the examples in the Lewis canon of good diction ("chronic routinitis") and nicely turned phrases: "He had had enough of the exhibitionism of the hair-shirt of morbid love"; there was "always the sound of corsets in the voice of Mrs. Denver" as her talk "wheezed" on; Mrs. Webb Wargate's "gray-silk courtesy" contrasted with her husband's "jittery incredulity"; "The Fandango had all the vices of Monte Carlo, done in oilcloth instead of velvet"; "He was fifty years old and always had been"; "Her position was so ducal that she could afford to look like a farm-wife."

One should point out as well the presence of figurative language in the novels: similes ("like aged dandies," "like a gilt Louis Seize chair"), metaphors ("he was Jane Austen in a tavern"), and oxymorons ("painful amiability," "furious intimacy"). These enliven the Lewis pages, though appearing at rather infrequent intervals. To be sure, hyperbole abounds!

Lewis's brisk, bombarding sentence pattern often works well, too, as in the reproduction of the "smart" chatter of a cocktail party in terms of very fragmented dialogue, or the succinct description of a social position ("Graham Aldwick, age nine, was already doomed. Like his father he would go to Lawrenceville, with a couple of summers at Culver Military Academy, go joyfully on to Princeton and Harvard Law, enter his father's firm, join the National Guard, be a gentleman, marry a lady, and, when his time came, defend Anglo-American Civilization and the Bar Association"). Lewis can also symbolize appropriately, particularly by means of the emblemizing house (the standardized middle-class Cornplow "brick Georgian" versus the aristocratic

Staybridge "museum piece"), or public building (the Connecticut Inn versus the Commercial Hotel, the Federal Club dining room versus an avant-garde tearoom). At times, however, the symbols force themselves too obviously on the reader's attention, as the much insisted upon Cleo-Isis one in Cass Timberlane.

The Lewis style, in sum, does not recommend itself highly, its course texture and writing-at-the-top-of-one's-voice manner inevitably putting the reader off. Farcical sequences like the opening passages in Kingsblood Royal, heavily ironic ones like the Copperhead Gap reformatory section of Ann Vickers, the blunt caricatures (even so central a character as Jinny Timberland is too labelled a "wild hawk" to convey much reality), and preponderance of detail (all those lists and counterpointings) function as drawbacks rather than assets. As he assails Middletown American and its dull people, mechanized activity, conformity and prejudice, Lewis delivers so strident a message that his arraignment in some measure loses credence.

Still, it must be granted that one can learn a great deal from Lewis-as-social-commentator: an assimilation of precise details about the maid of all work ("the last and dearest luxury in the pattern of American civilization in which you own a Cadillac but black your own shoes"), about different patterns of entertaining, either dressing for dinner or maintaining a studied casualness of attire, about the decoration of houses—with Maxfield Parrish prints and gadgets galore—or penthouse apartments, even barbershops and drugstores. If one can learn much less from Lewis-as-artist, he can nonetheless appreciate the presence in the novels of slashing satire and apt word choice ("busy meannesses," "jolly scoundrelism"), and he can admire the accuracy and solidity of the social particulars.

Perhaps we can conclude that Lewis should be read and re-read—after all. Though his major theme of the outsider partially rejecting his enclosed world is developed with much less wit and verve than it is by many another novelist of manners, still, his survey of American life passing into a new social order in the twenties and thereafter is a valuable one, and it seems clear that the decisive impression that "Babbittry" and "Main Street" have made upon our culture will surely not be, and should not be, lost.

ILLUSTRATION AS INTERPRETATION: GRANT WOOD'S 'NEW DEAL' READING OF SINCLAIR LEWIS'S MAIN STREET

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In 1936, the Limited Editions Club of Chicago announced its new edition of Sinclair Lewis's Main Street with illustrations by Grant Wood. At first glance, the match seems natural. Here, in one volume, would be the work of the country's two most famous Regionalists. Lewis and Wood had both burst into popularity with their most famous works: Lewis's Main Street in 1920, and Wood's American Gothic in 1930. Both found their subject matter in the Upper Midwest, and were well known for it, their names and pictures appearing often in popular magazines. As the St. Louis Post-Dispatch noted, "the novelist and the painter have become so well known for their studies of rural America that such a collaberation seems more than just appropriate" (quoted in Corn 114). The implication seems to be that Lewis and Wood not only share an interest in the northern prairie and its people, but that they also share the same feeling for that prairie and those people.

Those acquainted with the two men's work would, of course, recognize that their views are not nearly so easily compatible. It is true that such publications as the New Republic and Saturday Review gave Lewis considerable attention in the 1920s, but not for his Regionalist view. Most of these articles tried to explain Lewis's inexplicable popularity. As Lloyd Morris notes in a 1938 survey of the critical attention paid to Lewis, the prevailing critical opinion had it that Lewis was a satirist, and that his attention to detail was an effort to "delineate American life." Morris goes on, still summarizing what he claims is Lewis' critical reputation: " . . . as a novelist he suffered from one vitiating defect. Capable as he was of exposing those elements in our way of life which might properly move us to shame, he lacked the ability to include in his picture of vision of a better way of living" (384).

The Grant Wood of the mid-1930s seems to admit no better way of living than as a farmer in the Midwest. In Wood's Spring Turning (actually painted in 1936, the same year that the Main Street illustrations were drawn), a farmer who plows the

land lives and works in complete harmony with the natural order. In fact, the farmer and prairie are involved in an intimate and productive relationship, the masculine image of the plow coaxing the fertile, sensual earth into productivity. The natural harmony of the scene is given a sort of transcedent significance by the clouds which hover over the scene, reflecting the geometric shapes of the half-turned fields. The significant word here—and also Wood's positive value—is cultivation, for the picture is a celebration of the human capacity for creation and productivity, and the human ability to shape and order the world.

The rural Midwesterners whom newlywed Carol Kennicott meets on the train to Gopher Prairie seem to come from an entirely different world: "A soiled man and woman munch sandwiches and throw the crusts on the floor. A large brick-colored Norwegian takes off his shoes, grunts in relief, and props his feet in their thick gray socks against the seat in front of him." Other representatives of rural Minnesota include "an old woman whose toothless mouth shuts like a mud-turtle's"; rude, messy children; and an irritable old carpenter--all of whom apparently contribute to a smell which "grows constantly thicker, more stale" (25).

And yet, in spite of Wood's and Lewis's contrasting views, the illustrations are a wonderful complement to the text of Main Street. Wood drew pictures which neither interfere with, nor distract from, the spirit of the novel. In fact, Wood succeeds in finding common ground in his and Lewis's artistic worlds: an emphatic awareness of the social stratification which was accompanying the new century's growing modernism. Wood's reading of Main Street, as evidenced by the illustrations, is concerned with issues raised by the "New Deal" politics of the 1930s—including the virtue and necessity of work, the nature of political systems and the individual, and the humanitarian responsibility of citizens in a humane society.

Wood's refusal to sentimentalize Main Street's Gopher Prairie and its residents is signalled by the first and last illustrations in the edition, Main Street Mansion and Village Slums. The illustration of the "mansion" fulfills its representational task by being hard and angular, like Sam Clark's house, which Lewis describes as having "a clean sweep of clapboards, a solid squareness" (44). The mansion's generally inhospitable and lifeless character is emphasized by the bare branch in the upper left corner, and the similarly bare trellis—both essentially carriers of life, but here depicted as bare skeletons. The exposed drain-pipe indicates the owner's preference for function over form. Wood is true to the novel here: "Don't you think," Will Kennicott says to his

aesthetically-minded wife, Carol, "that it would be sensible to have a nice square house, and pay more attention to getting a crackajack furnace than to all this architecture and doodads?" (289). Similarly, Village Slums does its representational duty by depicting the other part of town which concerns Lewis—the group of shacks and hovels which include handyman Miles Bjornstam's home. Carol first sees the slums on a cold winter day, which explains Wood's use of snow. While there, she speaks with Bjornstam, who characterizes the slums: "Fine mess. No sewage, no street cleaning . . . " (114).

But Wood is not simply depicting Lewis' descriptions. These are the only two (of nine) illustrations which depict places rather than people, and their common theme—homes—and placement as the first and last illustrations in the editions indicate their role as a thematic frame for the other illustrations. Wanda Corn, whose catalogue accompanied the 1984 coast-to-coast retrospective showing of Wood's work, notes that the two illustrations provide "both geographical and sociological boundaries for the town" (114). The geographical location of these two scenes is insignificant, but Corn is correct in noting that they represent the extremes of Gopher Prairie's social classes. Wood clearly frames the novel's action between these two extremes, an indication that his concern with the novel is essentially a social concern.

In order to determine the thrust of Wood's concern, we need to consider the nature of the differences between these two scenes. One significant difference is the use of perspective. The mansion is viewed from ground level, so that its size and hard lines make it seem rather imposing. Wood uses shadows to de-emphasize windows and doors, so that the mansion seems less a place to live in than an image of an exclusive and immovable class. In stark contrast, the slum is a very social place, with the paths leading from all the homes to a common meeting point—the well. Apparently, even a rabbit enjoys the life of this community, its tracks joining those of the people. Wood chooses a perspective which allows him to view more than one home at once—a necessary perspective for depicting social interaction—and also provides the perspective that most Gopher Prairie-ites take of the slums: a superior one.

Wood also makes use of a fascinating visual echo in these pictures. The shape of the bare branch in Main Street Mansion is repeated in the shape of the pathways in Village Slums. The contrast is a critical one: the bare branch, and the bare trellis which mocks its shape, combine in an image of barrenness and domestic triviality; the slum's paths, on the other hand, represent the communal life of what Bjornstam calls "the submerged tenth," the class excluded from Gopher Prairie's self-reputed

prosperity (114). The visual echo also makes reference to one of the novel's most memorable moments--certainly one which Wood seems to have found memorable. This well, because of its close proximity with the out-houses around it, kills Miles Bjornstam's wife and child. Bjornstam tells Carol:

> We used to get our water at Oscar Eklund's place, over across the street, but Oscar kept dinging at me. . . . One time he said, "Sure, you socialists are great on divvying up other folks' money--and water!" I knew if he kept it up there'd be a fuss, and I ain't safe to have around, once a fuss starts; I'm likely to forget myself and let loose with a punch in the snoot." (309)

So Bjornstam uses a well which he knows is possibly unsanitary, planning to dig one of his own in the spring. As a result, his wife and child die of typhoid. Lewis' ironic point—and the point which Wood intends to register with his illustration—is that the anti-socialist well owner wouldn't even share his water, let alone his wealth. And so the branch and the pathway are similar in more than their shape; they are also similar in their reference to death, the ultimate effect of what Lewis and Wood see as a disparate social structure.

Wood turns to the book's characters for his remaining seven illustrations, but continues to capitalize on what he has obviously identified as his and Lewis' common social concern. In fact, Wood chooses not to name the characters, instead fixing on their portraits indications of their social roles. The Perfectionist is Carol Kennicott, and her appraising gaze makes it apparent that it is Gopher Prairie she wishes to perfect. Her foil—at least in Wood's view—is the Practical Idealist, Vida Sherwin, whose role in town is to unaggressively coax the town fathers for educational and civic improvements. The Radical is Miles Bjornstam, the town's handyman and socialist. His foil is the Booster, Big Jim Blausser, whose great vision and rhetorical prowess bring him to the little town that he calls 'the next Minneapolis.' The Good Influence, Mrs. Bogart, believes in a society founded on the moral code provided by the Baptist Church. Her foil is the Sentimental Yearner, Raymie Wutherspoon, who responds to mundane village life by drowning his senses in aesthetic bliss. The odd illustration—in more ways than one—is General Practitioner, apparently depicting Doc Kennicott, who doctors the townsfolk and farmers.

Clearly, Wood uses some of the titles ironically (few readers, for instance, would willingly call Mrs. Bogart a "good influence"). Two which may not at first seem ironic are The Perfectionist and Practical Idealist. Carol Kennicott certainly is a perfectionist, always viewing her town with an eye toward its improvement. Vida Sherwin is a more

practical woman who promotes, and generally accomplishes, her small civic improvements. Unlike Carol, who dreams of "a vista of arcades and gardens" down Main Street (130), and fails utterly to achieve her dreams, Vida Sherwin works toward a plain, new schoolhouse, and after some seven or eight years of constant, but properly unaggressive urging, accomplishes her goal.

But there is a tension between the titles and the images themselves which reveal Wood's irony. Carol, the perfectionist, has a button slipping out of its hole—an imperfection she fails to notice as she eyes Gopher Prairie's faults. While a slipping buttom does not negate Carol's right to criticize an obviously stale, unattractive town, it does indicate Wood's awareness that Carol Kennicott, before her break from Gopher Prairie, is annoyingly un-self-critical. The fact that Carol is indoors indicates that she is not participating in the civic life of her community, doing much of her criticizing from the safety of her front parlor. Also, the decorative lace of the foregrounded curtains is mirrored in Carol's braided hair—Wood's indication that Carol's preference is for the decorative, rather than the practical. This preference is obvious in Carol's vision of Gopher Prairie's future town hall:

> She saw in Gopher Prairie a Georgian city hall: warm brick walls with white shutters, a fanlight, a wide hall and curving stair. She saw it the common home and inspiration not only of the town but of the country about. It should contain the court-room (she couldn't get herself to put in a jail), public library, a collection of excellent prints, rest room and model kitchen for farmwives, theater, lecture room, free community ballroom, farm-bureau, gymnasium. (130)

This sort of romanticism is characteristic of the younger Carol's point of view. Out of this same view rose a dismal stage production and a forced Chinese theme party which, though it was pronounced a success, simply reinforced the town's view of Carol as pretentious and frivolous.

By the way of contrast, Vida Sherwin's practical approach is consonant with the town's expectations, and in this sense, she is a practical idealist. Wood invites a comparison with Carol Kennicott's image by placing them both in chairs, and dressing them both in blue with white collars. Where Carol's dress is patterned, Vida's is plain, austere. In direct contrast to the wayward button on Carol's dress, Vida is properly buttoned to the neck. What seems to be the most important contrast between the two is the fact that, while Carol Kennicott appraises Gopher Prairie alone, Vida Sherwin is caught in mid-sentence, obviously involved in a conversation. Since the Main Street Mansion and Village Slums set up the opposition of isolation and community, Wood clearly finds

value in Vida's approach to Gopher Prairie's social needs. But even Vida's small accomplishments, including what Lewis does call her "triumph" (the new school [427]), are called into question by her lack of meaningful ideals. After her husband, Raymie Wutherspoon, goes off to war, Vida began to rave about the Germans, saying that "though America hated wars as much as ever, we must invade Germany and wipe out every man, because it was now proven that there was no soldier in the German army who was not crucifying prisoners and cutting off babies' hands" (395). Add to this extremism Lewis' thematic use of Vida's sexual frigidity and it is clear that Vida cannot stand as Lewis' model for either civic responsibility, or human productivity.

Wood is aware of Vida's equivocal character and uses the rocking chair she is seated in to make his point. The rocking chair is an emblem of Vida's life: it gives the illusion of real movement, but of course it remains in the same place. The rocking chair's associations with spinsters is also appropriate (her marriage to the "spiritual" Raymie Wutherspoon notwithstanding) because Vida leads the trivial, gossiping life of a stereotypical spinster. Similarly, Carol's carved Victorian chair is an emblem of her sentimental preference for essentially cosmetic change based on a decorative sense of the past.

In both illustrations, however, the women exhibit a desire to do more than remain properly seated. And so the chairs indicate the women's exclusion from the outdoors, from the workings of the town, and from the magnificent prairie which both Lewis and Wood view as America's source of material and spiritual power.

Wood's portrait of Carol Kennicott seems simply to criticize her perfectionist nature. But I think there is reason to believe Wood is at least partly sympathetic to Carol and her guest. Like Carol, Wood loved costume parties, he participated in civic beautification projects, and his own home was a self-conscious revival of colonial architecture (Corn 1-33). The illustration may also indicate his sympathy for Carol's status as an unhappy woman in a sexist community. An examination of the Sears and Roebuck catalogue from 1920 to 1936 reveals the fact that Carol's dress was in style at the time of the illustrations' drawing, not 1918, when the novel is set. The dress with the large white buttons, white collar and subdued pattern first appear in Sears' Fall-Winter '36-'37 catalogue. Wood apparently sees some currency in the image of a woman seemingly trapped in her indoor world of lace curtains, carved furniture, and very evident boredom.

The other illustration which, like Carol's, demonstrates an appraisal of Gopher

Prairie's social system is the illustration of Miles Bjornstam. Bjornstam's and Carol's similarly appraising gazes are noteworthy, because both are essentially outsiders in Gopher Prairie, unfairly excluded from it workings. Both have an interest in its reform, though their ideal worlds would undoubtedly differ. And both of them show a genuine concern for a wide range of Gopher Prairie's citizens. For Carol, this view manifests itself in her kindness to the working poor and solicitous care of Bea and Olaf, Bjornstam's wife and child, as they are dying. In Bjornstam's case, this concern manifests itself in his socialist politics.

Wood clearly intends that The Radical be read against Booster, the illustration of Jim Blausser. In the same way that Main Street Mansion and Village Slums bounded Gopher Prairie's socio-economic range, so do these two bound its socio-political range. Blausser is obviously on the far right, a conservative who identifies with what he considers to be traditional American values. Bjornstam, as his "radical" label indicates, is on the political left.

Of course the opposition is more specific than this. Wood's treatment of these two indicates his interest in the novel's thematic treatment of work. Money is made in two ways on Lewis's Minnesota prairie. One way is to work for it. The other, as Carol realizes, is more profitable: "Carol saw that the prairie towns no more exist to serve the farmers who are the reason of their existence than do the great capitals; they exist to fatten on the farmers. . . . It is a 'parasitic Greek civilization'—minus the civilization" (261). Most parasitic of the townspeople's activities is the buying and selling of land and commodities at huge, quick profits—at the farmers' expense. Doc Kennicott does it, and so do most of his friends. But more significantly—at least for our purposes—it is "land speculation" which brings Jim Blausser to town (397). Bjornstam, on the other hand, works for his money, and is respected for the work he does, if not for the things he believes. Wood keys on this opposition by depicting Bjornstam as a virile rural worker, while Blausser is depicted as a jowly speachifier.

The most obvious reason to read these illustrations as a pair, and in many respects the most important features in them, are the American flag in Booster and the hammer and sickle in The Radical. More than simply indicators of Blausser's and Bjornstam's political loyalties, these images indicate Wood's preference for the radical. Again, the concept of work is the key. Bjornstam's hammer and sickle are, unlike Blausser's flag, more than merely rhetorical or symbolic. They are actual tools, and as such, they stand as images of active, productive change. We can push this opposition further.

Blauser wears two other symbols—his ring and lapel pin—which indicate his membership in fraternal organizations. The rest of Bjornstam's tools—for instance, the square—are symbols used by the Freemasons, but again, here they are actual craftsman's tools. Similarly, Blausser's gesture is merely rhetorical, while Bjornstam grips the handle of what is presumably a farm tool.

A closer look at the illustrations' details also indicate Wood's faithfulness to the subtleties of Lewis' text. In Booster he seems concerned with the signs of a growing American aristocracy. Blausser wears his ring and moose pin to declaire himself a member of two groups which consider themselves the foundation of America; men of, as Blausser says, "Pep, Punch, Go, Vigor, Enterprise" (398). The moose, especially, is a symbol of the lone, strong, North American character. But anyone living in America in the 1930s would know that these signs of exclusiveness could be bought from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue, which had an entire page filled with pins, rings and other civic jewelry. It was Wood's practice to use the catalogue as his source for images, and he does so here, quoting the ring and pin directly. Wood utterly deflates Blausser's reason for wearing the jewelry, and alludes to the democratic nature of life in the United States: the same jewelry which Blausser wears as a mark of membership in an exclusive, neo-aristocratic club could be bought by anyone with a Sears catalogue for $7.63—which would include delivery by the U.S. Post Office.

The detail in The Radical which bears further note is Bjornstam's tool—and the nature of the work he intends to do with it. Wood is purposefully ambiguous about the tool, and about the way Bjornstam holds it. Of course our experience of Bjornstam in the novel leads us to believe it is some sort of shovel or hoe—but it also looks like a club. This strikes me as an interesting pun on Blausser's clubs, and an indicator of Bjornstam's somewhat violent nature. Drawn during the height of the Depression, this illustration may also have been Wood's reminder of the possible result of further oppression of the rural poor.

Wood continues to present us with Gopher Prairie's social perspectives with The Good Influence and Sentimental Yearner. Little more than charicatures in the novel, Wood seems to view Mrs. Bogart and Raymie Wutherspoon as Lewis's *representatives* of two Main Street points of view: Mrs. Bogart represents the fundamentalist church, and Raymie Wutherspoon represents the watered-down aesthetics of the isolated prairie town.

Mrs. Bogart's title comes directly from Lewis' first description of her. He calls

her a "Good Influence . . . the soft, damp, fat, sighing, indigestive kind" (71). Wood alludes to both Mrs. Bogart's character and her status as a representative of the church by juxtaposing her with the church building. This visual connection is made stronger by Wood's contrivance of Mrs. Bogart's hat and veil, which mirror the outline of the building. The church itself is closely shuttered, a sign of its own brand of exclusiveness. Significantly, Mrs. Bogart's bare hand and prominent ring link her to Jim Blausser in Booster, and the clapboard architecture of the church links the image to Main Street Mansion. These links indicate Mrs. Bogart's membership in the Gopher Prairie status quo, the system of institutions which Carol Kennicott was able to identify only after she had escaped Gopher Prairie:

> 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 the 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 White Race; and the only defense against them, Carol beheld, is unembittered laughter. (413)

That Wood chose Mrs. Bogart over, for instance, the town lawyer, Guy Pollock, or any one of the social circle in which the Kennicotts run indicates his shared concern with these Midwestern institutions.

Sentimental Yearner confronts another issue which certainly concerns both Lewis and Wood: the state of the arts in the Midwest. Wood had, in 1926, credited Lewis with what he saw as the new "yearning after the arts in the corn-and-beef-belt" (Corn 114). Viewed as another in a series of responses to Gopher Prairie's socio-political situation, this illustration seems to view this yearning after the arts as a merely marginal activity, a strange view for an artist to hold.

The character depicted is Raymie Wutherspoon. Ridiculed by the "real men" in town, and (as Vida Sherwin recognizes) "longing for what he calls 'self-expression'," (77) Raymie's artistic feelings have no place in Gopher Prairie. I think there is reason to believe that Raymie has no place in Wood's world either—at least not as an artist. Wood admitted to having drawn a great deal of his aesthetic motivation from John Crowe Ransom, Alan Tate, and the other regionalist writers of the Vanderbilt group. It is significant to note that their view of the ideal artist leaves Raymie behind, as this summary by James Dennis indicates; "The great artist, working in a racially and spiritually unified society attached to the soil, his interests centered in a particular place, would be better equipped to create a masterpiece, with subject-matter emanating

from a self-contained tradition" (150-51).

That the artist ought to be "attached to the soil" is the critical notion, for Grant Wood's art is by all means attached to the soil he lived on. But Raymie's clearly would not be. The carnation that he holds has been plucked from the soil, and his gaze is skyward, away from the vigorous, productive prairie. An interesting and useful contrast is The Radical in which Miles Bjornstam is emblematically connected to the soil by the unseen portion of the sturdy tool he holds, and his critical gaze is fixed on the community around him. In the novel's terms, and according to Wood's preferences, Bjornstam, with his neatly decorated home and craftily designed furniture, is more an artist than Raymie. At any rate, the thrust of the illustration is clear: in a time when the aesthetic reveries and posturing of an Oscar Wilde character was a cultural cliche, this image of Raymie Wutherspoon is a strong rejection of an art not grounded in the traditions, and conscious of the problems, of the working people.

Finally, a much-misunderstood illustration, General Practitioner. Unlike the other illustrations depicting characters, this one seems not to allow any criticism of its character, Will Kennicott. None of the details are humorous emblems of character, as Blausser's jewelry and Wutherspoon's flower clearly are. In fact, the heirloom watch and homemade quilt lend a sense of familial comfort and stability to the scene. Furthermore, there is no facial expression to reveal Kennicott's attitudes. Wanda Corn believes that because Wood was involved in a difficult marriage when he created these illustrations, he may have "over sympathized with the doctor, who suffers a young, energetic wife constantly urging him and the townsfolk to better themselves" (114). This biographical explanation strikes me as rather feeble, and I think the text will provide us with a better one. But if Wood has removed Kennicott from his criticism, then he has read the novel as an affirmation of Kennicott's values. Wood's version of Main Street then becomes the story of a rebellious woman's slow but final integration into the patriarchal system of the small prairie town, as represented by her husband, the town's most respected professional.

The details of the illustration do seem to affirm Kennicott's behavior. The watch in the illustration reads 2:55, and given the shadows from a light directly overhead, it must be 2:55 a.m. Wood alludes to the many times when Kennicott goes out into the country at all hours in order to doctor the farmers, and especially to the time that we go along and watch through Carol's eyes. In this episode, Kennicott is unequivocably heroic. He amputates an arm, using a kitchen for an operating room, with the

constant danger, we are told later, of his ether's fumes exploding. On their way back to town, he uses his prairie-man's skills to lead Carol to a warm barn during a blizzard (184-91). Perhaps even more heroic is Kennicott's ability to rise above his community's prevailing prejudice toward the area's farmers and poor workers. While others in town use words like "hicks" and "shiftless" to describe the working poor, Kennicott serves them without reservation, and often without pay (176).

But Kennicott is a mixed character, and the reason Corn and Dennis accuse Wood of misreading the novel is this illustration's failure to recognize Kennicott's less attractive side. What they don't realize is that this picture is not necessarily a celebration of Kennicott, the individual. Wood has generalized the portrait, denying Kennicott the facial identity that the others are given. Here, the hands and the objects tell the tale, and we are not invited to identify this practitioner as Will Kennicott. In fact, Wood short-curcuits that identification. Lewis describes Kennicott as having big hands with "large fingers" (187), while the hands in this picture are slim and delicate--especially in contrast with the farmer's hand and arm. Wood simply celebrates the humanitarian value of caring for others, without exclusively assigning those values to Kennicott. Viewed in this context, Wood's title is just as ironic as the others: Kennicott is good generally; but in other areas--such as his financial adventurism, his lack of aesthetic sensibilities, and especially his insensitivity to Carol's needs as an individual--he is very limited.

Apart from its narrative content, this illustration is also a fascinating image of a unity which crosses social boundaries. First of all, the joining of the farmer's rough hand and the smooth hand of the doctor is an image of unity across class boundaries. The juxtaposition of the heirloom watch and homemade quilt--both objects which are traditionally gender-specific--is an image of unity across gender boundaries. And finally, the picture seems to echo Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel painting in which God's hand reaches across the void to touch Adam's hand--an image of the unity between humans and their Creater significantly demonstrated, in Wood's version, by a humanitarian act.

Clearly, these images are tied together by their visual affinities, but they also have in common their status as responses to the social disparity indicated by the framing illustration. Carol Kennicott criticizes a community from which she is essentially excluded. Vida Sherwin is active in the community, but is constricted by the community's sense of feminine propriety and her own prejudices. Jim Blausser cheerleads

for economic growth in the status quo. Miles Bjornstam remains excluded from the community and contemplates a revolution too few seem eager to fight. Mrs. Bogart preaches a moral integrity which she had not even been able to instill in her own son, the town bully. Raymie Wutherspoon contents himself with emotional immersion in the trivialities he calls art. Will Kennicott treats the unhealthy regardless of their social status, but capitalizes on shifting land values at the farmers' expense.

But I don't think we are simply left with the essential inadequacy of each of these characters and approaches. Certainly the generalized image of the doctor's humanitarian work, and the emblems of unity in General Practitioner stand as Wood's reading of Main Street's positive values.

Sinclair Lewis apparently thought well of the illustrations: he relayed a message to Wood through their publisher that he would like to buy at least two of the originals (Dennis 241n). But external evidence of this sort is unnecessary to realize that these illustrations express the thrust of the novel, its critical and emphatic social concern. In more ways than one, Grant Wood has left his signature on Main Street.

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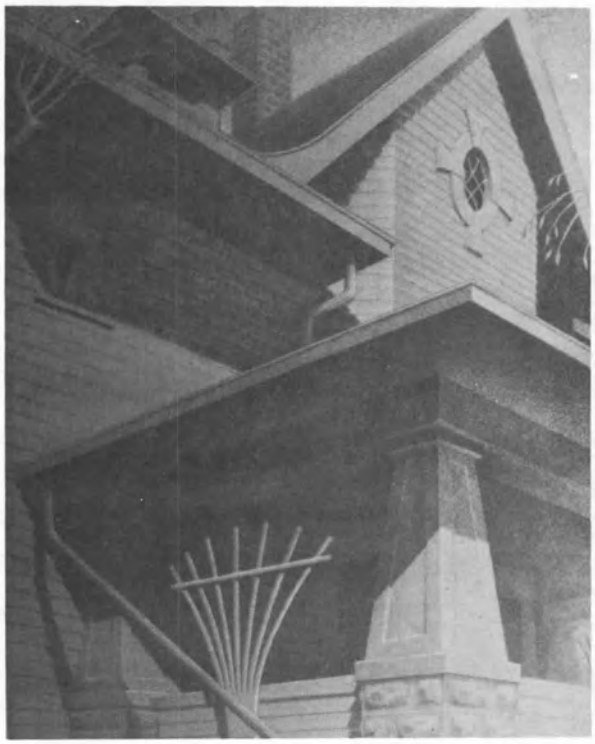


Main Street Mansion

Village Slums

The Perfectionist

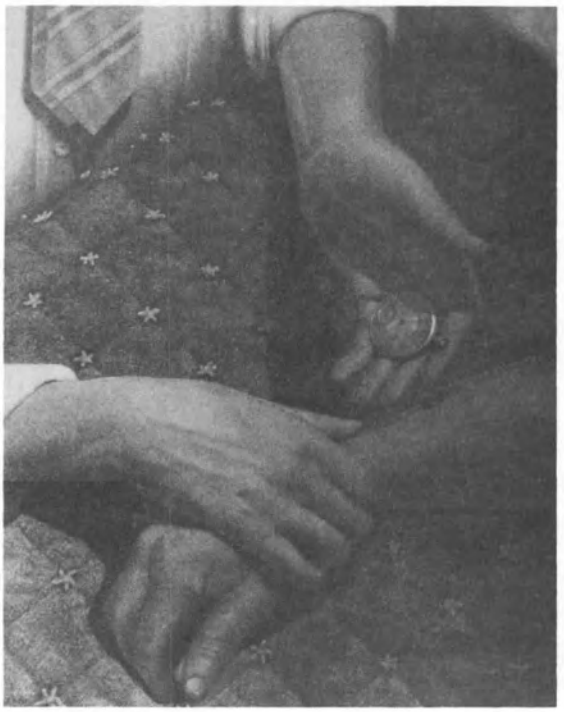
Practical Idealist

The Radical

Booster

Sentimental Yearner

The Good Influence



General Practitioner

FROM GOPHER PRAIRIE TO LAKE WOBEGON, MINNESOTA: FROM SINCLAIR LEWIS TO GARRISON KEILLOR

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It seems well agreed by now that Sinclair Lewis's most significant achievement was not in the art of the novel itself but, rather, in American literary history—and as a cultural force who widely and profoundly influenced the way Americans view themselves. This point is made by Alfred Kazin, for example: "Not so much revelations of life as brilliant equivalents of it, his books have really given back to Americans a perfect symbolic myth, the central image of what they have believed themselves to be" (175-76). In our electronic age, I myself doubt that any serious novelist could have the same kind of impact or find the same large and truly literate audience like the millions of readers of Main Street and Babbitt in the 1920s who made such a cultural phenomenon of Sinclair Lewis. But I would suggest that a contemporary equivalent of that large audience are the listeners to National Public Radio and, in particular, to A Prairie Home Companion. And through that show, Garrison Keillor gives his audience an evocative symbolic myth of themselves and their origins. Together, Main Street and, following five and six decades later, Keillor's monologues presenting the weekly news from Lake Wobegon provide an illustration of the lasting appeal that Americans find in the satirical portrayal of life in a small town, particularly the Midwestern small town. These two artists from Sauk Centre and Anoka, Minnesota, respectively, survey the middle-American scene and give us critical and convincing and very entertaining reflections of ourselves.

The great success of these two artists is well-known and at least roughly comparable. Mark Schorer calls the publication of Main Street the "most sensational event in twentieth-century publishing history," and he quotes publisher John Farrar's estimate of more than two million readers, including many fancied Carol Kennicotts who wrote to Lewis in gratitude for his understanding of their sorry plight (Life 268-70). Keillor went through a kind of apprenticeship with his Lake Wobegon material, not terribly unlike Lewis's struggling with early stories and novels, and lately A Prairie Home Companion has experienced a kind of a meteoric rise attracting more than two

million loyal listeners each week, making it, after All Things Considered, the second-most widely distributed program on National Public Radio, a network which attracts a kind of literate listenership, with the majority of its stations broadcasting from college and university campuses (Traub 111). Some listeners' letters and notes to Keillor are regularly read on the air (and thus are especially encouraged, perhaps), but anyway they are genuine and sometimes credit Keillor with bringing listeners a new understanding of themselves and their backgrounds. His notoriety is reflected in many newspaper and magazine articles, widely ranging from Mother Jones, the radical-liberal monthly still going strong, to the policy holder's quarterly of the Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Company (Zoloth and Dalzell; Borger).

Besides this similarity between the general subject matter and the popular success of these two artists are some remarkable similarities in their basic techniques, and underlying these are some fundamental and equally remarkable differences between these two men and their work. This comparison and contrast that can help define and clarify the respective achievements and limitations of the work of these two men is what I want to explore.

It's quite common, when reviewing Lewis's special strengths as a writer, to point to 1) his great power of observation and precise rendering of surface detail, 2) his remarkable gift for mimicry, and 3) his use of stock characters and creation of memorable American types (Schorer, Main 438-39; Krutch 37-38). These three techniques are all more impressive than, for example, the overall loose structure of his narratives and his episodic style of novel writing. Even here, though, we can see an analogy to the loosely strung-together anecdotes and musings and reminiscences that make up the Lake Wobegon reports. And these three techniques are as important to Keillor as to Lewis, and he is equally adept at them.

First of all, much of the evocative power of Lewis's and Keillor's narratives stem from the use of surface detail to vividly create the look and feel, the aura of their scenes. Lewis is known for lavishly piling up details of architecture and interior decor, the clothing and accessories and all manner of personal belongings of his characters, their food, and, of course, the details of their customs and social interactions. Keillor has to be more selective and concise, I think, given the constraints of his 15- to 30-minute radio monologues, but his selections are just as telling and cover all those same categories. In chapter 22 of Main Street, a kind of sociological and historical exposition on the traditional images versus the reality of the American small town,

Lewis turns first to surface detail to convey his impression of that reality:

> 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. (257)

And when Keillor wants to sketch a quick, general picture of Lake Wobegon, his method is similar:

> There are cast-iron deer and rock gardens in yards and large stones painted white on either side of the driveway. Church women still wear hats, navy with veils, maybe a few flowers on one side, and they come home afterward and serve Sunday dinners of chicken, ham, or pot roast, the stringy kind. (qtd. in Shulins 4)

Notice that Keillor does not claim to be generalizing about a whole social class nation-wide, but a similar impression is conveyed of middle-class conformity; very common, very prosaic interests; and less-than-sophisticated tastes. Just recently he was describing the nice new things that the old folks in Lake Wobegon have in their homes these days, things their children are struck by when returning home for holiday visits: "that shag carpeting that you rake with a rake," also a "recliner chair, color TV, and that couch in lilac velour," and a "nice driftwood lamp and glass coffee table" (Prairie 22 Dec. 1984).

A similar power of observation and recall make both Lewis and Keillor gifted mimics. Generally the same kind of flat, monotonous, and half-grammatical small-town conversation is vividly recorded by both, with some of the favorite topics the same in Gopher Prairie as in Lake Wobegon: weather, crops and gardens, gas mileage and tire durability. Similar overly hearty greetings and old, formulaic jests and jibes are used by the males in both towns. It has to be noted here, though, that Keillor has the extra advantage of radio and of his smooth and engaging vocal delivery with which he renders not just a Midwestern vernacular but more specific Minnesota styles of speech, German- and Scandinavian-influenced, with a liberal sprinkling of Jah, sure's and you betcha's.

Advertising provides another fitting subject for mimicry. Boasting is the very spirit of Babbitt's world, which is to say, the general spirit of the times, that "decade of dizzying and often mindless economic expansion" which was the 20s (Schorer, Babbitt 320). Here's part of the ad for Prince Albert tobacco, shared with us by Babbitt's distinguished poetical friend Chum Frink:

> Say—bet you've often bent-an-ear to that spill-of-speech about hopping from five to f-i-f-t-y p-e-r by "stepping on her a bit!" Guess that's going some, all right—BUT—just among ourselves, you better start a rapidwhiz system to keep tabs as to how fast you'll buzz from low smoke spirits to tip-top-high—once you line up behind a jimmy pipe that's aglow with that peach-of-a-pal, Prince Albert. (100)

Nothing about mellowness or relaxation, such as we might expect in reference to pipe tobacco, but rather all zip and zowee. Now compare part of a Keillor commercial for one of the mock "sponsors" of the Companion, the Fashion Division of Fruit Farm Microchips, "the world's leader in alternative electronics." The company has a slogan, of course, repeated twice during the commercial: "If your clothes don't compute, you're not wearing Fruit Farm." A female voice says: "As a chief executive, I can't afford to spend time exercising away from my computer terminal. That's why I wear the digital jogging outfit. The keyboard is on the wristband, the screen pulls down from the headband, the disc drive is on the belt pack. With the optional modem hat and antenna, I can even go online with the Fruit Farm mainfram computer back at the office." Keillor's mimicry here is even more ludicrous than Lewis's, maybe even silly. A similar kind of zealous salesmanship is being satirized as well as, I think, the dominant spirit of our high-tech and highly competitive age of the 80s, often symbolized in Keillor commercials by the computer and the related concept of management, or the shibboleth of "management," we might say. In this example, the Fashion Division of Fruit Farm Microchips also markets "Microtog" playsuits for kids, "tough enough for any play management that kids can dish out—and they're moisture resistant" (29 Dec. 1984). Characteristically, Keillor is not content with just one or just a couple targets for satire at a time. As we just saw, time management, bustling, super efficiency, and the fitness craze (a kind of physiological efficiency, after all) are jibed at, along with the very mod appeal to the super-liberated and successful working woman.

Newspapers are also frequently mimicked. Many excerpts from the Gopher Prairie Weekly Dauntless and the Zenith Advocate-Times, especially the society pages, keep us well-apprized of the newsworthy events involving the Kennicotts and Babbitts, in a style markedly florid or unctous. Keillor often gives us some Lake Wobegon News as rendered by editor and publisher Harold Star of the Lake Wobegon Herald Star, and equally good journalistic material is found in some of the sketches and stories in Keillor's collection Happy To Be Here. "Friendly Neighbor" recounts in small-town

journalese the annual "Dad Benson Friendship Dinner," held alternatively in Freeport, Minnesota, and Chafee, North Dakota, and documents the sad demise of this popular radio personality and his folksy "Friendly Neighbor" radio show. This particular year's dinner was held in Chafee, and the writer of the newspaper account (the nephew of the late Dad Benson) includes a note about the "Hospitality Stop" in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, on the bus trip from Freeport to Chafee. "The stop was held at Fergus Implement which carries our company's (Freeport Machine) line of creamers and automatic milking systems, both the 6-8's and the extendables" (68). Juicier human interest stories also get Keillor's attention. More in the style of a big-city paper, and under the headline "Local Family Keeps Son Happy," we get a story, written in a cheery, brisk, and amoral tone, of a couple who "obtained the parole of a twenty-four-year-old prostitute from the County Detention Farm" to be a live-in companion for their sixteen-year old son. The mother is quoted as saying, "We see more of him this way, since he stays home evenings and weekends." In good women's section fashion, the brief article concludes with the prostitute's special recipe for "Fancy Eggs" (172-73). Many other genres of popular literature and styles of writing are also hilariously mimicked in other selections in Happy To Be Here.

Next, we hardly need to be reminded of Lewis's gallery of "enduring memorials of familiar American types," as Schorer calls them, including in Main Street alone the village atheist, the cruelly sanctimonious widow, the town bully, the defeated liberal, and others, and featuring, most especially, the discontented wife Carol and the common sensical husband Will Kennicott (Main 438). Babbitt, of course, donated a new word to standard English for middle-class conformity and values. Equally evocative and widely recognized today are some of Keillor's Lake Wobegon cast of characters, such as Father Emil, strict and old-fashioned, but deep down so tolerant and kindly an old priest; pastor Ingquist, the introspective Lutheran minister, plagued by melancholy and self-doubt, and also so kindly and compassionate; Miss Faulkner, the high school English teacher and choir director, so elegant and classy, wearing tailored suits, very high heels, and glasses on a gold chain around her neck; and others. Drawing on perhaps the longest literary tradition of any of these characters, there is young Johnny Tolefson, the shy and quiet but deep young rebel, unappreciated and misunderstood in his prison of provinciality, who is his poetical work, says Keillor, "kind of picked up the career of A. E. Housman where Housman himself left off" (Prairie 20 Feb. 1982). Incidentally, in other anecdotes Keillor's descriptions of his own adolescent self are quite

indistinguishable, I think from young Tolefson. Taken together, those stories would make a fine portrait of the artist as a young Minnesotan. The young Tolefson/Keillor does also remind us of the sixteen-year-old Sinclair Lewis and his poetical work, such as the short lyric "Launcelot," published during his freshman year in the Yale Literary Review.

But despite the similarity in subject matter and some of these basic techniques that we have just reviewed, there could hardly be more a striking contrast than that offered by these two men and their work. It's a contrast that operates on so many levels. It's a case of Lewis's ambivalence versus Keillor's ambiguity, and their contrasting styles of irony. It's a case of Lewis the satirist versus Keillor the humorist. Furthermore, taking a very traditional biographical approach, underlying the above are strikingly different personalities and temperaments matched by contrasting personal experiences in and continuing relationship to their small-town origins. And underlying all these is the difference that time has made.

The fifty-seven years intervening between the birthdates of these two men do make quite a difference, of course. There is a way, moreover, in which Keillor's background specially suits him to be a successor in the line of Midwestern small-town writers and, simultaneously, makes Keillor different than Lewis in the context of his own generation and also a little less representative of American society in our time. Keillor's background telescopes or compacts a lot of American and Midwestern history, more than most people's. First, there is the immigrant factor just two generations back. Keillor's grandfather came from Canada to establish a farm near Anoka, Minnesota, around 1880. Keillor's own childhood and youth still had close ties to the farm, which linger in memories, for example, of being allowed to drive his uncle's hay rick drawn by a team of big black Belgian horses. But by 1942, the year of Keillor's birth, Anoka was turning into a suburb. Keillor's father was lower-middle-class and blue-collar, a railway mail clerk and free-lance carpenter. The family's vegetable garden took up a half acre. The family religion was still strict fundamentalist, the Plymouth Brethren--or the PB's, as Keillor calls them (Traub 111-12; Keillor "What"). The rest of Keillor's biographical outline is pretty well-known: college, some graduate school in English, gradual recognition and some success as a writer, and today's fame and also artistic status. A four-lane divided highway now runs just past Anoka, which has been assimilated into the Twin Cities sprawl.

It's pretty easy to see how that background could make a person sensitive to

the gaps and internal conflicts that spring up between generations and social classes and levels of sophistication and to the desire or need to somehow bridge those gaps and resolve those conflicts. It's easy to understand how that degree of rapid change could generate a strong nostalgic tendency in a person—a little more than most people's today, I'd guess. The interviewer and writer for Esquire, James Traub, says that "each of the randomly interviewed members of the audience" on the night he attended the Companion broadcast "had been brought up in a town like Elk River or Coon Rapids," and he concludes that "small towns are not all that far in the past of most latter-day Americans" (114). I have a hunch that his random sampling was accurate enough, but though there are a lot of us from such backgrounds, we are not quite typical today and not in the way that the man from Sauk Centre was in his day. And my point here also is that by the time Keillor began his artistic work (by, say, 1974 when the Companion broadcasts began), he had had a chance to reflect upon those conflicts; he was not still in the process of living through them the way Lewis was in the 1920s and 1930s.

When Main Street and Babbitt were being written, the Gopher Prairies and, to a greater extent, the larger Zeniths seemed terribly powerful and unstoppable on the road toward "progress" and expansion and, as Lewis would have it, total domination of Western civilization. Then 1929 and the 30s changed all that. As Anthony Hilfer points out in his chapter "The Thirties and After" in The Revolt From the Village, Lewis—along with Anderson, Masters, and others—all reversed their attitudes towards traditional American culture, as exemplified in the small town—attitudes which they had actually been ambivalent about all along (220-43). Thus, for example, Fred Cornplow can replace Carol Kennicott as the central sympathetic character in a Lewis novel.

Here, then, is part of the foundation for that contrast between the work of Lewis and Keillor. Hilfer's judgment is a bit harsh, perhaps, but basically accurate when he says that "Lewis was stylistically incapable of expressing ambiguity; instead, his central quality is a nervous and confused ambivalence" (226). That ambivalence has allowed for such divergent and conflicting interpretations of novels such as Main Street. As Schorer says, Carol and Will Kennicott embody two opposing parts of Lewis's own nature which struggled against each other in his own life (Main 439). It's a good attempt at reconciliation which brings the Kennicotts back together at the end of the novel, but it does not quite work, does not quite convince. Indeed, I think that some of the best scenes and most convincing dialogue in that book are domestic quarrels between

Carol and Will which usually end in a standoff, sometimes quite bitter.

By contrast, Keillor's greatest artistic achievement and also the single most important source of his wide appeal, I submit, is his deft and delicate handling of tone and his ambiguity. Just below the surface of, or smoothly blended with, his gentle satire of Lake Wobegon is a reaffirmation, often moving and even reverential, of the traditional values and ways of life that are hard to find in contemporary urban society but somehow preserved in "that little town that time forgot." Charm, intimacy, sympathy, and warmth are the qualities, maybe rare nowadays, that reviewers value in his work. Thus, the Time magazine reviewer of Happy To Be Here proclaims that Keillor is "in love with the upper Midwest, with the region and the people that Sinclair Lewis derided" (Skow 74).

Correspondingly, Lewis's irony is of the broad, reductive, sometimes tedious kind, such as when the courtship of Carol and Will is compared to fabled lovers of ancient history and romance. Keillor's irony, just like his ambiguity, is exactly the kind so highly prized by the New Critics, in which every truth is tempered by its opposite. According to Cleanth Brooks, writing in Modern Poetry and Tradition, "all mature attitudes represent some sort of mingling of the approbative and the satirical," and the "imaginative man" has "his particular value in his superior power to reconcile the irrelevant or apparently warring elements of experience" (29, 33). The opposite quality that Brooks is always on the look out for is sentimentality, which "nearly always involves an oversimplication of the experience in question" (37). And as Schorer maintains, Lewis was a "profoundly sentimental man" (Life 7).

I have space for just one illustrative Lake Wobegon ancedote. It concerns Mrs. Mangandance and Mrs. Dahl, two women who have been back-fence neighbors for a long time (Prairie 28 Aug. 1982). One day they got into quite a tiff after an outburst of mutual accusations of spying on the other from behind the curtains. These accusations evidently aroused such heat, the listener could guess early on in the story, because they were true. These are exactly the kind of peeping villagers that afflicted Carol Kennicott. Still, says Keillor, they were friends, "sort of." And just that week when Mrs. Mangandance was not feeling well, Mrs. Dahl was quick to bring over some nice soup for her lunch, because she had noticed that her neighbor was moving kind of slowly and bent over through her bedroom and kitchen that morning. It's a typically small-scale and minor-key kind of Keillor story. We do not have, say, a handsome boy and his mother dying of typhoid, like Olaf and Bea Bjornstam, nor round-the-clock heroic efforts

to save them, like Carol Kennicott's. Rather, one old lady has a touch of the flu or a bad cold, and another makes her some soup. No one really ever gets driven out of Lake Wobegon, either, or ridden out of town on a rail. People muddle through. And Keillor suggests here, of course, that maybe without the snooping, there could not be this kind of intimate, personal caring for one another. Maybe you can't have one without the other. There's an example, I think, of a nice ambiguity, a nice reconciling of apparently warring elements of experience. So with his wit and gentle satire he thus makes realistic and credible his reaffirmation of middle-class Midwestern values—while greatly entertaining his audience the whole while.

Entertainment is very important to Keillor. It approaches the highest artistic value of all, in his view. Keillor loves to make us laugh, and he is usually called, accurately enough, a humorist. In regard to Lewis, my reaction is quite the same as Sherwood Anderson's: "One has the feeling that Lewis never laughs at all, that he is in an odd way too serious about something to laugh." We indeed get the impression that "Lewis has himself found but little joy" either in his life or his work and that he is a man "who, wanting to see beauty descend upon our lives like a rainstorm, has become blind to the minor beauties our lives hold" (27, 28). That seems to be the price Lewis paid for being a pure and unrelenting satirist. In all his most significant writings, says Schorer, Lewis's "impulse is plainly the exposition of social folly" ("Half-Truths" 48). Thus, he is trying to prepare for social improvement. And Lewis surely is uncompromising. He tenaciously sticks to the highest ideals, of individual freedom and self-fulfillment, for example, measured against which everyone and everything must fall short. He never did find rest.

Keillor is so different. As I indicated, he wants us to laugh at his jokes and be entertained. But he is usually aiming at, and often achieves, more than that too. In May of 1984, as part of a series of programs called the Westminster Town Hall Forum broadcast by American Public Radio, Keillor delivered a mostly humorous lecture called "Changing the Lightbulb: Can We Meet the Comedic Needs of the 1980s?" In it he discussed the viewpoint that humor "is supposed to lead to something else, lead to changing the world or improving the world." But that is not his view. Rather, he says that Thoreau has taught us that "one cannot straighten out the world who has not learned to enjoy it," just as it was Thoreau who wrote that "only that day dawns to which we are awake." After this kind of preparation, then, it does not sound too odd when at the end of his talk, Keillor says that humor "is not a matter of words,

is not being funny." Rather, it is a "presence in the world, a presence like grace, which is always there and shines on everybody." In his Lake Wobegon stories, Keillor returns to this theme again and again, talking about being awake and paying attention, about the presence of the sacred and the holy which can be apprehended in every here and now, even in the quotidian and commonplace, or especially in the quotidian and commonplace--and the small town. He can talk quite convincingly about this theme, and, probably more important, he can demonstrate or dramatize that theme in his monologues. Lake Wobegon, recollected in tranquility, reveals all sorts of unexpected or easily missed minor beauties and finally takes on a supreme value of mere being that a lot of us can participate in. It's downright poetical, I know, and as Yeats said, "all the most valuable things are useless" (25).

So these are the contrasting artistic objectives that Lewis and Keillor seem destined to strive for, destined by—to put it terribly plainly—a rather sad versus a basically happy childhood and youth in their real-life versions of Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon, and by their contrasting personalities. But the last point has to be a point of comparison. At their best, Lewis and Keillor both realize their objectives, and we, as readers and listeners, are greatly indebted to both, and Midwestern and American culture are that much more richly diverse because of them.

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"GRAY DARKNESS AND SHADOWY TREES": CAROL KENNICOTT AND THE GOOD FIGHT FOR UTOPIA NOW

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> I want you to help me find out what has made the darkness of the women. Gray darkness and shadowy trees. We're all it it, ten million women, young married women with good prosperous husbands, and business women in linen collars, and grandmothers that gad out to teas, and wives of underpaid miners, and farmwives who really like to make butter and go to church. What is it we want—and need? (Main Street 197)

Women traditionally have been empowered not by challenging men directly but by exploiting their society's definitions of feminine and female, using nurturing and civilizing roles to achieve status and authority. In America such a pattern was true for women through the end of the nineteenth century; for many women, of course, it continues true today. But when Carol Kennicott makes her poignant plea in Sinclair Lewis's Main Street, asking Guy Pollock to help her find "what has made the darkness of the women," she is driven by her recognition that traditional nurturing and civilizing roles are not enough, at least for her, and that she must do something different if she is to save her soul.

Carol's fears that she is trapped in Gopher Prairie have spoken to the needs of many women since Main Street was first published sixty-five years ago, the same year as the passage of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. Many have seen themselves, like Carol, as women with "working brain and no work" (86), and when Carol moves to Washington to find that work, to achieve a more conscious life through a career, her move anticipates the decision more and more women of the twentieth century would make to gain control over their own destinies. The identification that many women have felt with Carol's frustrations and desires has certainly been a contributing factor to the continuing interest in Main Street, but that same strong identification has also made many readers uneasy about the novel's conclusion, uncertain about what to make of Carol's decision to become pregnant, to leave Washington, to return to Gopher Prairie to become, again, a "woman of Main Street."

Many readers quite simply have felt betrayed by the novel's ending. While continu-

ing to be sympathetic to Lewis's picture of women who lack control over their lives, they nevertheless fault him for not allowing Carol to gain control, for picturing her, as Nan Bauer Maglin has argued, as a woman who has "given up" (801). Maglin's reading of Main Street has much to commend, but, in fact, it does not do justice to the conclusion of the novel. As the number of women in the work force has increased dramatically since the publication of Main Street, it has become increasingly clear that Lewis' vision of empowerment is based not only a thorough understanding of the past but also on the prophetic vision of the future.

Alice Sodowsky has argued that the point of view of Lewis' heroines is primarily sentimental, but Lewis himself does not sentimentalize, at least in Main Street, woman's search of empowerment. Like many of his contemporaries, he laid bare the limits of nurturing and civilizing roles, in many cases more ruthlessly than women writers like Willa Cather and Edith Wharton; better than either Cather or Wharton, he was also able to anticipate that the great twentieth-century alternative for women seeking power, challenging men directly in the work force, has its own limits. It is a vision of female empowerment, both traditional and twentieth-century, that can be best understood by tracing the historical and literary patterns with which Lewis had to work.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of female power in America was that which occurred on the frontier, as women helped to push forward the boundaries of civilization, settling and domesticating. In The Lay of the Land Annette Kolodny has defined the American pastoral impulse as being, from the first, "a yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine" (8), arguing persuasively that "to make the new continent Woman was already to civilize it" (9). Kolodny continues her study in The Land Before Her, showing how women helped to transform the frontier and arguing, "Just as Eve had once been edited out of the wilderness paradise, so now Adam would become superfluous to the homestead Eden" (241). In a second important manifestation, traced by Ann Douglas in The Feminization of American Culture, women gained power by joining with the Protestant clergy as cultural custodians. By preaching the value of feminine qualities such as passivity, qualities that had been imposed upon them by society, they increased the significance of those qualities—and thus of themselves. Douglas writes, "In the midst of the transformation of the American economy into the most powerfully aggressive capitalist system in the world, American culture seemed bent on establishing a perpetual Mother's Day" (6).

Both Douglas and Kolodny are interested in what Douglas has called "the drive of nineteenth-century American women to gain power through the exploitation of their feminine identity as . . . society defined it" (8), but each emphasizes a different aspect of that definition: Douglas is concerned with society's defining woman as civilizer, Kolodny with the defining of woman as nurturer. While neither brings her study into the twentieth century, the patterns each describes have been enormously important for women writers who have looked to these nurturing and civilizing roles as patterns for strong heroines.

Willa Cather's pioneer matriarchs, for example, are embodiments of Kolodny's arguments, women who gain power by domesticating land that is itself perceived as Woman. In My Antonia, for example, the land is alive, moving, conforming to the shape of a human face, female, undulating, crossed by yellow ribbons of sunflowers. The land seduces at nightfall; stripped bare in the winter, it reveals itself as the truth. Nature may be harsh—one is threatened by wolves and snakes and the weather in My Antonia—but the land is beneficent. Pioneers burrow into it and build their homes of it. The land gives forth rich bounty, indeed life itself: in one of the novel's most brilliant images, Antonia's children explode out of the dark cave, as if born of the land. But most important, Antonia herself is the symbol of this female, fertile, seductive, nurturing landscape.

Jim Burden calls Antonia "a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races," not only because of her children but because she is a cultivator, a nurturer. He says: "She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions" (353). Antonia's strengths, these "strong things of her heart," control the Cather novel. Even in New York City, Jim cannot escape the call back to the scene of his childhood and adolescence. Antonia's husband, who wanted like her father to live in the city, among people and music and activity, is simply an instrument of Antonia's special mission.

The women in Edith Wharton's novels are similarly strong through their association with society's understanding of the feminine, the female. In The Age of Innocence, for example, May Archer represents "peace, stability, comradeship, and the steadying sense of an unescapable duty" (208); always sweet-tempered, the most reasonable of wives, she is truly an angel in the house, a woman who has never disappointed her

husband. Like the middle-class women of Douglas' study, May achieves power through influence, her strength based on a reinforcement of female values, and that strength controls Newland Archer even after her death. As attractive as the Countess Olenska is, with her promise of excitement, of new experiences, of stimulating conversation and love, Archer is caught by the domestic virtues embodied by his wife, by her unspoken expectations, by the sacrifice she has made of her own personality, and finally her life, to serve him and their children. When Archer chooses, at the end of the novel, not to visit Ellen Olenska, the decision is based not only on his desire to keep alive Olenska's memory. He asks his son to tell the Countess Olenska that he is old-fashioned, affirming the old-fashioned—feminine--values that he found so stifling at the beginning of the novel.

The heroines of both Cather and Wharton achieve strength through their affirmation of the female as it is perceived and valued by their societies; reading Cather and Wharton, we may well feel attracted to—or at least nostalgic for—their worlds, ones that value women and give them power for their nurturing and civilizing roles. But as readers in 1985, we also see, at the same time, that such empowerment has little connection with today's possibilities. Woman as domesticator, as cultivator, continues to have a strong mythic appeal (Hollywood in particular has capitalized on the attraction of a strong woman identified with the land), but economically America no longer has need for the pioneer matriarch. In The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan actually pinpoints the identity crisis of American women at the moment when frontier society closed, when "the fire and strength and ability of the pioneer women were no longer needed" (335). Similarly, while many, including the President of the United States, continue to celebrate woman as civilizer, most Americans can no longer afford to keep an angel in the house. With well more than half of all country's wives and mothers in the work force, there is little call for the woman who submerges her identity into that of her husband and children, who places a premium on sacrifice and quiet influence over her family's moral lives.

Both Cather and Wharton implicitly predict this, of course, for both writers—while they show female empowerment—look forward to a different time for the children of Antonia and May. The daughters as well as the sons are expected to live lives quite different from their mothers, for even without the economic changes that make these novels seem so dated, both Cather and Wharton are aware of other weaknesses in the forms of empowerment they have chosen to describe. Both writers, for example, show

the enormous cost—to the men as well as the women—of the lack of an imaginative life in the roles their women have chosen. In O Pioneers! Cather makes this explicit when she writes of Alexandra Bergson that lack of imagination was her "blind side": "Her life had not been of the kind to sharpen her vision. . . . Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields" (203). In The Age of Innocence, Archer realizes that May Welland's innocence can seal "the mind against imagination and the heart against experience" (145). Married, May remains a symbol of the female virtues only by cutting herself off from all sense of history, "so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change" (351). Such a failure affects not only the women but the men of these novels. Those who surround Antonia are all smaller than she is; Burden bears the burden of his own failure of imagination, his marriage to a sterile, unloving woman. In The Age of Innocence, both the men and the women are trapped in a conflicting mass of opinions: while "women should be free—as free as [men] are," "nice" women would never claim freedom (40-41). Thwarted and dwarfed by the web of hypocrisy that underlies the virtue he nevertheless affirms, Archer knows he has missed "the flower of life" (350).

Like his contemporaries Cather and Wharton, Lewis also considers, in Main Street, the ways in which women have tried to achieve power through their roles as nurturers and civilizers. But because Lewis set his novel several decades after My Antonia and The Age of Innocence, the emphasis in Main Street is much more on the failure of these roles for the twentieth century. Only through the figure of Bea Sorenson Bjornstam does Lewis show a potential pioneer matriarch, but her strengths are rejected by Gopher Prairie and are not enough to save her or her child from death. Carol's setting is always an urban center or small town, with clear recognition that Bea's pioneer life can no longer be an answer to the darkness of most women. When Will Kennicott tells Carol, "You haven't got enough work to do. If you had five kids and no hired girl, and had to help with the chores and separate the cream, like these farmers' wives, then you wouldn't be so discontented," Carol is quite explicit: "I've done that sort of thing. There've been a good many times when we hadn't a maid, and I did all the housework, and cared for Hugh, and went to Red Cross, and did it all very efficiently. I'm a good cook and a good sweeper, and you don't dare say I'm *not*!" But Carol also

sees the limit to this kind of work: "Was I more happy when I was drudging? I was not. I was just bedraggled and unhappy. It's work—but not my work. I could run an office or a library, or nurse and teach children. But solitary dish-washing isn't enough to satisfy me—or many other women" (404-405).

The reason for Carol's disenchantment with the physical labor of the pioneer farm woman is made quite clear in Main Street. Carol is not afraid of work and certainly not afraid of being tired. But having been exposed to the life of the mind, even at Blodgett College which is "still combating the recent heresies of Voltaire, Darwin, and Robert Ingersoll" (8), Carol knows that hard physical labor destroys the imaginative life. It promises exhaustion rather than satisfaction. Moreover, Lewis accepts one of Cather's assumptions—that whatever the advantages of the pioneer matriarchy, a farmer's children will become doctors and lawyers and governors. One may wax nostalgic about the joys of hard labor, but few men or women, given a choice, voluntarily choose it.

Main Street similarly questions the attraction of Carol's finding strength through the pattern of May Welland Archer; that is, through the exertion of female influence. Carol's decision to marry Will certainly involves the promise he holds out to her of transforming both him and Gopher Prairie, of making the town more attractive, of making him less materialistic, of helping him in his work. And Carol does try. She tries to change Gopher Prairie conversations from personalities to ideas; she tries to change patterns of entertainment by giving an Oriental party, by urging more winter sports, by putting on a play. She tries to awaken the Thanatopsis Club to an interest in social problems; she works to get funds appropriated for a new city hall. She tries to get Gopher Prairie to accept such outsiders as Miles Bjornstam and Erik Valborg; she works to convince the schoolboard to retain Fern Mullins after her experience with Cy Bogart. But unlike May Archer, in all these areas Carol meets defeat.

Even with Will she has little success. Although she redoes the living room of their home, she is unable to convince him about the design for a new house. Unable to lose herself in hard physical labor ("she wondered how many millions of women had lied to themselves during the death-rimmed years through which they had pretended to enjoy the puerile methods persisting in housework" [287]) and unsuccessful in transforming Gopher Prairie, or even Will, to her own vision, she tries, sporadically to abandon the struggle for power and recognition and lose herself in the role of wife and mother. But each in turn proves unsatisfactory. Of Will, she concludes, "I thought that adoring

him, watching him operate, would be enough. It isn't" (196). And of herself as mother, Lewis writes: "For two years nothing else [but Hugh] existed. [But] she did not, as the cynical matrons had prophesied, 'give up worrying about the world and other folks' babies soon as she got one of her own to fight for.' The barbarity of that willingness to sacrifice other children so that one child might have too much was impossible to her" (235).

Lewis, then, sees as clearly as Wharton and Cather that, whatever the attractions of traditional forms of female empowerment, these roles are, in fact, limited—at least for some women. Moreover, whatever power is actually gained through exploiting society's definitions of female seems minor compared to the cost of such empowerment, for men as well as for women: Dave Dyer is as diminished as his wife when she must beg him for money. Lewis actually shows these weaknesses in a far more direct way than either Cather or Wharton, revealing a profound sense of the grounds on which a woman—or a man—can finally achieve significant power.

The possibility that most critics of Main Street see as Lewis's alternative for empowerment is, of course, a career. This reading places Carol Kennicott with his other career women, heroines like Ann Vickers, and argues that the way for women to move from weakness to power is through work outside the home. Carol does perceive herself, in Gopher Prairie, as a working woman without work, and the move to Washington, whatever its disappointments, is freeing: there Carol "felt that she was no longer one-half of a marriage but the whole of a human being" (408). Following this interpretation, Maglin has grouped Main Street with The Job and Ann Vickers as novels about "the struggle of a woman . . . for her identity as a human being. Central to the focus of each novel is the dilemma: work or marriage" (783); because marriage in this culture, in this era, has a "stultifying" effect on women (792), the alternative route for growth and power is career.

However, to see Carol's experience in Washington as Lewis's alternative proposal is to see that Carol has failed. Whether because she is too old ("a faded government clerk" [414]) or because Lewis decides to affirm the values of Gopher Prairie, that failure must trivialize Carol's stature and, for many readers, the significance of the novel in 1985. By returning to marriage, a woman of Main Street, Carol seems to have given up the good fight for "Utopia now" to return to the gray darkness and shadowy trees. Perhaps the best that can be said of Main Street is Maglin's conclusion that Lewis seems to believe in separate but equal spheres: the fact that women, a few

extraordinary women, might succeed in careers "is less important than the fact that everywhere in America women have, if they care to seize it, a power and significance at least equal to that of men about them" (801).

That is too limited a reading of Main Street's conclusion, however. It is true that Lewis does not sentimentalize Carol's Washington experience any more than he sentimentalized traditional forms of female empowerment. But women who identify with Carol's rebellion against traditional nurturing and civilizing roles can also identify with her discovery that work can be routine and major metropolitan centers can be dull. In many cases, women who are trapped into work outside the home—for example, as single heads of households—are no freer than women trapped into marriage. The answer is not simply work. It lies, as Carol tells Guy, in a more conscious life.

When Carol tries to decide whether to return to Gopher Prairie from Washington, she tells Will, "Decide for me." He responds, "You've got to do your own deciding" (421). And the decision to return to Gopher Prairie, to have another child, does become—but only after several more months of consideration—Carol's decision. Having taken on the responsibility for that decision, Carol ends the novel with a clear sense of who she is, an acceptance of that sense and a strong pride in it: "I've never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to have gone beyond them" (432). What Carol and Will Kennicott both have overcome is their own failure of the imagination—their initial failure, in their first courtship, to incorporate the possibility of many alternatives, to recognize the relationship between freedom of choice, responsibility, and empowerment.

The conclusion of Main Street is a remarkable exercise in self-discipline. Lewis could easily have created yet another myth of female empowerment (as he, in fact, did in his career woman novels), the myth that strength will come for women in some automatic way if they have jobs that take them out of the home. That is as limited a sense of female empowerment as nineteenth-century myths which assumed women achieve power from their nurturing and civilizing roles. Power—for men and for women—comes not from becoming part of the work force (a recognition clearer to us in 1985 than it might have been in 1920), but from having the freedom to choose marriage or career or some combination of both, from having no artificial limits on potential, from knowing that we have freely chosen our course, and—finally—from accepting responsibility for that choice.

In Freedom of the Individual, the philosopher Stuart Hampshire writes of "the

power to do a specific thing on a particular occasion" because, he argues, "this is the fundamental kind of power" (16-17). Power comes when we are self-directed and free, to the extent that "there are genuine possibilities open to [us], and [we] can be said to have decided to live as [we do]" (93); that is, we are free, according to Hampshire, to the extent that we are "the authority" on our own future actions (112). It is power in this fundamental sense that both Carol and Will Kennicott achieve.

Carol's return to Main Street will probably not be the choice of the Kennicotts' daughter or of very many more daughters of Main Street. It may not be the choice of readers in 1985. But it is a choice that Carol makes for herself, and it is a choice for which she takes responsibility. She has imagined alternatives, she has acted on them, she is no longer ruled by fear of Main Street, she has become the authority on her own future. In this sense, she has come out of the darkness, the gray darkness and shadowy trees, to a more conscious life, achieving the only Utopia open to any of us, control over our destiny. We should not fault Lewis for imagining that possibility. Carol Kennicott has fought a better fight than she realizes.

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SAUK CENTRE AS ARTIFACT: THE TOWN AS SEEN IN HISTORY, PAINTING, ARCHITECTURE, AND LITERATURE

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In preparation for this afternoon's tour of Sauk Centre and Sinclair Lewis's childhood home, I want to discuss the history of Sauk Centre from 1858 to 1903, a period that dovetails with its evolution from uninhabited Indian territory, through the era of immigrant settlement, to the time when it became a prosperous farming center. My interest in Sauk Centre is focused upon an understanding of that community through a study of its artifacts: Buildings, photographs, paintings, lithographs, plat maps, newspaper stories, and literature. Collectively, these artifacts reveal how a town appears in reality through viewing its material surroundings, and how artists, writers, and citizens perceive the same community through their various media. Since Sauk Centre served as a model for Lewis's Gopher Prairie in Main Street, part of my discussion will show parallels between Sauk Centre and its imaginative reconstruction in the mind of Sinclair Lewis.

The land upon which the town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, now sits was ceded by the Chippewa to the United States Government in 1847, only 38 years before the birth of Sinclair Lewis. Early maps of the area that is now western Stearns County show that in the 1840s the land was largely prairie and swampland, and written accounts note dense forest stands nearby as well as the presence of wild game: fox, deer, elk, bear, and mink.[1] Until the outbreak of the Indian War in 1862, the region was neutral territory between the tribes of Chippewa and Sioux.[2] Most of the soil had never been broken by the plow nor were its hardwood resources tapped. To the native population it was a vast, unspoiled source of food supply; to the European immigrant or the Westward-moving Yankee pioneer, the land promised a living upon a landscape that seemed to be a Garden of Eden. Two early accounts by settlers and a later impression by a native son attest to the pristine beauty of the area. A visitor writing in 1868 said: "We stood upon an elevated ridge and looked down upon a level prairie and the sylvan Sauk [River], with a dense forest in the background of the other side. Before us lay

the townsite of Sauk Centre."[3] A Yankee settler noted: "Coming from New England, a land of rocks, and hills, this land seemed a paradise. The gem was lovely Fairy Lake, where we settlers used to picnic."[4] Even a reluctant resident like Sinclair Lewis's Carol Kennicott found the landscape exhilarating. Lewis tells us:

> Under [Carol's] feet the rough grass made a pleasant crunching. Sweet winds blew from the sunny lake beside her, and small waves sputtered on the meadowy shore . . . . She was nearing a frivolous grove of birch and poplar and wild plum trees . . . . She came out on the prairie, spacious under an arch of boldly cut clouds. Small ponds glittered. Above a marsh red-winged blackbirds chased a crow in a swift melodrama of the air. On a hill was silhouetted a man following a drag. His horse bent its neck and plodded, content.[5]

Given the beauty of the area, it is not surprising that one of the early inhabitants was an artist, Edwin Whitefield. Born in England in 1816, Whitefield emigrated first to Canada, and then in 1855 or 1856 to the village of Kandiyohi in Minnesota Territory. In 1858 he moved again to a site he named Kandotta, one mile from present day Sauk Centre. During these years, Whitefield combined his work in landscape painting with promotional efforts to bring new settlers into the region. One method he used was to have his watercolors reproduced into lithographs and distributed throughout the United States by land promoters for the purpose of advertising townsites. Whitefield also lectured widely and wrote articles extolling the virtues of Minnesota, a place with "space enough for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of emigrants." Among a number of reasons for settlement, Whitefield felt that Minnesota would become a "summer haven and resort for the unhappy people 'from the consumptive East and the fever-stricken South'".[6]

Whitefield, his wife, Lillian, and their family lived at the Kandotta townsite, which lay between the Ashley River and Fairy Lake—names given them by Whitefield—from 1858 to 1860.[7] Whitefield's First View of Fairy Lake, a watercolor dated July 6, 1857, is the first known picture of the Sauk Centre area. In this work Whitefield depicts an idyllic setting where three men chase butterflies across a field. It is a landscape Lewis often visited on foot, and a site he referred to fondly in his 1931 reminiscence, "The Long Arm of the Small Town":

> ". . . As I look at these sons of rich men in New England with their motor cars and their travel, it seems to me that they are not having one-tenth the fun which I had as a kid, swimming and fishing in Sauk Lake, or cruising its perilous depths on a raft (probably made of stolen logs), tramping out to Fairy Lake to a picnic, ten miles on end with a shot gun."[8]

Whitefield's watercolor, Kandotta, November, 1857, reveals more about actual pioneering conditions than does the Fairy Lake scene, although the mood is still bucolic. Probably the earliest portrayal of western county settlement, Whitefield's watercolor depicts a cluster of log buildings, including a home, two smaller shanty-type service buildings, and a roofless shelter that may have served as an animal compound. The home is of extended-end, round-log construction, saddle-notched, and heavily chinked. The well-constructed appearance of this structure reveals that Whitefield was not only a competent builder, but also a pioneer who sought permanency. To emphasize stability in an age of mobility, Whitefield shows family members involved in various pioneering tasks—standing guard, carrying water, unloading a cart, and washing clothes.

Whitefield's attachment to Minnesota was shortlived, however, for he left in 1860 for Chicago and died in Boston in 1892.[9] As we shall see, his son, Wilfred J. D. Whitefield, remained in Sauk Centre where he recorded in his lithographs the changing landscape of post-Civil War village life.

At the time Edwin Whitefield was attempting to establish his home on the frontier, seven New Englanders, led by Alexander Moore, formed the Sauk Centre Townsite Company in 1856. Moore, who was representing his mother, Rachel, staked out the earliest outlines of a townsite. Early sources record the presence of a dugout, possibly Moore's, as the first residence in Sauk Centre. Of a fairly common temporary pioneer shelter type, Moore's home was an excavation lined with poles in the river bluff. This squatter's shanty and a log house built on the riverbank in June 1857 constitute the rudimentary beginnings of the village. Construction of a dam by Moore and Edward Jacques during the same year was curtailed by the Panic of 1857, and lost to a flood in 1858. In 1860, a small sawmill was built at the site of the reconstructed dam. A postoffice, established in 1858, the first frame house (the home of Charles Merry), 1859, and Jesse Draper's blacksmith shop of 1860, further increased the nucleus of the struggling community.[10]

A major factor in Sauk Centre's growth was its advantageous siting on Sauk Lake, a potential source for milling. A second factor, which led to Sauk Centre's later commercial development, was its location on the Middle Trail, one of the ox-cart routes in the Red River Trail complex. A third factor was road improvements made in 1859 by James C. Burbank's Minnesota Stage Company, which carried mail, freight, and passengers throughout the northern part of the state. Burbank's improvement of a new state road helped develop an important artery for his stages as well as an improved surface for

the ox-cart trade.[11]

With its ideal setting along Minnesota's emerging trade routes, Sauk Centre became an important rendezvous for those who made use of the trail. The most interesting inhabitants of the trail were the ox-cart drivers, the metis, mixed-blood people from the Red River. Dressed in a colorful variety of clothing and speaking a composite language of European tongues, the metis lent an air of excitement to the settlement.[12] Even their carts have become a part of Minnesota's material folklore. Of ingenious design, these highly durable carriers were built of oak and painted in colors that suited the tastes of individual drivers. Women drove their own carts and painted them distinctively. People living several miles from the trails could hear the deafening screech of the greaseless wheels. Invented in the 1830s by an unnamed Hudson's Bay employee, an individual cart carried over a thousand pounds of hides—buffalo, mink, badger, wolf, lynx, otter, beaver, muskrat, bear, wildcat. Caravans usually included 50 to 100 carts.[13] The sight and the sound, as well as contact with the colorful drivers and their families, enriched the frontier experience and served as a link between Sauk Centre and distant, unknown places.

Sauk Centre's relationship to the state at large was dramatically heightened during the Indian War of 1862. The raising of a stockade in Sauk Centre also helped to develop cohesiveness in the tiny community. One of seven log structures erected in Stearns County during the disastrous summer of 1862, the Sauk Centre stockade was constructed of 12-foot upright tamarack logs that enclosed two acres (figure 1). Two-story oak bastions capable of holding forty men stood at the northwest and southwest corners.[14] The stockade was erected near the present location of Birch and 7th Street, about one-half mile southeast of where the Palmer House stands today.[15] Oblong in form, the structure enclosed several log buildings, including headquarters buildings, five soldiers' quarters, and stables. A white frame house, which also served as a store, was the home of Solomon Pendergast. Nellie Pendergast, the first white child born in Sauk Centre, was delivered there.[16] The fort's military surgeon, Benjamin R. Palmer, was also Sauk Centre's first medical doctor. Born in Pennsylvania and educated in Paris, Palmer had come to Sauk Centre for his health. A house within the stockade was converted into a hospital and a home for Palmer.[17]

Another important structure in the social history of Sauk Centre was the Joseph Capser store, which stood outside the stockade walls. Built in October 1862, the store was recorded in a painting done in 1864.[18] Serving as both store and saloon, the 12-foot

x 20-foot log building had a board shack lean-to for the family's living quarters. A later account of life in the store provides a glimpse of raw experience on this early frontier. According to an interview with an early settler recorded in the 1930s, the garrisoned soldiers had amicable relations with the settlers, though trouble developed when soldiers from other outposts moved through the area. One day these troops came into the store, filling it to capacity and demanding liquor. When the soldiers crowded forward to help themselves, Capser defended himself with a hatchet. Suddenly, his wife ran from the lean-to, grabbed the hatchet from her husband, simultaneously seizing one of the soldiers by the throat. Mrs. Capser held on to the man until an officer arrived to arrest him and restore order.[19]

The stockade also provided a happier setting for soldiers and settlers. Of particular interest was a group called the "Sergeant Brigade" that organized picnics, horseback riding, parties, and general social entertainment. According to one account, the soldiers wore their "natty forge [forage] caps over the left ear [to] win the hearts of the fair feminine."[20]

After the end of the Indian War, Sauk Centre began to form more of an identity as a community. Rachel Moore laid out and platted the original townsite in 1863, the year her son built a small gristmill. German emigrants arrived in 1863. Although no churches or schools were erected in the 1860s, a school meeting was held as early as April 1861, and a Congregational minister, Rev. C. S. Harrison, began serving in a mission capacity in 1860.[21] The founding of towns by Yankee settlers who later moved on to start new settlements was a common pattern in the Middle West of the nineteenth century. The founding of Sauk Centre and Sinclair Lewis's depiction of Gopher Prairie's beginnings are strikingly similar. As Lewis tells us, Gopher Prairie was founded by four representatives of the "aristocratic" professions—"the fine arts [of] medicine, law, religion, and finance." According to Lewis, these four were New Englanders who also became "arbiters" of the community's value system and rulers of the later eastern and foreign immigrant populations.[22]

Three businesses established in the 1860s are associated with Sauk Centre's commercial history: Pendergast and Fish's store in 1861, Capser's, 1862, and Warren Adley's Sauk Centre House in 1863. Fragmentary information about these enterprises provides us with valuable data about the material and social culture of early Sauk Centre.

Solomon Pendergast, born in New Hampshire in 1833, had made his way west on foot with his gun and dog. For several years he hunted and trapped in Hutchinson, Minn-

esota, and then moved on to Sauk Centre in 1861 where he built the store which served as "garrison, inn, and nursery" during the Indian War. Following a pattern of upward mobility common to the frontier, Pendergast later founded the Bank of Sauk Centre and served as its president from 1880 to 1889.[23]

Joseph Capser, a European immigrant, was born in Bavaria in 1833, and farmed in St. Joseph, Minnesota, before coming to Sauk Centre. The Capser store, besides its function as a saloon, became a "haven for farmers and travelers," a place where teamsters and wagons stopped between Sauk Centre and Minneapolis-St. Paul.[24] The business was expanded in the fall of 1864 when Capser bought a building (figure 2), which stood at the east corner of Main and 3rd, from Alexander Moore. It was here that Capser went into business with J. H. Linnemann of St. Joseph.

The Moore-Capser building is a fine example of a pioneer builder's attempt to transplant civilized taste in the form of architectural style to the Western frontier. The upright-temple form, one mode of the Greek Revival style, began in the East in the 1820s and spread to the South and West where it became an ideal plan for houses and public buildings. In the rural areas of the Middle West it was common to add a two-story, upright temple wing to an original one-story, two-room log house and cover both sections with white-painted clapboard siding. Many examples of these L- or T-shaped houses, often with classical detailing in the form of corner-board pilasters and returning eaves, are still found in diminishing numbers throughout rural Minnesota. The Moore-Capser building is more richly detailed than most of its domestic counterparts, emphasizing its importance as a commercial structure, but its fully developed entablature and capped pilasters were rare in central Minnesota pioneer communities. The pedimented gable roof, twin chimneys, sash windows, and long veranda are features that also isolate this building from its plainer false front neighbors.

The importance of a third business, the Sauk Centre House, can be reconstructed from an interview with a pioneer settler, J. D. Smith, who in 1932 recorded a rare description of the architecture of the frontier settlement. From Smith's account we can reconstruct in detail some of the early dwellings used by the immigrants, including the Sauk Centre House, and gain insight into the social patterns of everyday pioneer life.

Smith came to Sauk Centre from Hastings, Minnesota, with his parents and sister. They traveled nine days by ox-drawn covered wagon leading cows and young stock. Smith remembered passing through Minneapolis, "a little, squatty town," in 1864. The Merry home was the only dwelling outside the stockade that the Smiths found in Sauk Centre.

Proceeding toward the river, the family was met by former Hastings' friends who had built a kind of community shanty, 12-feet wide and 40-feet long. This unusual structure was constructed of six-foot vertical slab logs and was roofed with rough boards. Inside, three families lived in separate 10-foot by 12-foot rooms. Smith recalled that in this "slab shanty" women sewed by candlelight and cooked on a "rickety stove with the top all warped out of shape." Green wood had to be dug out of snowbanks and the river was the sole source of water.[25] A similar lifestyle is cited in a passage from Main Street where Lewis, referring to the territorial records of Minnesota, tells us that the Gopher Prairie pioneers "ground their own corn; the men folks shot ducks and pigeons and prairie chickens; the new breakings yielded the turnip-like rutabagas, which they ate raw and boiled and baked and baked and raw again. For treat they had wild plums and crab-apples and tiny wild strawberries".[26]

Smith's account of the interior of the Sauk Centre House in 1864 reminds us of the distance between outward architectural form and the reality of frontier life as it was lived within. The grandeur of the exterior (figure 3)—the graceful veranda, the pedimented roofline, returning eaves, heavy raking boards, and handsome window symmetry—would indicate a high level of splendor and elevated taste. Smith tells us, however, that although the dining room and kitchen wing was lathed, it was not plastered, nor were there carpets or rugs anywhere in the hotel. Of particular interest to an understanding of frontier sanitary conditions is Smith's account of the hotel's privies. An indoor washroom contained a long wooden trough that held a dozen tin pails. Full pails were poured into the trough which emptied into a large collecting pail below. Guests had to carry this pail through the hall, dining room, and kitchen to empty it in the outdoor latrine. Smith's account, including a description of the hotel's floor layout and room measurements, provides a rare view of the architectural and social environment of frontier Minnesota.[27]

The period of 1867 to 1881 showed expanded growth for the community with brief setbacks in the form of an 1867 flood that swept away the dam and mills and a major fire in 1870. The Panic of 1873 curtailed plans for a railroad and the 1876-77 locust invasion destroyed 24,000 bushels of wheat in Sauk Centre township alone. Despite these disasters, economic development at this time was unparalleled. During this period, the town's population grew to 1200, Henry Keller built a wagon factory employing 100 men, a Great Northern feeder line was completed, four banks were established, and a roller mill constructed.[28] By 1881, Sauk Centre had three four-story mills, a grain

elevator, a sawmill, five churches, a 500-volume library, and a ten-piece brass band.[29]

Another perspective on the town's development can be seen in visual documents. A study of plat maps, photographs, and a painting reveals the gap between the town's self-image and the reality of the raw frontier. Sauk Centre's plat is similar to most trans-Mississippi towns surveyed in the late nineteenth century. Following the guidelines of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, towns were commonly platted in simple, rectangular or square blocks, applying a grid to the landscape regardless of natural topographical feature. The grid system's monotony was increased even more when railroads began laying out speculative plats with streets arranged linearly on either side of the tracks. Sauk Centre's layout deviates but little from this plan. Railroad tracks separate the town from Sauk Lake, the town's major natural feature, thus forming a barrier between human inhabitants and nature. In Wilfred J. Whitefield's 1868 lithograph of Sauk Centre, however, the natural setting is emphasized (figure 4). While animals placidly lie in the foreground meadow, the river lazily meanders in the middle distance. Even more idyllic is the town in the distance, all of the buildings of which appear to be Greek Revival in style, with streets laid out in an apparently gridless pattern. Except for the presence of two smokestacks (to show the town's progressive, industrial spirit), the entire scene depicts a timeless landscape where handsome buildings are sited in proximity to nature.

A photograph from 1877 (figure 5) gives a rather different perspective. Here, the gridline is apparent and the townscape shows the presence of both classically-inspired structures (the L-shaped houses in the center and right) as well as the less attractive service buildings scattered throughout the town. It is obvious that in Whitefield's lithograph the artist merely drew an ideal setting by eliminating unattractive features that could not escape the camera. An even more realistic picture of social conditions in Sauk Centre appeared in an 1874 editorial which cited problems of health, sanitation, fire prevention, and street maintenance. According to the Sauk Centre Herald, "the town is in filthy condition . . . people living over the stores throw slops overboard; backyards of stores and hotels are filthy, they breed disease."[30] Even during the early years of the twentieth century, Sinclair Lewis noted the existence of garbage and ash-heaps in Gopher Prairie's backyards.[31]

Another 1877 Main Street scene (looking north of 4th Street) also shows the rawness of the frontier (figure 6). Here, we see an expanse of dirt between buildings and can imagine the street sprinkled with manure or filled with puddles. This scene is remarkably similar to Carol Kennicott's first impression of Gopher Prairie: ". . . the huddled low

wooden houses broke the plains scarcely more than would a hazel thicket. The fields swept up to it, past it. It was unprotected and unprotecting; there was no dignity in it nor any hope of greatness. . . . It was a frontier camp".[32] In the 1877 photograph, the buildings on the left are false fronts, the earliest type of main street architecture in the West and Middle West. Although the origin of the false front is obscure, it is thought to have originated in California mining towns arfter the 1849 Gold Rush.[33] The false front gave architectural distinction to the plain, gabled box or rectangle, provided a more or less consistent street line at cornice level, and made a space for individual business signs. While individual false fronts may be exceptionally designed, as in the case of the Connelley Market (figure 7), the overall impression of the streetscape, as seen in the 1877 view, is one of unevenness. The adherence to the right of each owner to his own style of building design and choice of signs at the expense of the total streetscape-aesthetic resulted in planlessness and established early the precedent for today's jumble of street forms.

In contrast to the generally bleak townscape of Sauk Centre, it is important to note that individual Main Street buildings often departed significantly from their neighbors. The Pendergast Block, 1877, is a good example of one businessman's sense of taste and willingness to set a standard for the community (figure 8). This two-story, free-standing brick building was designed as a fully conceived form rather than as a false front. Window-wall proportion is also well conceived, and ornamentation in the form of the cornice and the brick moldings—string-course, caps, and window trim—are well related to the design and of excellent craftsmanship. The cast-iron columns and street lamp reveal a fairly advanced stage of technological development for the place and time, although the board sidewalk and covered wagon remind us that this is still the frontier.

A view of the Sauk Centre House (taken during the 1892 Harrison-Reid Presidential campaign) shows an updating in style of the 1863 structure (figure 9). By the 1890s, the hotel's Greek Revival exterior had been almost totally removed (although remains of the older structure still appear in the building's rear) and had been rebuilt in the manner of the more fashionably up-to-date Italianate. The photograph shows the ornamental porch, cornice brackets, and box-like form of that style.

In 1900, the Sauk Centre House was destroyed by fire. In 1901, the Palmer Hosue was built in its place. This three-story, free-standing structure of red brick is of simple design though treated with reserved classical detailing in the form of pilasters and

first-story window moldings (housing Austrian-made stained-glass windows) that produce an arcaded effect along the south and east walls. Before the Pendergast building was modernized by later sheathing, its west wall contained a similar arcade in the form of blind arches that mirrored the Palmer House wall across the street. This distinctively European styling must have enhanced the aura of this street crossing and produced a rare elegance for small town architecture (figure 10).[34]

Lewis's treatment of Gopher Prairie's Minniemashie House, often recognized as a parallel to the Palmer House, shows how the author manipulated time periods to produce an ironic effect. While the Palmer House is of brick construction, the Minniemashie House was a "tall lean shabby structure, three stories of yellow-streaked wood, the corners covered with sanded pine slabs purporting to symbolize stone," and the interior, with its "stretch of bare unclean floor, line of rickety chairs . . . [and the] dining-room . . . a jungle of stained table-clothes and catsup bottles,"[35] harkens back to Smith's account of the Sauk Centre House in the 1860s.

By 1900, the influence of architect-designed commercial buildings had helped to change the face of Main Streets throughout America. Following designs that appeared in architectural periodicals and books between 1856 and 1916, the "commerical block" style was an attempt to give a richer architectural surface to business buildings.[36] Often Victorian-eclectic in style, these buildings were constructed of brick or stone, but often used the false front form as a parapet of rich design above the cornice. While the street level was left open for display purposes, the surrounding surfaces were treated sculpturally so as to add dimension to the otherwise flat design. During this period a greater attempt was made to construct a uniform cornice line, although individual store owners continued to pursue their own choice of style. In Sauk Centre, several commercial buildings built after 1900 on the west side of Main Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets show a high standard of architectural merit. On the other hand, wooden false fronts dominated the other side of street long after the turn of the century.

Two buildings on the west side of Main Street are of singular architectural worth. The facade of the First State Bank building (1900) is the only structure yet to be changed, a fact that adds to its character (figure 11). Like Carol's discovery of the Farmers' National Bank, an "Ionic temple, pure, exquisite, solitary,"[37] this building is a good example of the esthetic quality of a false front. The Hanson-Emerson building at the corner of Main and 3rd (1904) is essentially a false front; however, since it is a corner building, its architectural detailing has been carried around the corner to the 3rd Street

wall, giving the structure the appearance of a free-standing mass. Unfortunately, this Renaissance Revival building has been mutilated by tasteless and unsympathetic modernizing.

I have stressed the importance of those buildings in Sauk Centre that possess genuine aesthetic value to show a contrast to Lewis's generally gloomy and pessimistic view of small town architecture. While many drab elements of Sauk Centre's frontier past still existed after 1912—the east side of Main Street, for example--buildings showing architectural integrity had appeared as early as the 1870s. I feel that to some extent Lewis highlighted the least appealing visual elements of the town in order to show how Carol felt entrapped by her environment. Also, photographs of early Sauk Centre reveal that the townscape depicted in Main Street is closer in time to Lewis's childhood than it is to the period when Carol lived in Gopher Prairie.

Since Lewis used so many elements of his hometown to portray life in Gopher Prairie, what positive features did he either overlook or ignore that could have been used to brighten Carol's experience? I feel that to some extent Lewis overlooked a genuine progressive spirit in Sauk Centre, the fruits of which could be enjoyed in Carol's days.

First, the town enjoyed many civic improvements after 1900. By 1913, Sauk Centre's population was 3000. While former dreams of becoming a metropolis had faded, the town had settled in to become a prosperous farmers' trading center.[38] A city park, established in 1898 on land donated by Solomon Pendergast, had trees, flowers, and a fountain by 1915.[39] By the time Carol and Will had lived together three years in Gopher Prairie, Sauk Centre had a complete water, sewer, and electric light system, fifteen miles of cement walks (seven, according to Will Kennicott), four hotels and three banks.[40] Significantly, however, Main Street was not paved until 1924.[41]

Second, the town's cultural and social aspirations had been raised by two institutions—the Bryant library and the restroom established by the Gradatim Club. Although both institutions touched upon the lives of Lewis and his family in positive ways, Lewis underplayed their importance to the community to suit the needs of characterization. Carol found the library lacking in up-to-date acquisitions, and the restroom "resembled a second-hand store."[42] A library association had been formed in Sauk Centre as early as 1868. By 1880, the first library space, a room in city hall where Lewis had discovered the joys of reading, contained 5000 volumes.[43] By 1903, the present library building had been erected, a handsome (though rather severe)

neo-classic structure on south Main Street.

The town's progressive spirit is further revealed by the actions of the Gradatim Club, founded in 1895. The Gradatim Club ("Thanatopsis" in Main Street) is satirized by Lewis for its superficiality of monthly discussion topics, although in reality it played an important role in Sauk Centre's civic improvement. The club distributed flower seeds to children, established a reading room, lobbied successfully for a curfew, and, in an age when tuberculosis was rampant, helped enact an anti-spitting law.[44] Its major achievement, however, was the establishment of a public restroom, a place where rural women could rest, eat lunch, and care for children while their husbands carried out business in town. One of only two in the United States at the time, Sauk Centre's restroom was established in 1902. By 1911, a supportive city council had purchased a building, remodeled it with a new front, and furnished it with water, sewer, and electricity.[45] Viewed within the context of community life and public service, and as an example of emerging women's rights, the restroom was an important institution that reached beyond the boundaries of Sauk Centre.

In this paper I have attempted to trace the history of Sauk Centre from 1858 to 1903. My major purpose has been to provide an understanding of the physical and social environment into which Sinclair Lewis was born. For an understanding of this environment I have sought artifacts—paintings, photographs, maps, and buildings—that collectively communicate ideal and real perceptions of life in a particular Middle Western community. Supportive written material, especially impressions of the land and townscape by pioneer settlers, has helped me to visualize and understand the experience of the raw frontier. These accounts are also vital artifacts.

When Lewis wrote Main Street, he provided a new dimension to an understanding of Sauk Centre and to small town life in America. The novel reveals that Lewis was not only an astute social critic, but a writer who drew important parallels between society and architecture. By choosing a character who reacts sensitively to her physical surroundings, Lewis underscored the importance of material culture within the American experience. While I do not always agree with Lewis's gloomy and often pessimistic view of small town life and feel that he chose to overlook aesthetically worthwhile and progressively significant elements of community life, I feel that he forces us to look sharply at our physical environment and to examine the values that shaped it.

NOTES

[1]Maps consulted were: "Composite Map of United States Land Surveyors' Original Plats and Field Notes," 1969, J. Wm. Trygg, Ely, MN; "Map of the Territory of Minnesota," Capt. John Pope, Corps of Topographical Engineers, 1849; and "Hydrographical Basin of the Upper Mississippi River," J. N. Nicollet and J. C. Fremont, 1843, Bureau of the Corps of Topographical Engineers. References to wildlife appear in the newspaper writings of Edwin Whitefield as quoted in Ivy Louise Hildebrand, "Sauk Centre—A Study of the Growth of a Frontier Town," Thesis, St. Cloud State University, 1960, p. 8. Hildebrand's unpublished thesis is an invaluable resource for understanding Sauk Centre's history. Maps and the thesis are available at the Stearns County Heritage Center archives.

[2]Hildebrand 4.

[3]"A Trip to Sauk Valley in 1858," Sauk Centre Herald, 9 Apr. 1868. Qtd. in Hildebrand 1.

[4]"Sauk Centre File Folder," W.P.A. Records, Archives, Stearns County Heritage Center.

[5]Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt 1961) 144.

[6]Theodore C. Blegen, Minnesota, A History of the State (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1963) 176-77.

[7]Bertha L. Heilbron, "Edwin Whitefield, Settler's Artist," Minnesota History, (Summer, 1966): 69. The two watercolors referred to in the text are reproduced with a biography of Whitefield in Rena Neumann Coen, Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota, 1820-1914 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P and the U Gallery of the U of Minnesota) 48. See Plates 18 and 43.

[8]1931 Sauk Centre High School Annual (mimeographed copy, Sinclair Lewis Interpretative Center, Sauk Centre, MN).

[9]Coen 48.

[10]William Bell Mitchell, The History of Stearns County Minnesota, II (Chicago: Cooper, 1915) 1325.

[11]Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman, and Deborah M. Stulz, The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870 (St. Paul:

Minnesota Historical Society, 1979) 70.

[12]Gilman 5, 14. Also Frank G. O'Brien, Minnesota Pioneer Sketches (Minneapolis: Powell, 1904) 305-307.

[13]O'Brien 306 and Gilman 16.

[14]Caption of stockade photograph, "Sauk Centre Picture File," Archives, Stearns County Heritage Center.

[15]Mitchell I: 616.

[16]Mitchell II: 1326.

[17]Mitchell II: 1329.

[18]Photograph, "Sauk Centre Picture File," SCHC.

[19]"Sauk Centre File Folder," SCHC.

[20]Traditions and Life File Folder," W.P.A. Records, SCHC.

[21]Main Street, 51.

[22]Mitchell II: 1327.

[23]Ben DuBois, A Historical Sketch of Sauk Centre, Commemorating the Completed Modernization of the Building and Equipment of the First State Bank of Sauk Centre, 1954, [n.p.] 43. A copy of DeBois' booklet, invaluable for information not found elsewhere, is housed in the Bryant library, Sauk Centre.

[24]"Traditions and Life File Folder," SCHC.

[25]"Traditions and Life File Folder," SCHC.

[26]Main Street, 149. In this passage, Lewis briefly mentions the stockade and the locust invasion as well as the fact that Gopher Prairie was settled by "Maine Yankees."

[27]"Traditions and Life File Folder," SCHC.

[28]Hildebrand 51-54. Henry Keller (1846-1907) was a German immigrant, a member of the second wave of ethnic settlers. Before arriving in Sauk Centre in 1868, Keller served in the U.S. Army, 1864-1867. He later became president of the First National Bank, and between 1887-1897 was a member of the Minnesota senate. Warren Upham and Rose Dunlap, Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912, XIV, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1912) 393.

[29]J. Fletcher Williams, History of the Upper Mississippi Valley (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Co., 1881) 460-478.

[30]Hildebrand 57.

[31]Main Street 113.

[32]Main Street 30.

[33]Lester Walker, American Shelter, (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1981) 142-143.

[34]Material on the Palmer House has been collected by its owner, Mr. Al Tingley. A complete story of the grand opening appears in the Sauk Centre Avalanche, Oct. 17, 1901. Some 200 guests met at the new hotel for the grand opening. Dinner was served for groups of 70 throughout the evening. The newspaper reported that "clusters of tri-colored electric lights" were lit in the dining room and guests were treated to music by an orchestra which played an original waltz for the occasion.

[35]Main Street 37.

[36]Carole Rifkind, Main Street, The Face of Urban America (New York: Harper, 1977) 65.

[37]Main Street 40.

[38]Hildebrand 51-52. According to Hildebrand, the decades between 1880 and 1900 "marked the transition of Sauk Centre from a community still touched by frontier dreams of becoming a metropolis to a farmers' trading center much like those found in many places in central Minnesota."

[39]Mitchell II: 1331.

[40]Main Street 19; "History of Sauk Centre, Development of Town Folder," SCHC.

[41]Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw, 1961) 7.

[42]Main Street 133.

[43]Mitchell II: 1330.

[44]Schorer 17.

[45]"Sauk Centre Business File," SCHC.

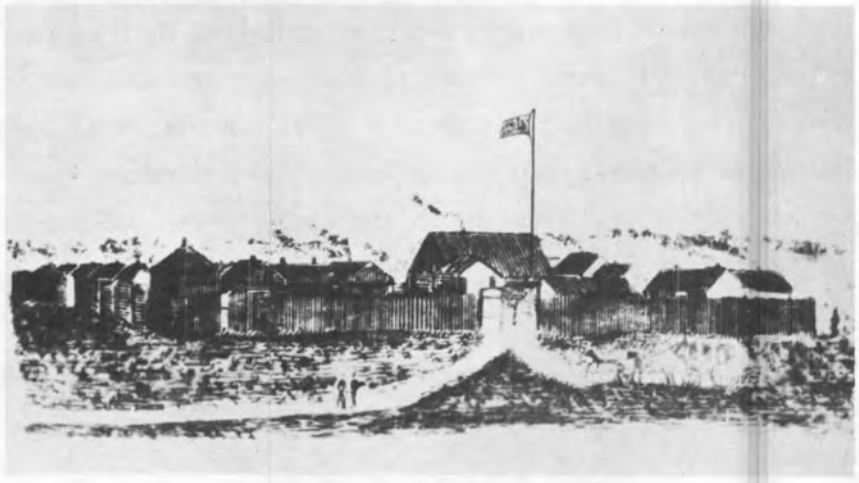

Figure 1: Sauk Centre Stockade, 1862
(Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 2: Moore-Capser Buliding, 1879
(Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 3: Sauk Centre House, 1860s
(Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 4: Whitefield Lithograph, 1868
(Minnesota Historical Society)

Figure 5: Sauk Centre in 1877
(Sincliar Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 6: Main Street False Fronts, 1877
(Minnesota Historical Society)

Figure 7: Connelley Market, Sauk Centre
(Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 8: Pendergast Block, 1877
(Minnesota Historical Society)

Figure 9: Sauk Centre House, 1892
(Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center)

Figure 10: Palmer House, constructed 1902
(Bill Morgan)

Figure 11: "Ionic Bank"
(Bill Morgan)

JACK LONDON'S INFLUENCE ON SINCLAIR LEWIS

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Notice of the relationship between Jack London and Sinclair Lewis is usually limited to London's buying plots from the unknown young Lewis and the conclusion that "the arrangement does not seem to have worked out very satisfactorily for London" (Walker 77).[1] The other, and more interesting, side of the relationship, the effect of the best-selling London and his work on the beginner Lewis, has been only incidentally observed. To fill this gap, this paper will show that London strongly influenced Lewis's life and writings, not only the early fiction, but later work like It Can't Happen Here of 1935. Of course, other authors—Charles Dickens, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain, and Hamlin Garland, to name a few—likewise shaped Lewis's fiction; and some authors, most notably Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells, influenced both London and Lewis so that isolating the influence of London on Lewis is difficult.

To assess the effects London exerted on Lewis, Lewis's novels will be examined in loose chronological order, with some subgroupings and omissions, through It Can't Happen Here. Most of the later novels and the short stories (with one exception) will be ignored. The most important of the London-like Lewis novels, Arrowsmith and It Can't Happen Here, will receive more attention. Preceding these analyses are a biographical introduction and a consideration of some references to London in Lewis's writing.

The first mention of Jack London in Mark Schorer's biography Sinclair Lewis: An American Life is dated 1904 or 1905. Lewis, a Yale undergraduate, had read the recently published London best-seller The Sea-Wolf and was so moved by it that he wrote in his diary concerning himself and two Yale professors: "Are they not—am I not—untried Humphrey Van Weydens?", that is, effete dalliers with books (96). On January 26, 1906, Lewis as a campus radical was no doubt present when London lectured on socialism at Yale, and, following the lecture, was probably among the students who talked at length with London.[2] In the nonfiction collected in The Man From Main Street, Lewis vividly reports firsthand Jack London's encounter at Carmel with Henry James's The Wings of the Dove: "the Master read aloud in a bewildered way while Henry James's

sliding, slithering, glittering verbiage unwound itself on and on. Jack banged the book down and wailed, 'Do any of you know what all this junk is about?'" (89). Perhaps Lewis sold London the first group of plots late in 1909 or early in 1910 shortly after the James reading. Lewis was a member of the Socialist Party for one year, in New York City from 1911 to 1912, and signed a letter to Jack London "Yours for the Revolution!" (Schorer 178). Their socialism formed a major connection between them. Schorer refers to an estrangement between the men in 1915 without elucidating clearly its cause (219).

In a summer letter in 1910 to his father, Lewis, then working in Washington, DC, showed himself conscious of Jack London as a model. Lewis will not, he tells his father, return to newspaper work, citing as a reason its effect on Jack London: "So it was with Jack London, a wonderful short story writer but . . . a rotten newspaperman. Never could get him to write a newspaper story as they wanted it—too much interested in aspects of a matter which had no news value" (Schorer 171). In an essay several years later on "The Passing of Capitalism," originally published in the Bookman in November 1914, and collected in The Man From Main Street, Lewis paid tribute to London for his social writings:

> Though adventure is the thing for which most of his books are remembered, in such novels as The Iron Heel and The Valley of the Moon, in such short stories as "South of the Slot" one finds an unflinching opposition to large private ownership; a wonderful feeling of companionship with the man in his shirt sleeves; a grateful lack of patronage toward what even the most sympathetic writers are very often inclined to regard as "the lower classes." (337)

A dozen years later, writing to his publisher Alfred Harcourt, on February 11, 1926, (collected in From Main Street to Stockholm) about the possibility of the poet George Sterling doing a book on the old literary Carmel, Lewis still esteemed London: "It's not so much that any of these people, except London, were very important . . ." (195).

Direct allusions to London in Sinclair Lewis's novels occur several times, particularly in the earlier works, and supply unmistakable evidence that London was in Lewis's mind as he composed. Significantly, there are two allusions to London in Lewis's first novel Our Mr. Wrenn (1914), in which one of society's little men, William Wrenn, a New York clerk, takes a cattleboat trip to England in a way reminiscent of Lewis's own youthful summer cattleboat trips of 1904 and 1906. The first reference is facetious but meaningful. Mr. Wrenn "made himself observe the sea which, as Kipling and Jack London had specifically promised him in their stories, surrounded him, everywhere

shining free" (53). And later as the timid clerk Wrenn is talking with the Bohemian artist Istra Nash, he remarks, "Oh say, I know about that caveman--Jack London's guys. I'm afraid I ain't one" (102). Lewis's own youthful cattleboat journeys were searches for exotic literary material inspired by Jack London, O. Henry, and Richard Harding Davis, as Lewis indirectly confesses in the article "American Kiplings" in Life on August 1, 1907: "But this sign of the times is less important than the fact that the men who may succeed Jack London and O. Henry before long are yielding to the wanderlust, and, incidentally, getting copy" (132).

His second novel, The Trail of the Hawk, the story of one of Lewis's most London-like protagonists, Carl "Hawk" Ericson, has another London reference. When the venturesome Hawk is ill, his wife "read aloud from Kipling and London and Conrad, hoping to rekindle the spirit of daring" (388). The most extended London reference occurs in Lewis's The Job (1917), his best novel before Main Street and fame. Una Golden, the career-woman protagonist, takes London's study of the British capital's slums, The People of the Abyss, on a ramble with her proto-Babbitt gentleman friend, Julius Schwirtz. Schwirtz explains Jack London and socialism to Una in a monologue of which the opening is representative: "Fine writer, that fella London. And they say he's quite a fella; been a sailor and a miner and all kinds of things; ver' intimate friend of mine knows him quite well--met him in 'Frisco--and says he's been a sailor and all kinds of things. But he's a socialist. Tell you, I ain't got much time for these socialists" (208). A late Lewis reference to London occurs in The Man Who Knew Coolidge (1928) when Lowell Schmaltz, the meandering, garrulous monologist, gets on the subject of San Francisco. He drops off the name of Jack London at the head of a list of the city's authors (97).

Perhaps the first substantial fruit of Lewis's reading of London is the short novel Captains of Peace serialized in nine parts from October 11, 1911, through June 1912, in the New Thought magazine Nautilus. In treating this work, Schorer labels it "a hodgepodge of Wellsian 'air science' and New Thought" (202). H. G. Wells' science fiction may be the ultimate source, but a more immediate one seems to be Jack London's futuristic short story "Goliah," published in England in The Red Magazine in December 1908, and collected recently in Curious Fragments: Jack London's Tales of Fantasy Fiction (1981). In both these fictions, peace is imposed on an unwilling world by the application of power from new scientific discoveries. Some recalcitrant American blood is shed in both, but whole foreign fleets are destroyed: in London a Japanese

fleet goes down on the West Coast; in Lewis a combined Japanese and German fleet is blasted off the New England coast (the troop transports are spared).

From the preceding, one infers that both authors were magazinists closely following popular tastes and searching for timely subject matter. So it continued. For example, some of London's best work including The Call of the Wild first appeared in The Saturday Evening Post, where Lewis was eventually to publish twenty-eight short stories from 1915 to 1935. Incidentally, perhaps the best of the stories that London wrote from a Lewis plot, "When the World Was Young," a tale of a conventional businessman by day who becomes a grizzly-killing savage by night, first appeared in The Saturday Evening Post for September 10, 1910. Nor did London and Lewis scorn the money to be earned from juveniles. London's boys' book The Cruise of the Dazzler of 1902 gave him practice in handling navigation in the adult novel The Sea-Wolf. Similarly, Lewis's juvenile Hike and the Aeroplane of 1912 gave him experience in handling the airplane in the adult novel The Trail of the Hawk of 1915. Not adverse to turning out potboilers, and certainly no Flauberts agonizing over diction, both men were rapid-fire composers. London's regimen of a thousand words a day, no matter what, is well known. Lewis probably even beat that pace when he penned It Can't Happen Here in about four months (Schorer 608).

Besides composing with celerity, London and Lewis often treat the same kinds of themes and characters. As early as 1930, Cesare Pavese, an Italian critic, pointed out how much of London's central autobiographical novel Martin Eden is reproduced in two early Lewis novels: "the situation of Martin Eden, a manual worker and intellectual in love with a daughter of the upper middle class, who teaches him to teach himself, is found again, at several points, in at least two of these novels, The Trail of the Hawk and Free Air" (Pavese 5). Although Lewis's first book under his own name, Our Mr. Wrenn, contains London allusions, with its little-man protagonist it is more in the pattern of H. G. Wells's Kipps or The History of Mr. Polly. But Lewis's The Trail of the Hawk, with a large-size hero figure in the pioneer aviator, is more like London. The aviator, Carl Ericson, the Minnesota-born child of Norwegian immigrants, like Martin Eden painfully educates himself, especially after being dismissed from a jerkwater college for defending an idealistic professor who discussed socialism and Wells and Shaw. Ericson hoboes, bartends, drives and repairs cars, and learns the underside of life. He adventures in the air as London's Martin Eden earlier had adventured on the sea. Both protagonists are bowled over by upperclass dream women named

Ruth, but with different results. Here as elsewhere Lewis softens the harsher London action. Lewis's Carl Ericson romances and wins his upperclass dream girl, Ruth Winslow; but Martin Eden's Ruth, Ruth Morse, comes crashing from her pedestal, a fall fatal for Martin.

Besides its reference to London's The People of the Abyss, Lewis's next novel, The Job, has a minor character perhaps inspired by London. She is Mamie Magen, an idealistic Jewish socialist, reared in bleak, working-class New York, who tries to educate Una Golden politically. It should be emphasized that the chief characters in Lewis's business novels, grouped together here, are either employees like the blowhard salesman Julius Schwirtz in The Job or small businessmen like George F. Babbitt in real estate or Lowell Schmaltz of The Man Who Knew Coolidge with an ailing office equipment business. The Lewis business people are small fry, not business Titans like Elam Harnish, the Klondike gold millionaire and Wall Street speculator and Oakland real estate tycoon, in London's business novel Burning Daylight (1910). Lewis's Dodsworth is not really an exception to the rule, for the millionaire automobile manufacturer soon sells his automobile business, and the novel thereafter chronicles a failing marriage.

Despite size differences, London and Lewis show thematic likenesses in describing business. The grab for the business dollar causes degeneration. The decay is symbolized in fat from overfeeding and flab from overdrinking. No wonder London's Elam Harnish left business after he saw himself in the bedroom mirror: "eyes that were muddy now after all the cocktails of the night before . . . the clearly defined pouches that showed under his eyes . . . a rising tide of fat . . . a paunch . . . rolls of flesh" (316). Julius Schwirtz, the booming, bumptious salesman of Lewis's The Job, shows similar ravages: "The thwarted boyish soul that persisted in Mr. Schwirtz's barbered, unexercised, coffee-soaked, tobacco-filled, whisky-rotted, fattily degenerated city body shone through his red-veined eyes" (203). Lewis's Babbitt is about as plump and bibulous, even getting lectured by a concerned drinking buddy: "D'ye realize you're throwing in the booze as fast as you can, and you eat one cigarette right after another? Better cut it out for a while" (343). The worst businessman in the Lewis lot, Lowell Schmaltz of The Man Who Knew Coolidge, got "simply ossified" and "had to be wending my way into the bathroom P. D. Q., and there, say, I lost everything but my tonsils. Wow!" (193).

While The Job of 1917 ranks as one of Lewis's better novels, his second novel that same year, The Innocents, a mawkish tale of an elderly, middle-class couple, is Lewis's

worst novel. Its link to London is a strong plot resemblance to his 1913 novel The Valley of the Moon. In this London novel, young Billy Roberts, a striking teamster, and his bride, Saxon, a laundry worker, leave industrial warfare in Oakland, California, and walk for months across country, seeking an ideal farm home before finding it in "The Valley of the Moon" near Glen Ellen. In Lewis's The Innocents an impoverished, elderly couple, weary of life in New York City, set out on foot for San Francisco. They get as far as Lipsittsville, Indiana, where they discover happiness in managing a shoe store and in relating to the community. Lewis has changed age, occupation, class, and geography, but has kept the key London concept of having a disillusioned urban couple set out on foot to seek the good life. Lewis was familiar with London's The Valley of the Moon, for he commended it in the article "The Passing of Capitalism," and he also noticed it in reviewing for W. E. Woodward's Publishers Newspaper Syndicate.[3]

Lewis's next novel, Free Air, of 1919 is, like The Trail of the Hawk, an education novel. Free Air again has a romantically beautiful upperclass girl for the poor, democratic youth to dream about as he labors for culture and the girl. In Free Air Milt Daggett, automobile mechanic and garage owner in the hamlet of Schoenstrom, Minnesota, drives off in his little bug to assist and rescue an aristocratic car and its operator, the urbane Miss Claire Boltwood, on the hazardous roads of the nineteen teens all the way from middle Minnesota to Seattle. In plot, Free Air is H. G. Wells's romantic bicycle novel The Wheels of Chance (1896), Americanized and motorized. The bravery and dash of Lewis's Milt Daggett and his learning capacity, however, are more in the heroic mold of Jack London's Martin Eden, Ernest Everhard, and Wolf Larsen (sans the superman viciousness in Larsen) than they are like Wells's pathetic draper's assistant, Mr. Hoopdriver. Milt doesn't get a college equivalency through prodigious studying on his own like Martin Eden, nor does he show up the inadequacies of even the best college professor as Martin Eden did; but still Milt learns fast. At the end he will study engineering at the University of Washington and acquire the girl and culture.

This dream of culture, and particularly of college education by the poor, is a recurring London subject. Since Lewis came from the middle class and held an Ivy League degree, his fondness for the subject is scarcely to be explained autobiographically. True, an inferiority complex and imagination helped, but the origin of this favorite subject of the poor dreaming of college and culture is, I think, to be sought in Lewis's

reading of works like Martin Eden. Already in Century Magazine (where London had serialized The Sea-Wolf), Lewis published in June 1917 a touching short story, "Young Man Axelbrod," in which an elderly Scandinavian farmer after painstaking preparation seeks his dream of Grecian academic groves as a freshman at Yale. In Main Street of 1920, the character Miles Bjornstam, workingman, socialist, and rebel, cherishes a similar vision: "Always wished I could go to college" (115). Another defeated rebel in Main Street is Erik Valborg, the artistic tailor who carries on the glimmerings of an affair with the married Carol. Groping for knowledge, Valborg threatened to read the dictionary through and blindly studied Caesar and Latin grammar, something Eden drew the line at.

Although it contains no reference to London or Martin Eden, Lewis's Arrowsmith (1925) seems of all Lewis's novels the most like Martin Eden. And external evidence exists to show that Lewis was thinking of Martin Eden while composing Arrowsmith; for in letters of July 31 and September 21, 1923, to his publisher Alfred Harcourt, Lewis worried about naming his novel Martin Arrowsmith because of "its resemblance to Martin Chuzzlewit and Martin Eden" (137), and again, "Does the resemblance to Martin Chuzzlewit and Martin Eden bother you?" (140).

Despite different content, Martin Eden and Arrowsmith have similar themes and characters. London's earlier title for Martin Eden had been Success, a word used ironically, because, despite his hard-won fame and fortune as a writer, Martin Eden reaped only disenchantment and death. Arrowsmith, again ironically, might well be called Success in Medicine and Science. Having succeeded as a writer, Martin Eden drowned himself at sea while en route to the South Seas, where he had hoped a return to nature would awaken his will to live. Arrowsmith, more fortunate, reaches the Vermont woods, where, uncontaminated, he knows the bliss of pure scientific research. The flights of Arrowsmith and Babbitt to the woods are usually attributed to Thoreau, but they may be more akin to the return to the idyllic life in the Sonoma hills so central to the resolution of London's novels Burning Daylight and The Valley of the Moon. Even Lewis's move to Twin Farms in Vermont in 1928 may connect with London's Beauty Ranch above San Francisco. At least a letter from Lewis to his publisher Alfred Harcourt dated March 19, 1928, supports the theory: "And I'm thinking . . . of the dim possibility of going to California . . . and seeing if one could obtain without too much cost, a tiny fruit ranch that would make a real home. . . . I wouldn't want an expensive pretentious place like Jack London's" (264).

Besides the escape to nature from success, both Martin Eden and Arrowsmith contain attractive, genteel English majors who preach the doctrine of monetary success to their suitors, rude, crude, creative male geniuses. Conventional Ruth Morse, an A.B. in English from the University of California, discourages Martin in his writing: "You would make a good lawyer. You should shine in politics" (666). Madeline Fox, loitering on her Ph.D. in English at the University of Winnemac, wants Arrowsmith to be an affluent physician: "Look at a surgeon like Dr. Loizeau, riding up to the hospital in a lovely car with a chauffeur in uniform, and all his patients simply worshiping him" (26). Arrowsmith's second wife, Joyce Lanyon, a wealthy Eastern socialite, almost entices him from science before he escapes to the Vermont woods. But not all women menace. In both novels, good women serve as foils to those corrupted by convention. In London's novel the working girl Lizzie Connolly unselfishly loves Martin; in Lewis's, Leora Tozer marries Arrowsmith and until her death from plague saves him from success.

Lewis's succeeding novel, the potboiler Mantrap (1926), rival to The Innocents as his worst, may reflect Jack London characters like the wealthy, flaccid Humphrey Van Weyden of The Sea-Wolf and playwright John Pathurst of The Mutiny of the Elsinore, who emerge as masterful men after confronting hardships and violence. Or, more than these, the dog Buck in The Call of the Wild is the advantaged tenderfoot who makes good. Lewis's candidate for the initiation in Mantrap is forty-year-old Ralph Prescott, a diffident, wealthy New York City attorney, who, on vacation in the Canadian wilds, shows he can make it. Which is more than Lewis could, as Mark Schorer relates. On the 1924 summer expedition to the Canadian wilderness, a journey which supplies what facts there are in this tale, Sinclair Lewis dropped out of the group midway. The fictitious Ralph, though, moved on like the survivor in London's famous short story "Love of Life" through "a delirium of quaking muskeg which let them down to drenched knees" (248). In the triangular plot involving a vampish manicurist from Minneapolis, her fur trader husband, and the lawyer, one is not always sure when Lewis is writing adventure or spoofing it. At times parody prevails, as in these remarks on the initiation theme: "In fiction, all proper tenderfeet, particularly if they wear eyeglasses and weigh not over one hundred and thirty-seven pounds, after three weeks on a ranch, in a lumber-camp, or on a whaler become hardened and wise" (214). Despite the frequent parody tone and the $42,500 he received for serializing Mantrap in Collier's (Schorer 399), one conjectures this admirer of Rudyard Kipling and Jack London, this former assistant editor of the pulp magazine Adventure (from 1912 to 1913), really wanted

to write an adventure story after living some of it. Though not well coordinated physically himself, as Schorer testifies, Lewis typically makes characters with whom he identifies closely men of stalwart physique: Dodsworth is "a large and formidable young man" (1) and Cass Timberlane "looked like a tall Red Indian" (3); even Elmer Gantry, though at least not consciously admired, is "a powerful young man" (16). Probably, in Lewis reality struck dream, and the splatter of satire resulted.

Again, a love-triangle plot, like an initiation theme, is so common in literature that one would hesitate to claim much for Jack London's triangle in The Little Lady of the Big House as a source for the triangle in Lewis's Dodsworth. The biography of each author has, of course, much to do with it. Still there are resemblances like the upper-class settings and characters, the satire directed at Bohemians, and the respect the chief male triangular rivals show for each other. The most specific resemblance is the extended quotation from Kipling's "The Gypsy Trail" and the discussion of it in each novel. "The Gypsy Trail" is the theme song of the lovers, Paula Forrest and Evan Graham, in London's novel: "And as they sang the reckless words to their merry, careless lilt, he looked down at her and wondered—wondered at her—at himself" (214). In Lewis's Dodsworth, Dodsworth fondly remembers chanting Kipling's "The Gypsy Trail" on an automobile trip to the West Coast early in his marriage to Fran and "vowing that some day they would wander it together" (34).

Lewis's Ann Vickers (1933) with its multi-chapter condemnation of American prisons may well have had some stimulus from the sordid but compelling picture of San Quentin in London's late novel The Star Rover (1915). Incidentally, two of the plots that Lewis sold London, as reprinted with the Walker article, have to do with prisons. Again, London has the first-hand experience of imprisonment as narrated in The Road that Lewis lacked.

Published twenty-seven years after London's prediction of an oligarchical dictatorship in the United States in The Iron Heel (1908), Lewis's It Can't Happen Here (1935) with its picture of a fascist dictatorship in Washington still clearly shows London's influence. Lewis does not refer to London or The Iron Heel in his novel, but he had mentioned The Iron Heel favorably twice in his 1914 essay on "The Passing of Capitalism" (328, 337). Twice in his own novel Lewis echoes London's key word oligarchy: "he believed now only in resolute control by a small oligarchy" (36) and "all oligarchies and dictators have, for all future ages to come, removed opposition!" (138). It's easy to see why J. Donald Adams titled his review of It Can't Happen Here in the New York

Times for October 20, 1935, "America Under the Iron Heel."

The plan and execution of these novels over a quarter of a century apart are much alike. Both novels see dictatorships coming in the immediate future. London's The Iron Heel, written in 1906, describes the near future from 1912 to 1917, with a few later events; and there are footnotes written seven centuries later in 419 B. O. M. (Brotherhood of Man) when socialism is enjoying its triumph over an impersonal Oligarchy, formed by the large capitalists, their mercenaries, and elite labor unions. Lewis's It Can't Hapen Here, composed in the summer of 1935 and published that fall, narrates the coming of fascism in 1936 with the election to the presidency of the rabble-rousing personality Senator Buzz Windrip, a mix mainly of Senator Huey Long and Adolf Hitler. As with London, Lewis indicates an eventual triumph for the forces of good. The last sentence of the Lewis novel says of the hero: "And still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die" (458).

For maximum impact each author often places his prophecies of the near future in settings with which he identifies personally. For example, Avis, London's narrator, hides out for a while near London's Glen Ellen, where she is joined by her husband. Lewis, writing on his Twin Farms estate in Vermont, stages much of his action in the fictitious town of Fort Beulah, Vermont.

In an effort to heighten verisimilitude, London and Lewis allude frequently to contemporary events and personalities. London notices the recently suppressed Russian Revolution of 1905, and Lewis draws on Hitler's Blood Purge of 1934 in inventing internal struggles within the dictatorship. The Lewis novel especially cascades contemporary names. Interestingly enough, some of the contemporaries mentioned in the London novel like William Randolph Hearst (454 n), H. G. Wells (486 n), and John D. Rockefeller (425, 426 n) were still living when referred to in the Lewis novel: Hearst (49, 109, 133, 134, 137, 264), Wells (37, 265), and Rockefeller (449).

Undemocratic forces in each novel ruthlessly repress Congress. In the London novel, the humanitarian Socialists were falsely accused of setting off a bomb in the House of Representatives, a device which was actually planted by an agent of the Iron Heel with this result: "Fifty-two socialist Congressmen were tried, and all were found guilty" (489 n). In It Can't Happen Here after Congress refuses Windrip dictatorial powers, soon "more than a hundred Congressmen had been arrested by Minute Men, on direct orders from the President" (162-3).

In addition to repressing Congress, both the London and Lewis dictatorships move

in similar fashion against a free press, the college campus, and the clergy. The plant of the Socialist Appeal to Reason is destroyed by a mob incited by the Iron Heel. A mob also threatens the newspaper of Doremus Jessup, Lewis's newspaper editor, when he editorializes against Fascist crimes, but here the Fascists seize the newspaper instead of destroying it. After a local Fascist bully burns his illustrated set of Dickens as subversive, Jessup is eventually sent to a concentration camp from which he escapes. In the earlier novel, Avis's father, John Cunningham, a professor at the University of California, loses his position, has his wealth taken from him, and his book Economics and Education suppressed. Finally he disappears without a trace. If Cunningham resists tyranny, the fuddy-duddy university president Wilcox, "whose withered mind was stored with generalizations that were young in 1870" (387) cooperates with the sinister authorities. Wilcox initially tried to bribe Cunningham with "a two years' vacation, on full pay, in Europe, for recreation and research" (388). Somewhat parallel in Lewis are the misfortunes of Professor Victor Loveland, teacher of Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, at Jessup's alma mater, the fictitious Isaiah College. When the college acts against critics of its military training program, Professor Loveland is fired, put into a concentration camp, and finally executed. Like Cunningham's boss, Loveland's college president, Dr. Owen J. Peaseley, works with the authorities. Dr. Peaseley is in an ecstasy over his appointment as "Director of Education for the Vermont-New Hampshire District!" (199).

Many clergymen in the novels prove as servile as the educational administrators. In the London novel, the ecclesiastics Dr. Hammerfield and Dr. Ballingford support the Iron Heel and get a ringing refutation from the formidable Ernest Everhard. But as the Oligarchy tightens its hold "they have been correspondingly rewarded with ecclesiastical palaces wherein they dwell at peace with the world. . . . Both have grown very fat" (505). Wild religious revivals come as crises multiply, dissipating the strength of the workers: "The people ceased work by hundreds of thousands and fled to the mountains, there to await the imminent coming of God. . . . But in the meantime God did not come, and they starved to death in great numbers" (475).

But like Lewis later, London is careful to present some positive religious forces and a good deal of religious imagery, perhaps in order to win over a mass audience to his ideas. A notable example is the Protestant Bishop Morehouse, who converts to a primitive Christianity and takes up the poor man's cause and garb. For this change he is put into an insane asylum. Escaping, he lives among the poor and suffering until

he perished in the slaughter of the proletariat in the Chicago uprising of 1917.

A similar contrast of conforming clergymen and courageous religious rebels against tyranny occurs in the Lewis novel. One dubious clergyman character, Bishop Paul Peter Prang, with his League of Forgotten Men and his radio oratory, was clearly based on the radio priest of the 1930s, Father Charles Coughlin. Prang helps Windrip to power and is then speedily liquidated by him. After palace revolutions, the last dictator Haik inaugurates a Puritanical regime: "Haik made such use of the clergy . . . while there were plenty of ministers who . . . considered it some part of Christian duty to resent the enslavement and torture of their appointed flocks, there were also plenty of reverend celebrities . . . to whom Corpoism had given a chance to be noisily and lucratively patriotic" (427-8). The murder of Rabbi Dr. Vincent de Verez by a drunken Fascist cabinet member caused Lewis's protagonist Jessup to enlist against Fascism. At the end of It Can't Happen Here, the venerable Episcopal Reverend Mr. Falk dies in a concentration camp; the Roman Catholic, Father Stephen Perefixe, survives as a leader in the local resistance. The main male characters in each novel, Everhard and Jessup, however, are purely secular in their motivations, in this resembling London and Lewis themselves.

To sum up the London-Lewis similarities, their secularism, their socialism, their romantic wanderlust, their admiration for Wells and Kipling, their concern with education, their fondness for the initiation theme, their emphasis on thesis and content over literary form, their journalistic verve, their slapdash method of composition, their prolificness, their pursuit of the magazines' quick money, their bestsellerdom and great financial rewards, their marriages, divorces, and immediate remarriages, their front-page existences, their alcoholic problems, their disenchantment with success, their awareness of the poor, their consciousness of class lines in American society, their relish for condemning middle-class hypocrisies—all these to a considerable degree London and Lewis had in common. Other features—like London's talent for headlong narrative; his gift for the short story; and his, it must be acknowledged, manifestations of racism and superman pride—are not Lewis characteristics. Nor did London possess Lewis's aptitude for satire and mimicry, nor did he show any inclination for that industrious cataloging of myriad details that often bog down Lewis novels. Although the Zeitgeist of the early twentieth century and biographical coincidences probably explain most of the London-Lewis similarities, when allowance is made, one still concludes that London was an important factor in shaping Lewis as an author. Above all, Sinclair

Lewis, son of a successful small-town physician and a Yale graduate, got from Jack London and other authors a perception of class lines and social injustice in American life and a sense of middle-class deficiencies which Lewis was to lambaste so successfully in his best work.

NOTES

[1]Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin annotates the Walker article with an addendum that sixteen of the plots sold by Lewis to London are extant (85). The plots of those actually used by London, which add up to three short stories, one novelette, and an unfinished novel (78), were evidently destroyed by London. The unfinished novel, The Assassination Bureau, Ltd., was later completed by Robert L. Fish and published in 1963. It is a poor work with a ridiculous plot.

[2]Since Lewis was not keeping a diary at the time of the London Yale lecture, January 26, 1906, there is no absolute evidence for his attendance, though considering his interests, it seems inconceivable he would miss it. Schorer (104) even suggests that Lewis might have been the unnamed student with socialistic convictions who helped the New Haven minister, Dr. Alexander Irvine, in making the arrangements.

[3]See Sinclair Lewis, Sinclair Lewis on the Valley of the Moon. Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1932. This seems to be a reprint of a page from the review of 1913 or 1914 for the Publishers Newspaper Syndicate. The reprint was requested by Harvey Taylor for private circulation.

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GOPHER-PRAIRIE-LAKE-WOBEGON: THE MIDWEST AS MYTHICAL SPACE

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Every Saturday night the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Carol and Will Kennicott sit down in cities and suburbs across the continent to listen to Garrison Keillor's tales of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, "the little town that time forgot and that the decades cannot improve." From Novia Scotia to California, from Ohio to Mississippi, carpenters and college professors, teen-agers and octogenarians, apartment dwellers and tillers of the soil all gather over Saturday night supper ready and eager to share another quiet week with all of those strong women, good-looking men and above-average children of the northern prairie.

What Carol Kennicott fought against--small-town social rigidity, political and religious bigotry, intellectual provincialism, and just plain physical ugliness--all somehow become in Keillor's version of the small-town Midwest elements in a more gentle, accepting satire. Without denying the foibles and frailties of Lake Wobegonian humanity, the monologues point the reader beyond derision and criticism. Instead, as listeners, we are often attracted by something laudable and "decent" in the security of a lifestyle based more on love and equality than on conflict and achievement.

Of course, both fictional towns, Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon, represent security. Gopher Prairie's "security" is that which deadens the mind and the senses, at least from Carol's point of view. Lake Wobegon, on the other hand, offers the radio audience a respite from an outside world of violence and alienation. Lake Wobegon offers a sense both of self and of belonging to others who care about you. As Keillor occasionally reminds his listeners, it is a security which we knew best as children. While this nuturing security is not entirely absent even from Main Street, both texts offer their audiences a paradoxical awareness of what the small town is, as well as what it could be; what it is, as well as how it is remembered. In responding in a positive, approving manner to the Lake Wobegon monologues, we do not necessarily have any less sympathy for, or empathy with, Carol Kennicott. Our response is more complicated than a mere historical shift in perceptions and attitudes over the sixty years that separate the two works.

Both spaces—Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon—might be viewed as middle ground, located as Leo Marx says of the pastoral in American cultural, "somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcedent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and Nature" (23). Yet as middle ground, the Gopher Prairie of Main Street is a negative quality. Carol would prefer either the "city's yellow glare of shop windows . . . or the primitive forest . . . or a barnyard warm and steamy . . . [to] these dun houses . . . winter ash piles . . . roads of dirty snow and clotted frozen mud" (113). And even in Lake Wobegon, which I always imagine as more congenial, more "pastoral" than Gopher Prairie, there are perhaps too many compromises with civilization to really qualify it as pastoral. The clock at the Side Track Tap may always be half an hour late, but there is a clock.

A somewhat different approach from Marx's to the imaginative uses of literary space is taken by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his book, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Tuan's concern is with "mythical space"—the images of various spaces which we carry around in our heads. In one context, according to Tuan, mythical space is a "fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known . . . a conceptual extension of the familiar and workaday spaces given by direct experience." The city of St. Paul, for many residents of Minneapolis, is very much a "fuzzy area of defective knowledge": close, an extension of their own space, but at best only vaguely familiar.

In a second context, according to Tuan, mythical space is "the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values . . . a component in a world view or cosmology . . . a people's more or less systematic attempt to make sense of environment." The familiar New Yorker cover which shows everything west of the Hudson River, with the possible exceptions of Chicago and Los Angeles, as desert is a cartoon expression not only of "fuzzy and defective knowledge,"—if we take it literally—but also of a value center associated with a particular piece of urban space; the message is that nothing else has much value, or even really exists. Thus, according to Tuan, countries (and, I assume, all spaces) "have their factual and their mythical geographies" (86-87, 98).

In a similar way, the fictional communities of Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon may also function for their audiences as mythical geographies—especially, perhaps, for those of us who have such towns among our own experiences and memories. Moreover, Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon are not oppositions so much as they are different facets of the same piece of imaginative space—call it "home town." This piece of

mythical space, Gopher-Prairie-Lake-Wobegon, is an intellectual construct made up of both real spaces remembered and the embracing-rejecting of the values or world views which each reader associates with that space. In short, it is an image network which evokes great gobs of ambivalence. If in our late teens and twenties, for example, we are anxious to reject and grow beyond the dull streets and sanctimonious Republican neighbors of Gopher Prairie, by our mid-40's we may be all too willing to seek—at least for an hour or so on Saturday night—the respite, the easy laughter of self-recognition and the promise of renewal offered in the back yards and living rooms of Lake Wobegon's pious Democrats. If we are lucky on these ventures into the mythical spaces of home town, nostalgia and cynicism cancel each other in favor of reflection.

On the one hand, Gopher-Prairie-Lake-Wobegon is that space of restraining origins and the growing away, the breaking of parental bonds by which we measure our own maturation and liberation, be that liberation social or intellectual, economic or spiritual. Both the Tollefson boy's embarrassment at having to take his Montgomery Wards-clothed "hick" relatives from Lake Wobegon with him when he travels into "cosmopolitan" St. Cloud for college registration (Keillor, "Summer"), and Carol's feeling that everybody in Gopher Prairie was "born old, grim, and old and spying and censorious" (102), are images of hometown restraint, even though in a strict sense Gopher Prairie is not Carol's "hometown."

On the other hand, this same home-town space as rendered in these two texts can also provide for the audience an immediately gratifying and therapeutic experience, somewhat akin to Erik Erickson's idea of moritorium, as Richard Lebeaux discusses it in Young Man Thoreau, through which the pain and frustration of the very liberation so diligently sought can be eased, the accomplishments of that liberation periodically reassessed and its costs put into perspective (64). In some of her loneliest Gopher Prairie moments, Carol seeks refuge in the mythical spaces of her own remembered childhood home in Mankato, another small Minnesota community, which Lewis tells us is saved from being a Gopher Prairie by its hills and bluffs and its "garden-sheltered streets and aisles of elms" (6). She remembers "her father's Christmas fantasies; the sacred old rag doll at the top of the tree . . . the punch and carols . . . [her father's] thin legs twinkling before their sled" (195). Similarily, in one of the Lake Wobegon monologues, Keillor compares the homes of the tiny community on Christmas night to a "Lionel model train layout . . . one of those perfect model train layouts, that when you sit down and put your face down by it, you feel like—that's the whole world, right

there" ("Winter"). These images provide momentary but beneficial order—a wholeness all too often lacking in the hustle and hassle of adult life.

Indeed, as both of the above passages suggest, special times of year like Christmas and Thanksgiving are important elements in our conceptions of mythical space. Mythical space is ritual space. Periodic returns in fact or in imagination are occasions for replaying the old family dramas centering around old bonds (and conflicts) between the generations and between old and new life styles. In Lake Wobegon, for instance, Thanksgiving is marked by "the return of the exiles, come back to their homes . . . come back every year to little towns so much the same it's hard to look at it and not believe you're still twelve years old." And lest we slip too far into nostalgia, Keillor reminds us that twelve years old is "how some of the returning children behaved, too." Old conflicts emerge between old parents and their grown children. Grandchildren are warned by their parents not to violate the values of hometown space. A mile out of town, a mile or so from Grandma's house, the "exiles" smoke their last cigarettes and dig out the breath mints for the duration ("Spring").

But rituals of mythical space need not be as momentous as special holidays. They can be as common or comical as the annual battle of the storm windows. "Winter is not a season in the North Middlewest," Lewis wrote, "it is an industry." "In every block [of Gopher Prairie] the householders . . . were seen perilously staggering up ladders. . . . While Kenicott put up his windows, Carol danced inside the bedrooms and begged him not to swallow the screws, which he held in his mouth like an extraordinary set of external false teeth" (81). Meanwhile, over in Lake Wobegon, we find the Sons of Knute "up to the Sons of Knute Temple" [holding] the annual ritual of the installation of the ancient and honorable storm windows . . . [including]. . . a ritual taste of the amber essence of the blessed hops . . . until [the Sons] get to the point where you don't want to let 'em go at the storm windows for fear a storm window might jump out at a Knute and get 'im down on the ground and hurt 'im" (September 8, 1984).

It makes little difference in mythical space that by now, in 1985, aluminum combination windows have probably captured a good share of the storm window market even in Gopher Prairie and Lake Wobegon. In mythical space, old wooden storm windows with their forever-crumbling putty and their forever-rotting corners still exist, metaphors of perseverance and adaptation. They have something to do with endurance and with particular skills such as weather stripping while wearing gloves, and ladder steadying on frost-hardened lawns. But failure to get your windows up before cold

weather, in the collective wisdom of Lake Wobegon, marks you as a dreamer, as one of the "unstable element in town" (September 8, 1984).

All of which brings me to a brief consideration of mythical space and regionalism, in this case Midwestern regionalism. Gopher-Prairie-Lake-Wobegon is a small human settlement surrounded by a vast prairie covered by an endless sky and periodically purged by the huge and often violent weather systems which roll through, season after season. Lake Wobegon experiences summer storms so "biblical" in proportion, according to Keillor, that one almost expects the waters of the lake to part and walleyes to come walking up through the town on their tails (July 28, 1984). Children of Lake Wobegon indulge themselves in fantasies about wild dogs and snow leopards that roam the frozen fields and woods devouring careless children. But the terror of terrors is the infamous Pump Handle that lures innocent children to touch their tongues to its frozen surface, thereby condemning them to stand bent over, unable to talk or eat, until the Spring thaw frees them. Carol's memories of blizzards are fun when viewed from the safety of her Mankato window, but when she and Will are caught in a sudden storm on the open prairie, it is a race for life. Blizzards are not "much fun on the prairie," Will explains. It is very simple. "Get lost. Freeze to death. Take no chances" (193).

In both texts and, in Tuan's terms, in both the empirical and the mythical Midwest, the weather, the land, and the towns form a triangle of antagonism. The towns usually come out on the short end of the deal. The streets of Gopher Prairie, for example, are "unenticing gashes" which "let in the grasping prairie on every side." In winter, "the unprotected houses . . . crouch together in terror of storms galloping out of that wild waste" (33). In Spring, Main Street is a "black swamp from curb to curb . . . the town . . . barren . . . bleak . . . the houses squatted and scowled" (139). Even in summer, the prairie "spread out . . . uncontrollably. . . . [with] a "martial immensity, vigorous, a little harsh, unsoftened by kind gardens" (25). In Lake Wobegon, men plant windbreaks of spruce trees, "not just as a windbreak, but to bring the horizon closer"; in order to break up, to manage, the overwhelming immensity of land and sky together (July 28, 1984).

But this same land which can be so dangerous, so threatening, so intimidating can also be turned by mere light into "exuberance":

> They drove home under the sunset. Mounds of straw and wheatstacks like bee-hives, stood out in startling rose and gold, and the green-turfed 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 greyness. Cattle came in a long line up to the barred gates of the farm yards, and over the resting land was a dark glow. (Main Street 58)

This is the heartland. This is the bountiful, nurturing land that can feed nations as well as imaginations. In a recent book, The Role of Place in Literature, Leonard Lutwack suggests that horizontality—flat spaces—may be imagined either as "safe, restful, reassuring," or as "dullness, tragedy and death," as in the "arid plain" of T.S. Eliot's Fisher King and the Bible's "sign of direst catastrophe . . . the leveling of high places, the hills and the towers" (40-41). But if the landscape surrounding Gopher-Prairie-Lake-Wobegon sometimes suggests sameness and spiritual death, read—viewed, heard, smelled—more closely, it also reveals contrast, virility, challenge, and vitality. The metaphor of the Midwest as heartland is an organic metaphor, a metaphor of life rooted in the promise of immense productivity, both agricultural and wild.

The Midwest out of which both Lewis and Keillor invent their mythical regions is sparsely endowed with those more tangible landmarks of natural and human history: mountains, shrines to Founding Fathers and Civil War battlefields. It may be easier for Midwesterners than for other Americans to think of their region only as that space which is not New England or California or New York City. On the other hand, Midwesterners too often overlook their central landmarks—the small towns like Gopher-Prairie-Lake-Wobegon surrounded by their vast farmlands and seasonal extremes. Among the region's most culturally useful artifacts, then, are surely to be numbered its novels—and its radio shows—through which empirical space is transformed into mythical space, making it possible for the descendants of both Carol Kennicott and the Tollefson boy, wherever they may live, to discover and possess a complex but vitally important place.

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SINCLAIR LEWIS'S NEWSWEEK ESSAYS

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Seven years after capturing the Nobel Prize in Literature, Sinclair Lewis (with the manuscript of The Prodigal Parents behind him and adumbrations of the theater before him) decided to lecture for six months and to write a literary column for Newsweek. The publisher, Malcolm Muir, announced in the new-look issue of October 4, 1937, that the evolving magazine—with wider coverage, striking graphics, and new features—would deliver the news in a colorful, compelling, dramatic style. "For the first time in his life," Muir continues, "Sinclair Lewis . . . will publicly pronounce himself on books as they are published . . ." (2). Actually, Lewis was an old hand at reviewing books and—as he proudly noted in his diary at Yale after a walk with Professor Chauncy B. Tinker—talking "of many things; especially matters literary" (Schorer 70).

In New York City and on tour, Sinclair Lewis tapped out "Book Week" from October 4, 1937, to April 18, 1938. The material of the columns and the material of the lectures, as Mark Schorer has observed, spill into each other (634). In the posthumous collection, The Man From Main Street (1953), described by editors Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane as the "cream" of Lewis's nearly one million words of nonfiction, one finds only two of Lewis's twenty-nine Newsweek essays—one on Communism and the other on Transcendentalism (29-31, 240-42). More than a few critics have been impressed by the quality of Lewis's best nonfiction, among them John W. Aldridge, James Lundquist, and even Mark Schorer, who comments in his jumbo biography on a few of the "Book Week" essays of special interest.[1]

This centennial year seems a not unfitting time to say something about Sinclair Lewis's little left-handed exercises as a whole. Wise to the marketplace, Lewis brought to "Book Week" some of his customary verve and slapdash: too many Americans "find it easier to turn a steering wheel than to turn a page."[2] Hemingway is so "viril and hairy" that the hairs stick right through the pages of his book.[3] A household ashamed of a radio under $150 "feels altogether smug about itself if its literary treasures consist of a telephone book, a Gideon Bible, stolen during father's sojourn at a convention, and

a limp-calf collection of aphorisms from Edgar Guest and Elbert Hubbard."[4] To be sure, readers of the new Newsweek expected Lewis to inform and entertain—with his nervous, emphatic, improvisational style ranging from the savage to the sentimental. Even behind Lewis's big books lies the episodic impulse, his gift for turning small units into large. The reader of Lewis's weekly two-column boxed and by-lined feature notes a title that teases and a lead-in that "grabs." Quickly Lewis sets the stage, provokes curiosity, presses his point, and rushes to the end.

Although accident—the publication of a book, some experience lecturing, the fascination of a place—inspired most of the "Book Week" essays, Lewis the old magazine serialist made some effort to link his contributions, to give the twenty-nine acts of his performance some kind of coherence. He opens his first essay, for example, with: "My friends—as all the great and good men say on the radio—let me inaugurate this new department . . ."[5]—and contrives in the final sentence of his final essay, half a year later, to close the circle with: "And now, my friends of the far-flung radio audience, I retire to the country for six months or so . . ."[6] Allusions to earlier columns ("I have suggested . . . ," Last week . . . I said . . .) also help the series hang together.

But more fundamental than these repetitions and facile adjustments are Lewis's sequences, his patterns of contrary or like pairs and trios. His first two essays, for example, begin—in Lewis's own critical vernacular—not by "garroting" or "boosting" particular books but by "croaking" about the American writer in one and about the American reader in the other.[7] His following set does treat particular novels: he garrots a Hemingway novel one week and boosts a Wodehouse novel the next.[8] Turning to nonfiction, he one week praises a book about the rediscovery of Mark Twain's America and the next a book about the passing of England's Ruling Class.[9] Lewis's put-down of Dale Carnegie is a happy precursor to his elevation of Henry David Thoreau.[10] And his veneration for Thoreau that week contrasts starkly with his detestation of Stalin the next week.[11] Following his essay on crimes against the language, Lewis tries to apprehend an avant-garde literary racketeer.[12] But the last two columns of 1937 spread Yuletide cheer—and book sales.[13] As if with new resolve, Lewis's first pair of 1938 essays puzzles over the problem of critical judgment.[14] Lewis next celebrates two books of nonfiction.[15] He follows praise for American places and for a foreign correspondent with three essays on his lecturing experiences.[16] The next two columns puff a few recent novels.[17] The set following offers advice—the first to the writer, the second to the lecture-goer.[18] In his miscellaneous final triad Lewis croaks about the promise

of the American West, boosts several plays in book form, and, as finale, garrots boobs who write him importuning letters.[19]

If Lewis's method is satiric, his intent is didactic. As he prodded the American writer and reader in the 1920s, so he continues to prod them in the 1930s. Whatever contempt or sympathy he felt for his readers, he believed in reading good books.[19] And sympathetic to the Fred Cornplows as well as to the Depressed at this time, Lewis the old socialist now abhorred radicalism that went beyond the New Deal. Like some latter-day Emerson, he declares in "Onward Chicago!": "Now is the time for literary America to emerge as no longer a province of His Britannic Majesty's Government." For too long American writers have penned their novels and plays in the long shadows of Hardy, Conrad, Kipling, Moore, Galsworthy, Bennett, Barrie, and Chesterton. But now only Wells, Shaw, and Yeats remain--and younger competitors like Maugham, Walpole, Huxley, and Mackenzie. One notes in Lewis's list the conspicuous absence of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, E. M. Forster, and Virginia Woolf. Touching on America's some "dozen or two or three" young literary pioneers, Lewis cites Hemingway, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Prokosch, Odets, and O'Hara. Less impressive is Lewis's list of women writers: Victoria Lincoln, Josephine Johnson, Josephine Lawrence, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Eleanor Green. Lewis counsels would-be writers away from such hoary plots as Boy Meets Girl, Rags to Riches, and Hero Saves Community. Those who plod up the "same dreary Communist lane" will manufacture yet another pedestrian novel about some Galahad who reads a snifter of Marx, organizes the toilers, and saves the world from hay fever and from deacons who wink at widows. Though later Lewis would come to feel that films could become "real drama," in "Gold, Inc." he cautions writers to stay away from Hollywood—"its pretty girls with hearts and hair of platinum." Stage-struck himself, Lewis announces: "There are many signs that a stage renaissance is coming in America . . ."[20]

"There existed," Lewis preached in his lectures and Newsweek essays, "an art called Reading." But thanks to radio, cinema, picture magazines, and—yes—even lecturing, "we may now escape reading altogether."[21] Lewis viewed the sale in America of one copy of a first-rate novel for every 1400 people as "miraculous." That literary talent ended up in Hollywood was not entirely the fault, chided Lewis, of the talent.[22] Few Americans realize that "building a home library gives stimulus superior even to the glories of Charlie McCarthy."[23] If it is time for the American writer to surpass the British, it is time also for Civis Americanus to assume leadership by mastering the

great books—not the "exotic dishes" served at St. John's College, but books "more contemporary and more American." In Lewis's view, Kenneth Roberts, Joseph Hergesheimer, and Willa Cather teach more history than Charles A. Beard and James Ford Rhodes combined.[24] Not to know something about the novelists Lewis recommends, he says, is not to know "what is going on in American fiction."[25] Lewis legislates specific books for executives, parents, the young, the envious, the deceived, Communists, reactionaries, and Carnegie-ites. And anyone who deprives himself of Victoria Lincoln's joyous masterpiece, February Hill, is an "idiot."[26]

"Audiences," Lewis maintains, "are beginning to understand that there is more magical release in looking at actual people than at the craftiest photographer." Still, the "marooned" lover of drama can watch the revival of theater in book form.[27] As for those who attend lectures to look at writers and listen to them "drone aloud," Lewis has another message: there is an art of listening. Don't exhaust the speaker before the lecture and consider what he says after the lecture.[28] "Imbecile" teachers who incite students to pester busy authors provoke Lewis into parody. He devises a refusal form with appropriate squares: NO—he won't go fifty-fifty on an idea, expose some institution, contribute to a new magazine or charity fair, address a dinner.[29] He awards a circlet of thorns in "Crowns for Critics" to those who set themselves up as literary judges. Criticism, he complains, is "as arrogantly practiced by any cub just out of C.C.N.Y. as by the most responsible professional." As a critic of critics Lewis raps aristarchs who regard the man rather than the work. Briefly he censures a smug, unsigned Saturday Review of Literature editorial which lambastes the "Faculty Style"—a job which Lewis completed on the man six years later in Saturday Review in his celebrated piece of tomahawking, "Fools, Liars and Mr. DeVoto" (Apr. 15, 1944).

As a literary critic, Lewis relies on impressionism, partisanship, and wit. He praises books he finds "interesting" and "important"—Horace's old dulce et utile. Steering a broad middle course, he likes Balzac and Flaubert for making "much out of ordinary middle-class life, not out of high falutin' duchesses or tragic laborers."[30] Montparnasse, Oscar Wilde, and the Little Review hold as little charm for him as Skid Row, Mike Gold, and the Masses. He cheers vigor, humor, honesty, and naturalness. He hoots at urban mincing, obscurity, hypocrisy, and obscenity.

A veteran promoter of his own wares, Lewis felt little compulsion to efface himself. He updates readers on his comings and goings. At one point he interjects that he spoke to a "packed house,"[31] at another that radicals ought to grant a Liberal like Dorothy

Thompson freedom of speech.[32] He several times alludes to Sauk Centre: to the exhilarating set of Dickens in his father's house;[33] to the four-letter words spoken in Sauk Centre forty-five years before Mr. Hemingway made Messrs. Scribner print them in a book;[34] to the in-no-wise inferior lad trained at Sauk Centre High School rather than somewhere else;[35] to the view that, yes, Sauk Centre holds as much inspiration as Manhattan, but this is not to say that there is no glory in New York.[36] Lewis also acts as press agent for some of his major characters: Dale Carnegie, for example, is "The Bard of Babbittry."[37] Lewis titles another review "Babbitt in Babylon," the "reign of the Babbitts" going back to Mesopotamian salesmanship. He confides that he will send a copy of Miriam Beard's A History of the Business Man to his friend Sam Dodsworth in Hawaii. And even a thick ear detects "Elmer Gantry" in the encomium Lewis bestows on the splendid Wodehouse character Elmer Chinnery.[38]

Though Lewis alluded to and endorsed much fiction in his twenty-nine columns, he devoted only five exclusively to novels, boosting all but Hemingway's To Have and Have Not. In "Glorious Dirt," Lewis grumbles that after the "rich and exhilarating" A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway's "thinly connected" tough tales struck him as not only barbaric, neurotic, and obscene, but "irritatingly dull." The book confirms the "puerile slaughter" and "senile weariness" of Green Hills of Africa. For Hemingway, "no real man ever thinks of anything save adultery, alcohol, and fighting." Still, declares Lewis, "if Hemingway tried to save himself instead of Spain, he might yet become "the greatest novelist in America."

Hemingway appears in Lewis's catalog of twenty-eight living candidates for "The Greatest American Novelist," the title of his first Newsweek essay of 1938. In the end, however, Lewis votes for Willa Cather. His choice is especially interesting in light of his unfavorable review of One of Ours in the New York Evening Post ("A Hamlet of the Plains," September 22, 1922) and in his later disappointment when the Pulitzer Prize went to One of Ours instead of to Babbitt. Despite their radical dissimilarities of temperament and artistry, Lewis from early on had named Willa Cather among the potpourri *of novelists* he customarily championed in his conversations, letters, lectures, and articles. Other writers have chased after novelty and nihilism, but "quiet and alone, Willa Cather has greatly pictured the great life."

Lewis also relished the ordinary, middle-class life rendered by Josephine Lawrence. In "Vie de Newark," he quotes at length from Bow Down to Wood and Stone and comments on her "truly unusual power of seeing and remembering the details of daily living." And

this she does without guidance from Party "sparrows," little left-wing publications.

In "The Sparrow Screams," Lewis spotlights Meet Me at the Barricades, a novel which makes Charles Yale Harrison "not merely interesting" for Lewis "but really important." With "humor and winning pity," Harrison has crystallized the rank-and-file revolutionist as a "Marxian Milquetoast" who imagines himself a fighting general "bossing a noble horde of roughnecks." In the same column, Lewis also plugs the fantasy in Margery Sharp's The Nutmeg Tree, a novel based on the "eternally satisfying Cinderella legend," with Cinderella "forty, fat, frivolous." Marking the advent of Hervey Allen's Action at Aquila, Lewis--because he had exalted Allen's Anthony Adverse--coyly decides to "await the verdict of the real professional book reviewer."

Without hesitation, however, Lewis praises Summer Moonshine and ranks P. G. Wodehouse as the greatest living writer of humor. In "Garland for Clowns," Lewis envisions the English wit as "a whole department of rather delicate art," a master of the touchingly inane . . . of the ultimate and lordly dead pan," and each Wodehouse novel--"a leisurely cyclone"—is welcomely different. In his Christmas column, "A College in the Home," Lewis suggests fourteen works of fiction. Upon this foundation the reader (especially the middle-class, book-buying reader) can start a home library. Besides his bias toward the middlebrow novel (best-sellers like A. J. Cronin's The Citadel, J. P. Marquand's The Late George Apley, and Kenneth Roberts's Northwest Passage), Lewis acquiesces to Ignazio Silone's Bread and Wine, John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, and Virginia Woolf's The Years.

While George Jean Nathan reviewed plays on stage for Newsweek in his "Theatre Week" column, Lewis devoted one essay, "Theatre by the Fire," to plays in book form. He endorses nearly a dozen, decorously omitting Jayhawkers (1935), the dramatic version of It Can't Happen Here (1938), and any mention of the theatrical scene as raw material for Bethel Merriday (1940). For Lewis, the most original, moving, and American of plays to read is Thornton Wilder's Own Town. Of new plays in book form, the reviewer lauds the "simplicity, arrogant philosophy and lively village humor" of Paul Vincent Carroll's Shadow and Substance, a drama in which Lewis, in 1940, played the role of Canon Skerritt, the scholarly Irish priest who yearns for the glories of Madrid.

Of the ten nonfiction books Lewis reviewed, he boosts seven and garrots three. In "One Man Revolution," he pushes Henry Seidel Canby's edition of Walden as the "book-buy of the year." Lewis often claimed that Thoreau had a strong formative influence on him, though Mark Schorer finds no mention of Walden among the juvenilia (Life 25,

79). At any rate, the boy and man who long cherished an ideal of individual freedom describes Thoreau's masterpiece as "warm and gay," as one of the three or four "unquestionable" American literary classics, as "more modern than Dos Passos." When Lewis boasts that Thoreau helped make Concord "vast as London," one wonders if Lewis might not also have in mind how vast he has helped make Sauk Centre.

Like Lewis, Thomas Hart Benton roamed American by-ways. In "Slim, Jim, and Lem," Lewis heartily approves of An Artist in America. "Here is a rare thing," he declares, "a painter who can write." Benton's painter's eye "perceives the strangeness in everything from the bayous of Louisiana by moonlight to the expert spitting of a Georgia justice of the peace." Lewis, who fancies Benton as an ideal traveling companion, figures himself as a traveling companion in Frazier Hunt's One America, the adventures of a foreign correspondent from the Midwest. Main Street had inspired and Lewis had encouraged Hunt to write his opposing picture of American small-town life, Sycamore Bend (1925). "Perhaps Hunt wrote too fast and wrote sketchily," Lewis admits in "Tom Sawyer on Downing Street," but "that adventurous haste, combined with his warm heart, has enabled him to see people as capable of infinite variation."

This variation a Frenchman also discerns, says Lewis. In "George Harvey We Are Here," he dreams up statistics to celebrate Ernest Dimnet's My America, a book which knows America "ten times" as well as the average English visitor knows it and expresses what he knows with "a hundred times as much sympathy." Still, Winston S. Churchill, Lewis argues in "Lancelot in Khaki," knows more about the American Civil War than "99.9 per cent of Americans." For Lewis, the "innocent prejudices" of the class-conscious Churchill serve only to increase the value of his stately volume, Great Contemporaries.

In "Babbitt in Babylon," another historian later claims Lewis's attention. Here he passes off Miriam Beard's A History of the Business Man as "startling news," for her extraordinary book has exploded the radical-left myth that salesmanship is recent and that careers for women are ultramodern. But even more important is Stuart Chase's The Tyranny of Words. In "The Words of the Prophet," Lewis approves of the semanticist's controversial attack on meaningless abstractions which regulate our conduct: "magic phrases," "verbal rattles," "zombie" words, "phony unthought." In "We View With Alarm," Lewis himself, not above the "Puckishly picturesque," offers some pointers on precision in writing. And in "Tools for the Trade," he promotes certain dictionaries, encyclopedias, and anthologies. Noteworthy among the sixteen nonfiction titles that Lewis listed in his "A College in the Home" column is the autobiographical Before I Forget by critic

Burton Rascoe, heir to Lewis's "Book Week."

The three nonfiction books which Lewis fulminates against emerge from the extreme left, the extreme right, and the extreme highbrow. In "Seeing Red," Lewis attacks as pernicious the pro-Kremlin report of the Second America Writers Congress, The Writer in a Changing World. "There is no excuse for any one to swallow the Bolshevik claim to be the one defense against fascism." Spurned by the "more rarefied reviewers," Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People comes under Lewis's satiric scrutiny. In "Car-Yes-Man" (not Car-nay-guy) Lewis explains that Carnegie's mission is "to make Big Business safe for God and vice versa." Pointing up contradictions in Carnegie's "saintly refusal to criticize," Lewis exposes How to etc. as a "streamlined Bible" that tells you "how to smile and bob and pretend to be interested in people's hobbies precisely so that you may screw things out of them." Another literay con artist, in Lewis's opinion, is Gertrude Stein. Though he finds his attitude towards her hackneyed, in "The Gas Goddess," he can do little else but join the long line of reviewers who dismiss her writings as "drivel." Quoting Everybody's Autobiography at length, Lewis, hard on expatriate intellectuals, pictures a condescending Stein peddling bogus books.

In one of his early columns, "Too Much Fate in America," Lewis saw the United States as the most exciting country in the world, a world that may exist as Mark Twain knew it, "unashamed without benefit of Ezra Pound or Henry James." Lwis tied a few of his columns to places on his lecture tours. In "Towers at Dawn," he forewarns writers against coming to New York City to practice their craft. Still, he is moved to utter that in the clear fresh morning the silver towers of Manhattan—taller than the huts of fishermen—are glorious. On his "Byrd-like" discoveries in the West, Lewis, in "Lecturer's Message," points out that despite Albuquerque's sagebrush plains, slag-colored mountains, and Mexican adobe, its business section is like two hundred others. Only by admitting the permanence of standardization, says Lewis, might he convince his audiences that, more than ever, America has a desperate need for the individual mind. Though Lewis, we noted, directs young writers away from "bewritten" Hollywood, he discovers a literary gold mine in the Plain People, the colony of emigres from the Mississippi Valley who live in teeming Los Angeles and environs. In "Gold, Inc.," he tells of advising a young writer from New England to remain in California. Lewis than spews out a torrent of sample questions, the first of millions the novelist must ask. "To make a saga greater than Turgenieff's, he needs only those answers—and the ability to write!" Even after reading a semi-literate letter from a lonely revolutionist in a little San Fran-

cisco hotel, Lewis still finds the seaport city the most hospitable in America. But he wonders, in "Golden Gatling Gun," how useful his pathological correspondent might be to the proper leader who comes along and gives him a machine gun. Free of cities, Lewis in "Desert Terror," stands in awe of the open West, true home of the airplane. Of Big Sky Country, he declares: "If this iron land should ever produce great artists, besides the neurotic self-centered novelists and cocky literary essayists who have been most of its surprising intellectual crop to day, their work ought to endure, as this land will endure." He concludes that this age is "more exciting than the dawn of the Renaissance."

During the time Lewis wrote for Newsweek, the editors printed about a dozen letters from readers. Franklin P. Adams and H. L. Mencken sent strong approval;[39] in the same issue, another reader charged Lewis with projecting onto Hemingway his own failings as a novelist—distortion and lack of restraint. Later, another, naturally, viewed Lewis as "the most perspicacious of them all."[40] Declared someone from Pennsylvania: Dale Carnegie can do more good in one day than Sinclair Lewis can do in a lifetime. But a reader from Maine felt that what was done to Carnegie needed to be done—and who better than the author of Babbitt? "Long may he be your literary critic!"[41] Another reader demurred: Lewis was too iconoclastic to be a great literary critic—but he knew how to start an argument and sell magazines.[42] A man from Detroit wanted to know why Lewis did not name himself The Greatest American Novelist: "Is Mr. Lewis too modest, or does he underrate his own ability?"[43] Another reader from Maine affirmed that "Once in a dog's age Sinclair Lewis breaks from the apron strings of Dorothy Thompson long enough to write a pungent editorial."[44] After Sinclair Lewis "took to the tall timber to write plays"—as Newsweek put it—the editors printed a letter by a reader delighted to see Lewis's departure: in Burton Rascoe the reader saw "someone who will give us more about books and less of the columnist's mind-musings on his own lectures, travels, and sufferings at the hands of the American bourgeoisie."[45] Despite Sinclair Lewis's shortcomings as a man of letters—his lack of formalist aesthetics, his middlebrow biases, his self-indulgent meditations, his sweeping assessments—he gave to readers of the popular news magazine questions to ponder, answers to weigh, rosters to check, and spiky oxymorons to chortle over.

NOTES

[1]See John W. Aldridge, "Mr. Lewis as Essayist," NYTBR, 15 Feb. 1953: 6, 23; James Lundquist, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Ungar, 1974) 87-101; Mark Schorer, "The World of Sinclair Lewis," New Republic 6 Apr. 1953: 18-20; Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw) 633-34, 637.

[2]"Onward Chicago!" 4 Oct. 1937: 32. Rather than clutter the text with titles, references to Lewis's 29 essays will be given in notes throughout.

[3]"Glorious Dirt" 18 Oct. 1937: 34.

[4]"A College in the Home" 27 Dec. 1937: 28.

[5]"Onward Chicago!"

[6]"Thanking You in Advance" 18 Apr. 1938: 34.

[7]"Onward Chicago!" and "Too Much Fate For America " 11 Apr. 1937: 42.

[8]"Glorious Dirt" and Garland for Clowns" 25 Oct. 1937: 37.

[9]"Slim, Jim, and Lem" 8 Nov. 1937: 25; "Lancelot in Khaki" 9 Nov. 1937: 28.

[10]"Car-Yes-Man" 15 Nov. 1937: 31; "One Man Revolution" 22 Nov. 1937: 33.

[11]"Seeing Red" 29 Nov. 1937: 30.

[12]"We View With Alarm" 6 Dec. 1937: 30; "The Gas Goddess" 17 Dec. 1937: 36.

[13]"George Harvey We Are Here" 20 Dec. 1937: 24; "A College in the Home."

[14]"The Greatest American Novelist" 3 Jan. 1938: 29; "Crowns for Critics" 10 Jan. 1938: 33.

[15]"Babbitt in Babylon" 17 Jan. 1938: 32; "The Words of the Prophet" 24 Jan. 1938: 32.

[16]"Towers at Dawn" 31 Jan. 1938: 28; "Tom Sawyer on Downing Street" 7 Feb. 1938: 28; "Lecturer's Message" 14 Feb. 1938: 32; "Gold, Inc." 21 Feb. 1938: 21; "Golden Gatling Gun" 28 Feb. 1938: 36.

[17]"Vie de Newark" 7 Mar. 1938: 31; "The Sparrow Screams" 14 Mar. 1938: 30.

[18]"Tools of the Trade" 21 Mar. 1938: 36; "That Was A Good Lecture" 28 Mar. 1938: 30.

[19]"Desert Terror" 4 Apr. 1938: 34; "Theatre by the Fire" 11 Apr. 1938: 32; and "Thanking You in Advance."

[20]"Theatre by the Fire."

[21]"Lecturer's Message."

[22]"Onward Chicago!"

[23]"A College in the Home."

[24]"Too Much Fate For America."

[25]"The Greatest American Novelist."

[26]"The Sparrow Screams."

[27]"Theatre by the Fire."

[28]"That Was a Good Lecture."

[29]"Thanking You in Advance."

[30]"Vie de Newark."

[31]"Lecturer's Message."

[32]"Golden Gatling Gun."

[33]"A College in the Home."

[34]"Glorious Dirt."

[35]"Onward Chicago!"

[36]"Towers at Dawn."

[37]"One Man Revolution."

[38]"Garland for Clowns."

[39]1 Nov. 1937: 2.

[40]15 Nov. 1937: 4.

[41]29 Nov. 1937: 2.

[42]27 Dec. 1937: 2.

[43]3 Jan. 1938: 2.

[44]11 Apr. 1938: 2.

[45]9 May 1938: 4.

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[Lewis's twenty-nine Newsweek essays (4 Oct. 1937 - 18 Apr. 1938) cited in notes.]

CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF THE WORKS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

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As a societal force, Sinclair Lewis is perhaps without peer in this century, certainly among American writers. His books seem to lend themselves to the motion picture medium with great ease, full as they are of vividly sketched characters, dramatic situations and relentless narrative drive. However, none of the fifteen films based on Lewis's works comes anywhere near to the power of the original on which it is based, and in this paper, I will briefly attempt to address some of the reasons for this curious phenomenon.

Lewis made the connection with Hollywood early on. There are a number of silent films based on Lewis's works, and the first appeared on January 13, 1923. The Ghost Patrol, based on Lewis's short story, was a 50-minute mini-feature directed by the untalented Nat Ross, who later went on to direct a string of pedestrian westerns for Majestic Pictures. Raymond L. Schrock's screenplay is equally ordinary, and all in all, it is not an auspicious motion picture debut. Lewis's original story concerned an Irish policeman who reconciles the Italian and Jewish parents of a pair of young lovers; although the original is slight, the film is even more marginal. Ross's direction consists entirely of establishing wide shots and sentimentally composed closeups. One can excuse the many crudities of the production on the grounds that the motion picture medium was still in its initial stage of development, but if one remembers that at the same time Fritz Lang was making Die Nibelungen Saga in Germany for UFA Film, the gap between filmic art and hack work becomes painfully obvious.

Next in line was an adaptation of Main Street, released on May 28, 1923 by Warner Brothers. Although the film suffers from the enforced handicap of inter-titles common to all silent films, it is in many ways a very fine piece of work. Harry Beaumont, the director, worked from a screenplay by Julien Josephson which was remarkably faithful to the novel. Running slightly under 90 minutes, Beaumont's film is far preferable to 1936's I Married A Doctor, Hollywood's second attempt at filming the novel. At

this point, Warner's also purchased the rights to Babbitt, and Beaumont filmed that novel with less success in 1924, releasing the film on June 4th of that year. Dorothy Farnum's screenplay is less faithful than Josephson's, and Babbitt becomes simply an unsympathetic buffoon in this version of the work. These two films were very much a personal project for Beaumont, and he would have gone on to more adaptations of Lewis's works, but, surprisingly, box-office receipts on the two films were not as good as had been anticipated. Certainly Lewis's novels had been controversial, but this controversy did not automatically translate into audience acceptance, and Warner's quietly dropped plans to do any more adaptations of Lewis's works. But, as we shall see, they attempted to cash in on the writer's notoriety after his 1930 Nobel Prize, with a quickie production of Babbitt.

Mantrap was produced in 1926 with a screenplay by Adelaide Heilbron and Ethel Doherty from Lewis's novel. Released on August 30th of that year, the production received routine direction from Victor Fleming, who was to go on to fame as the director of The Wizard of Oz in 1939. The last of Lewis's silent films, Mantrap is a 70-minute "B" picture starring Clara Bow and Ernest Torrence and was designed by the studio simply as popular entertainment. Although the book is generally agreed to be one of Lewis's lesser efforts, in the film it turns into a complete piece of froth, so light it threatens to float away at any moment. Clara Bow gives a strident, one-note performance to complement Torrence's stolidly forthright interpretation of his role, and the film was sold as a "romance that will live forever," which of course has nothing to do with the novel. The modest financial success of the film, Lewis was assured by the studio, had more to do with Miss Bow's fans than with his, and for the moment, Hollywood was through with Sinclair Lewis.

Then, however, came the Nobel Prize. Suddenly Hollywood was willing to accept Lewis as a serious writer again, and interest in his work flared anew. Paramount saw the chance to cash in on the Prize with the production of Forbidden Adventure, directed by the utterly faceless Norman Taurog, and released it on June 22, 1931. The film was based, if that is indeed the word, very loosely on Lewis's "Let's Play King", which the studio had purchased shortly after the Nobel Prize was announced. The three-part serial was not first-rate Lewis in any event, having been written for Collier's simply to make some needed cash, but the film of the serial is truly terrible. Taurog, the director, epitomized the studio hack, and he was still at work in the late 1960s, directing such films as Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine. To make matters worse, the screenplay was a patch-work affair concocted on a daily basis by Edward E. Paramore (a

studio flunkey who crossed swords with F. Scott Fitzgerald on several of his Hollywood projects; Fitzgerald wrote that "Paramore embraces everything that is mediocre in both a human being and an author"), Joseph L. Mankiewicz, and Agnes Branch Leahy. Forbidden Adventure was released with a new publicity campaign, "by the great Nobel Prize Winning Author, Sinclair Lewis," and, once again, it is an unfortunate debut. For this was Lewis's first talking picture, and in Norman Taurog, Lewis had a director who simply caved in to the demands of the Bell Telephone sound technicians, who, in the early 1930s, were more in charge of the production of a film than the director was. Movies had moved; now they stopped and stared at people talking. The camera was momentarily frozen and the soundman was king.

Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy was filmed in 1931 by director Josef Von Sternberg. Although sound was relatively new to the motion picture medium when it was produced (having been introduced in 1927 by Warner Brother's production of The Jazz Singer), Von Sternberg strove to make certain the production did not suffer from the same static, talky air that infected so many other early sound films. Much of the production was filmed outdoors, and Von Sternberg managed to keep the production natural, flowing, and convincing, avoiding much of the theatricality inherent in Dreiser's novel. In fact, Von Sternberg's film is at least the equal of the Dreiser novel, and presents the story in a matter-of-fact manner which is free from excessive moralizing, effectively telescoping the novel's concerns into a concise, swiftly moving 75-minute film. If only Von Sternberg, or a director of his stature, had tackled Sinclair Lewis's novels, the tone of this paper would be entirely different. But I have brought up the case of An American Tragedy to point out that it was possible, even in the early days of sound, to effectively translate a fine novel with intelligence, cinematic style, and without becoming a lifeless slave to the text. Lewis has never had such a gifted interpreter, and the films of his works suffer because of it.

He did, however, come close to a gifted director when John Ford was assigned to the 1932 production of Arrowsmith. But Ford, now canonized as one of the greatest Hollywood directors, was still in his formative period when the film was made, and to him, the film was "just another picture." As a director, Ford certainly is more at home with westerns than with social commentary. Sidney Howard's screenplay is respectful but not really cinematic: too often, Ford's direction simply backs off to watch events as they occur. The film is over-long at 110 minutes, and is more an entombment of scripted events than a visualization of them. However, the film did recoup its investment at the box-office, and the Nobel Prize had allowed Lewis to

get a good price for the work. Equally uninteresting was the 1933 production of Ann Vickers, directed for RKO by John Cromwell. Max Steiner, who had in that same year composed the music for King Kong, composed a bombastic score which pretty much drowned the picture. Jane Murfin's screenplay is routine, and both Arrowsmith and Ann Vickers share one unfortunate defect: they have had their edges rounded off to appease nervous studio bosses.

The next attempt to film one of Lewis's works was the 1934 production of Babbitt, directed by William Keighley, and starring Guy Kibbee as Babbitt. Unhappily, the film is static, talky, and seems so much in awe of its source material that it never takes off on its own. Guy Kibbee gives a convincingly "Zip and Zowie" performance as Babbitt, and the film afforded the actor a refreshing break from the "Sugar Daddy" light-comedy roles he had grown used to playing for more than a decade. Indeed, Kibbee's other film of 1934 is the saccharine Captain January, in which he played a saintly old lighthouse keeper opposite a young Shirley Temple. But Keighley's direction is lackluster, and uses wipes and other jarringly artificial filmic transitions to cover up the huge chunks missing from the novel. Keighley was an efficient house director, but certainly no major cinematic artist, and he seems to have viewed his assignment to the project as simply an exercise in the "Classics Illustrated" school of filmmaking. There is no interpretation in Keighley's style, simply recording, and Kibbee is left to carry the film as best he can. One can sympathize with the earnestness of his performance; it was his one chance for greatness, and he knew it. Iconographically, Kibbee fits the fole of George Babbitt exceedingly well. But perhaps he also knew that the project would not turn out as well as it might have in different hands, and one can detect a certain desperation in Kibbee's work which may not be entirely associated with the character he was playing.

In this case, the film failed because it had a director who was too unsure of himself to adequately visualize Lewis's world, and because the film was never given a sufficient budget. The film was again designed as a "B" picture, even though Lewis was still a well-known name to the public. Warner Brothers had owned the rights to the novel since 1922, the year of its initial publication, and the first version, as noted, was a lavish affair. Now, with the rights costing them nothing, Warner's failed to give the production adequate values, and the resultant film looks and plays like a cheap little "program picture." Then, too, it is astonishing to note the number of hands who attempted to re-write and "improve" Lewis's dialogue. Mary McCall Jr.'s initial screenplay draft was revised and substantially re-written by Tom Reed and the ubiquitous Niven

Busch, and even then Keighley wasn't satisfied. The final ignominous touch to the production is that a hack dialogue writer, Ben Markson, was brought in on a daily basis to rewrite the rewrite on a scene-by-scene basis, just as each sequence went before the cameras. Under these conditions, it is nearly impossible for anything of quality to emerge, and here, little of quality did. In the final analysis, Lewis, Kibbee, and the audience are cheated by the half-heartedness of the film's execution.

In 1936, Lewis was favored with what is arguably the most accomplished adaptation of one of his works, Dodsworth, but before that, he had to contend with Archie Mayo's disastrous I Married A Doctor, a truly amazing re-writing of Main Street. Archie Mayo was a house director for Warner Brothers, and he directed more than 50 films in the years 1934-45 for that studio. At that pace, he obviously could spend little time on subtleties. By his own admission, Mayo's approach to the film was "Get it, then forget it", and this lack of care certainly shows throughout the film. Once again, Lewis's work was re-written by a team of dialogue writers, Harriet Ford, Harvey Higgins, and Casey Robinson. And once again, the final result is another cheap-hack patchwork lacking in style or sensibility.

With Dodsworth, however, Lewis finally got a good director, if not a great one: William Wyler. For the first time, he had the benefit of "A" production values, and an excellent cast, including Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, and a young David Niven. Huston is extremely effective in title role, and the screenplay is adapted by Sidney Howard from his stageplay of the novel. This Samuel Goldwyn Production was to be the only serious attempt to translate Lewis's work to the screen in the writer's lifetime, and Lewis approved of the production himself, with some minor reservations. If there is a fault in the film, it lies paradixically in the meticulousness of Wyler's directional style. While the other films of Lewis's works were slapdash affairs, Wyler over-rehearsed his actors, and would often do up to twenty takes of one scene. By the time the final take was made, the actors were often unspontaneous in their movements and reactions, as if they had performed a play on the stage too many times. While the film is respectful, restrained, and uncompromising in its treatment of the novel, it, too, falls short of greatness through Wyler's undue perfectionism.

Dodsworth was the last adaptation of a Lewis work in the 1930s, and the decade that followed was not kind to his work. In 1940, Paramount assigned the western director George Archainbaud to do a remake of Mantrap, this time titled Untamed. Released on July 26, 1940, Lewis's name is apparent only in the credits on the film itself, and is mentioned nowhere in the publicity campaign for the film. Paramount still owned

the rights from the 1926 production, and they saw a chance to use a screenplay over. In 1943, Universal, then best known for their Abbott and Costello pictures, assigned Felix Feist, a low-grade director even by their standards, to direct This is the Life, a quickly made little film based on the stage play which Lewis had co-authored with horror-movie actress Fay Wray, Angela is Twenty-Two. The play is a minor addition to the Lewis canon; the film is considerably less than that. 1947's Fun and Fancy Free marked, at least for this writer, the nadir of Lewis's association with Hollywood. This Walt Disney film, based on Lewis' short story Bongo, (and, according to the pressbook, "the immortal fairy tale of Jack and The Beanstalk"), was an animated-live action film with Donald Duck and Jiminy Cricket, where Lewis's already slight short story was re-written and padded out by no less than six dialogue writers. Cass Timberlane, the last production of a Lewis work in the author's lifetime, followed immediately. Although this film has a high production gloss, and the inestimable talents of Spencer Tracy, Lana Turner, Zachary Scott, and Mary Astor, George Sidney's direction treats the entire project as soap opera, and in the end the film is turgid and often unwatchable.

Lewis died in 1951, alone and in exile in Rome. His personal life had by that time become a nightmare, and he had estranged even his closest associates with his increasingly aberrant behavior in his last years. Lewis's work was, for a time, largely forgotten, and it was said of him that he spoke to a generation now long dead: that the things he attacked and the alternative values he espoused were out-of-date, no longer relevant or even existent. But this is certainly not the case, and Richard Brooks's prescient production in 1960 of Elmer Gantry manages, in many ways, to be the very finest adaptation of the author's work to the screen. Brooks directed the film from his own screenplay, originally driven to do the project because of his own dislike for Bible-belt revivalist preachers. Brooks saw Gantryism on the rise rather than on the wane in America, and certainly the popularity of such Gantryesque figures as Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell and others bears this conclusion out. For Gantry, Brooks picked the florid Burt Lancaster, who was perfect in the part, winning an Oscar for his work in the film. For Sharon Falconer, Brooks chose Jean Simmons, and she manages to bring off her role quite acceptably. But the focus of the film, and the novel, is always on Gantry, and Lancaster gave his interpretation of the role an undeniably seedy elegance. However, Brooks's direction is just a shade short of real genius, and the auteur of the film version of Elmer Gantry remains more the energetically out-of-control Burt Lancaster than the level-headed competent Brooks as director. Brooks's script was quite good, but his execution of his own script left something to be desired. It

was often merely competent illustration, not interpretation.

So, summing up, what have we here? Lewis's work, compromised and battered, rearing its bloody head from the wreckage of a group of largely botched films. The concerns of Lewis's work are, despite some less observant critics, still valid today. Main Street is as much a force as ever in small-town American life: Gantryism is everywhere. Babbitts still run local chambers of commerce, and Dodsworthian businessmen daily converge on the emptiness of their souls. The challenge remains: will anyone ever translate Lewis, unvarnished, full of the terror of the daily and commonplace, to the screen? Studio demands for high box-office returns work against that possibility, now as then. But the work remains, and the challenge remains, and perhaps someone will pick up the gauntlet, and run with it.

FILMS BASED UPON WORKS BY SINCLAIR LEWIS

1. Ghost Patrol 1923 Universal
   Director: Nat Ross
   Screenplay: Raymond L. Schrock
   Based on Lewis's short story
   5 reels
   Released January 13, 1923

2. Main Street 1923 Warner Brothers
   Director: Harry Beaumont
   Screenplay: Julien Josephson
   9 reels
   Released May 28, 1923

3. Babbitt 1924 Warner Brothers
   Director: Harry Beaumont
   Screenplay: Dorothy Farnum
   8 reels
   Released June 4, 1924

4. Mantrap 1926 Paramount
   Director: Victor Fleming
   Screenplay: Adelaide Heilbron
   Ethel Doherty
   7 reels
   Released August 30, 1926

5. Forbidden Adventure 1931 Paramount
   Director: Norman Taurog
   Screenplay: Edward E. Paramore, Jr.
   Joseph L. Mankiewicz
   Agnes Brand Leahy
   Based on Lewis's story "Let's Play King"
   7 reels
   June 22, 1931

6. Arrowsmith 1932 United Artists
   Director: John Ford
   Screenplay: Sidney Howard
   11 reels
   Released January 16, 1932

7. Ann Vickers 1933 RKO
   Director: John Cromwell
   Screenplay: Jane Murfin
   Musical Score: Max Steiner
   9 reels
   Released September 28, 1933

8. Babbitt 1934 Warner Brothers
   Director: William Keighley
   Screenplay: Mary McCall, Jr.
   Adaptation: Tom Reed, Niven Busch
   Additional Dialogue: Ben Markson
   8 reels
   Released December 15, 1934

9. I Married A Doctor 1936 Warner Brothers
   Director: Archie Mayo
   Screenplay: Harriet Ford
   Harvey O. Higgins
   Casey Robinson
   From Main Street
   9 reels
   Released April 28, 1936

10. Dodsworth 1936 United Artists/Samuel Goldwyn
   Director: William Wyler
   Screenplay: Sidney Howard (from his stage dramatization)
   11 reels
   Released September 28, 1936

11. Untamed 1940 Paramount
   Director: George Archainbaud
   Screenplay: Frederick Hazlitt Brennan
   Frank Butler
   Based on Lewis's Mantrap
   9 reels
   Released July 26, 1940

12. This is The Life 1943 Universal
   Director: Felix E. Feist
   Screenplay: Wanda Tuchock
   Based on the play, Angela is Twenty-Two by Lewis and Fay Wray
   10 reels
   Released November 17, 1943

13. Fun and Fancy Free 1947 Walt Disney Productions
   Directors: Jack Kinney
   W. O. Roberts
   Hamilton Luske
   Screenplay: Homer Brightman, Ted Sears, Lance Nolley, Eldon Dedini,
   Harry Reeves, Tom Oreb
   Based on Lewis's story "Bong" and the fairy tale "Jack and The Beanstalk"
   8 reels
   Released April 23, 1947

14. Cass Timberlane 1947 Loew's
    Director: George Sidney
    Screenplay: Donald Ogden Stewart
    Sonya Levien
    12 reels
    Released November 19, 1947

15. Elmer Gantry 1960 United Artists
    Director: Richard Brooks
    Screenplay: Richard Brooks
    15 reels
    Released June 29, 1960

THE BOOK THAT HAS NEVER BEEN PUBLISHED

Clara Lee R. Moodie
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One of the most important books by Sinclair Lewis has never been published! Remarkably, though Lewis wrote 126 short stories, spanning his lifetime as an author from 1903 to 1951, only nineteen of these stories have ever been collected and reprinted.[1] The others, including some of his best, are forgotten now and hidden in the bound volumes of the periodicals of four decades. Many of these stories are memorable in their own right. For the reader who enjoys Lewis, there is a great deal more to read than the novels.

There is another reason for collecting Lewis's short fiction. Implicit in these stories are the great American myths: Horatio Alger success, the pioneering spirit moving Westward, and the beneficence of the American village. Lewis began writing squarely rooted in the Transcendental tradition. Like Whitman he celebrated the worth of the common man, finding drama and even heroism in the lives of obscure "little people." Lewis began, in the short stories, by rebelling against the notion that the Middle Westerner was inferior to the Easterner. But the more he attempted to vindicate the middle class Midwesterner, the more he became aware of his complacency and materialism. This led Lewis to attack hypocrisy and pretension in all its forms and to recognize the stultifying effect of the Midwestern town as well as the corruption of the big city. The early short stories definitively chronicle Lewis's growth from the Transcendental tradition to social criticism and satire. A centennial celebration is an occasion for a reassessment of the writer and his impact. How can we attempt an evaluation of Sinclair Lewis as a writer without a familiarity with his short fiction?

Between 1903 and 1920, from the time Sinclair Lewis matriculated as an undergraduate at Yale to the publication of Main Street, he wrote seventy-six short stories. Many readers assume from the romanticism of the novels published before 1920 that Main Street represents a sudden development in Lewis's literary career. As I pointed out in an earlier article in Studies In Short Fiction, writing short stories was Sinclair Lewis's apprenticeship for the major novels of the twenties. Moreover, this short fiction

reveals the concerns and issues, and the ways of approaching them, which he used in all the later works. In these stories one can find the themes and ideas that dominate the novels. It was through the short fiction of this early period that Lewis developed his narrative technique and refined his style.

"A Theory of Values," published in the Yale Monthly in 1906, is the first story in which Lewis clearly affirms the common man and the small town as the source of American virtue. The story charts a change of values in Karl Nelson, a Minnesota country boy. Karl longs to be educated, and he spurns his "hick" town. But, when he becomes the manager of a store and achieves a feeling of success, he begins to take pride in his town and interest in local politics. This change in attitude is set against the experience of Karl's best friend, who attends the University of Minnesota and does acquire a formal education. Lewis makes it clear that what Karl learns from practical experience within the bosom of his small town far exceeds what his friend accomplished who went to the university.

Lewis's view of the self-made man nurtured in the Village Tradition is often mistaken for an anti-intellectualism. A short story like "Young Man Axelbrod" (Century Magazine, 1917) makes clear the distinction Lewis draws between a formal education and real learning. Knute Axelbrod, a Scandinavian farmer trapped in rural poverty, secretly hankers after learning all his life. Finally, he realizes his dream and, as an older man, enrolls at Yale.

> But for months he wrestled and played with that idea of a great pilgrimage to the Mount of Muses; for he really supposed college to be that sort of place. He believed that all college students, except for wealthy idlers, burned to acquire learning. He pictured Harvard and Yale and Princeton as ancient groves set with marble temples, before which large groups of Grecian youths talked gently about astronomy and good government. (190)

Knute's experience at the university is far different than his naive aspirations lead him to expect. He meets with cruel jibes from his Eastern classmates and a functionalist attitude toward education in his professors, who misinterpret his love of learning as "showing off." Disillusioned, Knute returns home to pursue learning after his own lights. Lewis makes clear that true learning resides with this humble Midwestern farmer, not with the effete Eastern snobs at the university: "With a longing for music and books and graciousness, such as the most ambitious boy could never comprehend, this thick-faced prairie farmer dedicated himself to beauty and defied the unconquerable power of approaching old age" (190). As in all his work, Sinclair

Lewis is making a distinction between the true and the false, between the real and the spurious.

By the late teens, Lewis had extended his affirmation of the common man beyond the rural Midwest to include the little people "who do the world's work" in the big cities. In "The Hidden People" (Good Housekeeping, 1917), a young midwestern college boy, Julian Oliver, comes to New York to earn his fortune and find the girl of his dreams. Instead, he encounters adversity and begins to feel very lonely and isolated. Then he meets a manicure girl in the office building where he works, and she introduces him to her friends.

> Certain Jews and Italians and Irish folk, who had come from villages that rustled with bird sounds, had made themselves another village—along the entrance hall of the Zodiac Building. Its inhabitants were inconspicuous to the thousands who merely dashed into the building, glanced at the name board, and took an elevator, but they were as interested in one another, as friendly and placid, as villages the world over. . . . Julian Oliver first saw New York as a habitable place when he saw the kindliness of the hidden village. (135-36)

Not only did these little people provide the only kindliness and warmth to be found in the big cities, but they were frequently the only ones who retained a sense of integrity in the midst of dirt and corruption. In "For the Zelda Bunch" (McClure's Magazine, 1917), it is the waitresses and busboys of the Zelda lunchroom who demand, even to the point of striking against the manager, cleanliness and real compensation for the lunchroom's customers.

Between 1915 and 1920 over sixty Lewis short stories appeared in magazines like The Metropolitan and Red Book, and his name became a byword in the Saturday Evening Post of this era. This fertile period was, beyond question, the source of the great novels of the next period, and as such, is of major importance in any critical evaluation of Lewis's art. This mass of short fiction not only enabled him to establish a wide popular audience of a kind that the early novels did not reach, but it also permitted him to explore various areas in American life and to establish his attitudes toward them.

The theme that true American values are best recognized in the lives and work of common, everyday people continues to dominate this fiction. The more Lewis becomes aware of the sham and decei that underlie the sophistication and "culture" of the East Coast lifestyle, the more emphatically he portrays the inherent integrity and kindliness of the Midwesterner. n most of these stories, the plot centers on a

choice of values. The protagonist is momentarily blinded by an illusion, whether it be Utopian idealism or the status and comfort affluence seems to offer. Eventually, however, his own good sense leads him to abandon the false dream for the very real fulfillment of his everyday life. Typical of such stories is "The Enchanted Hour" (Saturday Evening Post, 1919). Ross Leyland, a prosperous businessman and the owner of a paint company, returns to a Bohemian colony in California where he lived for a brief time as a young man. Middle-aged and discontented, Leyland seeks out his first love and shares an idyllic hour with her. Despite the nostalgia that surrounds the occasion, Leyland's inherent common sense and practical values lead him to see the colonists as essentially failures. Hard work and practical engagement with life, not withdrawal and dreaming idealism, bring peace of mind. So Leyland returns to his wife, home and work, and he is freed of his discontent.

It was a natural step for Lewis to shift the focus of his stories from a choice of values to satirizing false values themselves. He had ridiculed psuedo-intellectualism in his earliest short stories. For example, he attacked the pretentiousness of newly published authors in "The Yellow Streak" (Yale Literary Magazine) in 1905 and current fads in modern art in "Scented Spring and the G.P" in 1913 (Short Stories). However, it was not until the Saturday Evening Post stories that Lewis began exposing the artificiality and sham of the Bohemian life of Greenwich Village. The point of reference for all these satires continued to be the Midwesterner, usually a businessman like Dennis Brown in the story "Hobohemia" (Saturday Evening Post, 1917). Brown was a substantial lumber merchant of Northernapolis who loved a girl with aspirations after cultue and a literary career. Only after Brown followed her to New York and exposed the ridiculousness of her Bohemian group's enthusiasm for lugubrious Russian authors was he able to convince her to marry him.

Small towns, too, have their aspirations after culture, and in some ways their very provincialism makes these pretensions more ludicrous than those of the more sophisticated Bohemians of New York City. "A Rose for Little Eva" (McClure's Magazine, 1918), though ostensibly a tale of the fortunes of the Cushman Bland vaudeville family, is in reality a humorous commentary on the tastes of Gopher Prairie. While performing Uncle Tom's Cabin in Gopher Prairie, the troupe falls upon hard times, and the town philanthropist, Miss Rockland Dill (her major philanthropy has been the contribution of seven maples to the town square), arranges a benefit to aid the troupe. Actually, the benefit is merely an opportunity for Miss Dill, a frustrated thespian,

to perform. This situation allows Sinc air Lewis to parody women's "uplift societies" and their efforts to raise the cultural le el of their town.

In a series of seven stories which appeared in the Metropolitan Magazine between 1917 and 1919 and in the story "Gladve tising" (Popular Magazine, 1918), Sinclair Lewis created the figure of Lancelot Todd, th e prototype of George F. Babbitt. He describes Todd tellingly in the first of these, "Snap py Display":

> Lancelot is an artist of advertis ng; a compound of punch, power, pep and purest rot serene. You have do ubtless heard his addresses, "Upward and Pupward," and "The Smash and Lash that Put the Zing! in Advertising" which are so inspiringly delivere d before Chautauquas, Y.M.C.A. business classes, and commercial clubs. (7)

Each story is an expose of some aven e of merchandising which Todd tries to exploit with his razz-matazz technique. The plot device is the same in each story: crooked Todd's chicanery backfires and the de eption is exposed. This group of stories about high pressure salesmanship and booste ism represents Lewis' exploration of the world he will satirize in Babbitt, and as such h lds a special interest for Lewis critics.[2]

Another favorite point of attack for Lewis is snobbery and class consciousness. The story "Commutation: $9.17" (Sat urday Evening Post, 1915) is about a suburban businessman who is frustrated in his eff rts to attain importance and community recognition. He is rejected by the Harbor C ub and his attempt to found an Arnold Bennett Culture Circle fails. In a fit of pique, he defies a railroad conductor and refuses to show his commutation ticket, and this earns him the attention he desires. More important than the irony of the plot situati n is Lewis's analysis of the class consciousness of the town.

> The sets in Crosshampton Harbo are of a subtlety. There is the Harbor Club set, consisting of an undert aker who wears suspenders, a fuzzy-faced lawyer, the real estate person na ned Litchfield, the chief plumber in town, and a collection of easy-going ommuters and town merchants who play five hundred until midnight ever Saturday and attend the smaller wooden *churches on* Sunday. . . . There is a town merchant set that does not belong to clubs, and a social-uplift set, and a literary set, and the Old Inhabitant set whose families date back to 17)0. (8)

Sinclair Lewis's short fiction of his period contains the most carefully detailed scenes of ordinary life, and his prota gonists are invariably humble, average people. Their struggles are set against a busine s world and big cities whose materialism, crassness and drudgery are faithfully reco ded in the most realistic terms. Although the majority of these stories are built on t e simplest of plot devices, the chronicle, Lewis

is constantly working at the reproduction of colloquial speech and experimenting with narrative structure. As early as 1907 in a Puck story, "Extracts from a Club Woman's Diary," Lewis uses the dramatic monologue as a technique for exposing a character's foibles. This story is literally a series of diary entries written by a woman who wants to be president of her Woman's Club. As we read the diary, it becomes obvious that this woman really dislikes her so-called "best" friend who competes with her at every turn. The monologue is an effective device for satirizing the hypocrisy of provincial club women. In the Lancelot Todd story, "Snappy Display" Lewis uses excerpts from adman Todd's writings to preface each stage of the story, thus contrasting Todd's preaching with his action. "The Way I See It" (Saturday Evening Post, 1920) is an account of problems which arise between a mature boss and a new young salesman. A story about the "generation gap" in business, the plot turns on the irony of different perspectives of the same problem. Each participant in the story explains his viewpoint to an outside business associate who never comments. First you have the account of the young salesman, then that of the mature boss, then comments by their secretary and by the president of the company. In the course of the monologues we learn that the dispute culminates in the boss firing the young salesman. The piece concludes with a straight narrative account of the accidental meeting of these two ten years later.

Lewis's critics have condemned him for ambivalence. He is accused of attacking what he defends and defending what he attacked. But our vantage point has been Main Street and Babbitt and the novels that follow. What the short fiction of this early period provides is another way of looking at Lewis's attitude toward small town America and its values. Bernard DeVoto pointed out in The Literary Fallacy (95-123) that satire must have a touchstone, a point of reference which makes the positive values clear. Lewis's Whitmanesque affirmation of the integrity and importance of the common man, his optimism about the value of life in the American small town, seen so clearly in the short fiction, provides us with a Transcendental base for the satire of all the novels and short stories.

As Lewis turned his attention to the novel form, he greatly reduced his output of short stories. Between 1920 and 1930, he wrote only fifteen short stories, most of them after he finished the novels. Three stories were written in 1921, one in 1923 and the remaining eleven in 1929-30, after Dodsworth. It is almost as if the short

fiction of this period comes as a culmination to his major artistic efforts and as a transition to an entirely different period of productivity.

The short stories of the twenties are a further exploration of familiar themes. They contain no innovations in technique, but they do exhibit a maturity of style that most of the earlier stories did not have. Four of them--"A Matter of Business" (Harper's, 1921), "Young Man Go East" (Cosmopolitan, 1930), "Number Seven to Sagapoose" (American Magazine, 1921), and "The Hack Driver" (The Nation, 1923), vindicate the Main Streets and Babbitt's of America. This is particularly interesting when one realizes that two out of the four were written in 1921, just after the publication of Main Street and before the publication of Babbitt.

A new theme, how to handle women, enters the short fiction of this decade. "What a Man!" (Cosmopolitan, 1929) is a dramatic monologue by a middle-aged, married lawyer consumed with curiosity about a celebrated lover's technique. When the narrator contrives to meet this famous lover, he finds him to be a mousey, nondescript, unprepossessing little man. But the lover confides his secret, four rules of charming women:

1) A man must really LIKE women
2) He must take TIME with them
3) He must be willing to LISTEN to them
4) He must always ASK them for what he wants (225).

When one remembers that 1925 saw the break-up of Lewis's marriage to Grace Hegger, it is not too surprising that a somewhat cynical attitude toward women should crop up in stories written in 1929.

The remainder of the stories of this decade, almost all of them written in 1929 and 1930, are satires on Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution, on pulp magazine writers, on pedants and false scholarship, and on Prohibition. One example of his more sophisticated approach to the short satire is "Dear Editor" (Cosmopolitan, 1929), a parody of the manuscripts submitted to popular magazines by pseudo-literary females. The piece begins with a letter to the editor from the authoress, describing her training from a correspondence school in short story writing. The letter writer assumes the story will be accepted. The letter is followed by the most abysmally sentimental and contrived story one can imagine. This, in turn, is followed by a formal rejection slip. The whole piece closes with another letter in which the authoress outlines how she followed all the rules of short story writing, and she demands the story be reread by the editor himself. The technique is reminiscent of The Man Who Knew Coolidge;

the authoress is allowed to condemn herself without authorial pointing.

The Nobel Prize, awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930, marks the apogee of his career. From 1930 to his death in 1951, his career is a descending curve containing twenty-three short stories and ten longer works. This was a period in which he attained only an occasional peak of power, such as in It Can't Happen Here and Cass Timberlane, and in four of the short stories.

Of this group of stories only "Proper Gander," (Saturday Evening Post, 1935) a satire of Congressional lobbyists, is as effective and clever as his earlier short satires on greed and hypocrisy. Mr. Plim, a professional lobbyist, loses his sinecure when Crovenia is recognized by the United States. He looks around for a cause he can espouse, preferably a cause which cannot possibly succeed, so that he will have a permanent job. Through an encounter with the millionare fanatic, Dr. Winshop-Boggs, he becomes the secretary of the National American Humanitarian and Dietetic League for the Propagation of an Anticarnivorous Constitutional Amendment. The piece is a scathing satire of lobbyists who fatten off impossible causes. The humor is broad and still pertinent. The passage describing the government of Crovenia, an underdeveloped country, is an example:

> The Right-wing Radical Leftist Deviation Party—the most conservative group in the country—had maintained so popular a government that the monthly purges had decreased from two thousand to a few hundreds, and the Premier had startled the world by announcing that, hereafter, he would give all his nonsupporters a fair trial before shooting them. (18)

The rest of the stories of this period reflect some of the new interests Lewis acquired during the last twenty years of his life. His earlier concern with the conflict of values between East and West broadened, as he traveled, into a concern with the conflict of values between Europe and America. Lionel Trudgeon, a fourth-rate British writer who decides to cash in with a lecture tour on the American adoration of anything British, is the central figure of "Dollar Chasers" (Saturday Evening Post, 1931). He comes to the United States with all kinds of preconceptions about American crassness and materialism, and though he finds little to support his stereotypes, he maintains *them* nonetheless. Lionel's first impressions upon landing in New York reveal Lewis's descriptive power:

> For the quarter of New York near the docks was as unkempt as the mining-camp settings he had seen in movies. Rheumatic brick houses, with graceful old doorways, now greasy and splintered, crouched like blank old men beside the cement walls of warehouses. A freight train, unguarded, ran through

> a street of moldy laundries and g·oceries and chop-suey joints, above which were tenements with torn bedding hanging on rusty fire escapes. The streets were fluttering with torn paper, (usty with ashes, stale of air, and hopeless and cruel. (132)

The portrait of Lionel himself is a masterful piece of satire, for Lionel is more narrow, more provincial, more of a " ulture hound," more of a "dollar chaser" than any American. This story, like so mai y of the others of this period, is the length of a novella, and although it is too long, it has some really good moments. One of the best is Lionel's reflections upon Americ n trains:

> In a proper British compartment /ou could touch knees with an archdeacon and stare him down. Thus, to r se above physical proximity, you learned to develop an inner and spiritua l privacy. But here there was plenty of leg room, and so many strangers in a row that you could not pick out any one of them to hate. So you ha almost no chance to snub any particular person and no chance to develop that inner privacy. It was disconcerting. (67)

Lewis's personal life impinges mo e directly on the short stories of this last period than on the earlier fiction. One of h is consuming interests in these years was the theatre, and four of the short stories /ritten during this period deal with the theatre and theatre people, the Matt Carnival tories which appeared in This Week and Liberty Magazine between 1940 and 1941. Al o, there are six stories which deal exclusively with satirizing women. After two di astrous marriages and one unhappy affair, it is not surprising that Lewis's bitterne s toward women should make itself felt in his fiction. "All Wives Are Angels" (Cosm politan, 1943) is set in Cornucopia, a mythical small Midwestern town. The story chr nicles the success of the marriage of Lambert Fenn and Lyddy Turpee. Lam as the pa ient, tender, loving husband yoked to an impetuous, irrascible wife is a typical portrait n the Lewis gallery of marriages.

"Green Eyes: A Handbook of J alousy" (Cosmopolitan, 1943) is a novella and a serious study of a childish, neurotic w fe. It was sold to Hollywood in the 1940s where it was made into a movie starring A n Sheridan. The setting is again Cornucopia, and the plot again revolves around a mu ch abused husband. Both "All Wives Are Angels" and "Green Eyes" employ a doctor as the narrator. He, as the family physician, comments on the health of each marriag , and this proves an interesting and effective device. It not only lends perspective o the events, but it also allows Lewis to treat the stories as dramatic monologue, a tec nique he handles with considerable skill.

The first thing one notices about he short stories of this last period is how many

of them are not short stories but novellas, or "novelettes" as Cosmopolitan insists on calling them. Five of the twenty-three are the length of a short novel, and several more are on the borderline. It was as if the kinship of style and structure in the novel and the short story had become so strong that Lewis could no longer distinguish between the two forms. Furthermore, the short stories can almost be matched to the longer pieces on the basis of their similar content and concerns. The four theatre stories, especially "They Had Magic Then" (Liberty Magazine, 1941), are very close to the philosophical debate over drama as illusion and drama as social realism which is the central issue of Bethal Merriday. The religious fanaticism satirized in such stories as "Onward, Sons of Ingersol" (Scribners, 1935) and "City of Mercy" (Cosmopolitan, 1931), is the same religious fanaticism that Aaron Gadd encounters in The God-Seeker. In fact, "City of Mercy," set as it is in another time, might well be viewed as a preliminary exercise for the novel. The conflict of values between Europe and America, which is the central conflict of World So Wide, is explored in depth in at least three of the short stories: "Seven Million Dollars" (This Week, 1935), "Ring Around A Rosy" (Saturday Evening Post, 1931), and "Dollar Chasers" two of which are short novels in length. Obviously, all the short sketches of nagging, dominating women and of deteriorating marriages were trial runs for the portrait of Peony and Winifred in Gideon Planish, and Jinny and the "Assemblages of Husbands and Wives" in Cass Timberlane. It is interesting to note that Mark Schorer in his anthology of Lewis's short stories I'm A Stranger Here Myself and Other Stories treats the "Assemblages" from Cass Timberlane as short stories and includes some of them as representative of Lewis's last work in this genre.

The short stories of this period are satires of hypocrisy, pretension and materialism, as they have always been. Lewis hung his criticism on a narrative line, the simplest he could devise, the chronicle, but always the protest of a social ill, the dissection of different facets of American society, was his chief concern. The short fiction of this last period does not contain the strong vindication of the middle class which is the major characteristic of the longer fiction. But almost all of the short stories are set in the Middle West, and all affirm, either directly or indirectly, the virtues of individuality and integrity.

In summary, then, a sizable number of Sinclair Lewis's stories are memorable

in their own right. He wrote many bri liant little satires which range over all the areas of his concern in the longer fiction. S ome of these satiric pieces are unusual for their technique alone. No one employs th e dramatic monologue as a satiric exposure of character more skillfully than Lewis d oes early in his career in "Extracts from a Club Woman's Diary" and late in his career ir "You Seem to Forget" (Cosmopolitan, 1944).

In addition to the significance of the good short stories to Lewis's reputation as a writer, there is the importance of their relationship to his long fiction. First, the short stories, most of them written before his longer fiction, allowed him to explore the ideas, themes and places that do minate the longer pieces. Writing short stories is how Lewis learned his craft.

However, the second aspect of th e relationship between the short and long fiction is the more important. Lewis's values l ave been a favorite target of the critics. Harlan Hatcher sees Lewis as sometimes prais ng provincialism, even defending what he earlier attacked (109). When our acquaintan e with Lewis is limited to the novels such as Main Street and Babbitt, a piece like The Job can seem a betrayal of principles. If, however, we examine the broad spect um of his fiction, we see that Lewis is not as ambivalent about American values as j st the novels would suggest. Lewis hates sham, pretense, hypocrisy—whether it occurs n the big city or the small town. He particularly detests false intellectualism, the fads and enthusiasms of his day. Exposure of the poses of those who pursue social and material status is the major thrust of his satire. Rather than praising provinciality and middle class standards, Sinclair Lewis celebrates the simple common sense and indepen ence which allow his characters to discern the false from the true. The old American values—Transcendental self-reliance, the Puritan work ethic, the integrity of the comm n man--are frequently the subject of the short stories and undergird all the satires. Acquaintance with the entire body of Lewis's work allows us to place the satires in framework of values which, though sometimes deemed sentimental, are nonetheless inh erent in most of American literature.

Right now, the short stories of S nclair Lewis are essentially "lost," both to the general reader and the scholar. The s erious student of Lewis's fiction who wishes to trace his development as a writer nee s access to these stories. The general reader with a predilection for Lewis is missi g some memorable pieces. The celebration of Sinclair Lewis's one-hundredth birthda is an appropriate occasion to call attention to this omission and to complete the Lew is canon.

NOTES

[1]Sinclair Lewis published twelve stories in 1935 in a collection entitled Selected Short Stories. It sold a little over 3,000 copies. The only other stories which have been reprinted appeared in 1962 in Mark Schorer's collection, I'm a Stranger Here Myself and Other Stories. Of the twelve stories in Schorer's collection, only eleven are actually short stories--one is an excerpt from Cass Timberlane--and four duplicate Lewis's own earlier collection. Schorer's little paperback, published in the afterglow of his biography of Lewis, quickly went out of print.

[2]This point is developed more extensively in my article in Studies in Short Fiction. As I do not wish to go over the same ground, I am attempting a broader look at the stories in this essay.

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A MIDDL :-CLASS UTOPIA: LEWIS'S IT C AN'T HAPPEN HERE

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> Paradise, indeed! Nobo y else in the world, I am bold to affirm—nobody, at l ast, in our bleak little world of New England—had reamed of paradise, that day, except as the p ole suggests the tropic.
>
> Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance

So thoroughly has Sinclair Lewis' writing been effaced from the canon of our national literature that it took the c njunction of two major historical events--one literary, one political—to spur my rea ing of It Can't Happen Here. The advent of 1984, the most portentous year of our l terary generation, and its attendant discussions of Orwell led me in search of other u opian novels. That 1984 also happened to be a presidential election year made Lewis' book pertinent; for those on the left, it seemed darkly prophetic. Both the literary a d the political omens were auspicious, and I came away from my reading convince that It Can't Happen Here deserves a better reputation on two related grounds: fi st, it makes an interesting contribution to its genre, and especially to American ut opian literature; second, it extends the social critique of Lewis's "great" novels, like Babbitt, into a fuller, more honest comment on the American middle class. I'll take u my discussion along these two lines.

Most commentators agree that ut opian writing can be divided into six categories: literary, political, historical, philosop ical/anthropological, prophetic, and satiric. We should note that these categories do ot mutually exclude: they provide descriptions of genesis, method, or emphasis. Placin Lewis's novel in the context of each category—saving the discussion of the literary ut pia for the second half of the paper—will give a good idea of the breadth of its concept al base and the variety of its insights.

The Political Utopia: Here the au hor speculates about the political foundations of culture. The speculations lead to th eories upon which a utopia might be founded. It Can't Happen Here contrasts a 19th century view of politics--the view that it is a pursuit for the vulgar--with a decide lly fatalistic entre deux guerres view—though

politics offers little more than a reductionist approach to the complexities of life, it is, nevertheless, unavoidable. The progress of Lewis's protagonist, Doremus Jessup, reflects this contrast and charts the change from one attitude to another in American life. Doremus would like to remain neutral in the face of the Corpo revolution. Indeed, he maintains his comfortable lifestyle to the very last. He takes a new Beatitude for his motto: "Blessed be they who are not Patriots and Idealists, and who do not feel they must dash right in and Do Something About It." However, though Doremus prefers the contemplative to the active life, the Corpo regime, by means of brutality, imprisonment, and torture, forces him to become an activist. Finally, in his new role, he seems quite content. Lewis embodies in Doremus a great shift in the political attitude of the American middle class in the first half of this century and founds his utopian vision on the resulting conflict.

The Philosophical/Anthropological Utopia: Here an investigation into the foundations of culture in human nature leads the author to posit the empirical elements of a utopia. Lewis's insight into human nature suggests that it is individualistic, libertarian, and comfort-seeking, that is to say, bourgeois. Lewis viewed the individual as the basic unit of social, economic, and political life. In his view, the ideal society springs from the resources of individuality. If individuality constitutes the theory of utopia, then utopia must practice individual liberty. Before his incarceration, Doremus in his attic study manages to formulate this principle: "I am convinced that everything that is worthwhile 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." Rather than a proposal on the order of Plato's Republic, with its goal of a well-ordered city-state, Lewis envisions a scene in which an individualistic utopia, our bourgeois democracy, falls prey to its own individualistic flaws. At the end of the novel, Doremus, the representative of individualism, is fighting to restore the very same state he had once taken for granted, and so lost.

The Historical Utopia: Here insight into the nature of change or progress leads the author to propose the inevitability of utopia. By casting his discussion in negative terms—that is, by forcing his protagonist to react to a rightist revolution, Lewis avoids the hypothetical fallacy and the trap of Marxism. Though his vision of the ideal life differs little from that of Marx, Lewis makes it seem far from inevitable. It is, in fact, based on the classic work-ethic. Lewis's view of progress is that despite our knowledge and our technology, we tend toward totalitarian solutions and regimes.

His middle-class utopia seems anything but inevitable; it remains constantly in jeopardy. Traditionally, utopias are set in the past (a lost paradise or golden age), the present (a distant land, lost or only recently discovered), or the future (heaven or the classless society). By casting his utopia in terms of its opposite, the Corpo regime (and this is true of Orwell's 1984), Lewis avoids some of the romanticism that usually permeates utopia. His message is clear: utopia can be achieved by only one mundane means: work. The perfect state lies not elsewhere in time or space, but here.

The Prophetic Utopia: Here the author forecasts the details of a visionary, religious, revolutionary, or technological society. We are all too familiar with the predictions of commercial technology; our children now grow up in the fantastic future. Lewis evinces little nostalgia for the past or the future. His vision extends inward into the American character, not outward into the applications of science. More and more we reject his kind of vision, what Lewis Mumford calls the utopia of values, in favor of the wonderfully vivid utopias of science fiction, which Mumford describes as utopias of means. Lewis's prophecy in It Can't Happen Here is not his own; it is borrowed from the socialism of his early years. Because it is borrowed, it must be negative. Only what is genuine has value in Lewis's world. Therefore, the Corpo regime--the Oligarchy of Jack London's The Iron Heel--reverses the bourgeois paradise. Its leaders are members of the middle class run amok. The novel presents the worst of Revelations and leaves the Second Coming to the reader's imagination.

The Satiric Utopia: Here the author's discontent with reality leads him to create a negative utopia. The satires of Swift or Dickens, for example, depict society in such a comprehensive way that we identify them as utopian. Anti-utopian, or dystopian, literature, which has become the predominant modern vision of utopia, really amounts to satire. Huxley satirizes our blind faith in science and technology; Orwell satirizes wartime propaganda. The critique intended by satire hopes to correct the flaws in its object by presenting them as the bas s for the model of the negative society envisioned. It Can't Happen Here uses the formula of the satiric utopia, and so it can be identified with the British anti-utopian works that preceded and followed it. But that is only a categorization, not an explanation. In fact, the nature of Lewis's satire lies at the heart of this novel—and his other works as well. Understand his critique of the American middle class, and you understand the moral of It Can't Happen Here, its relation to the Lewis canon, and how it fits into the utopian tradition.

Lewis's treatment of the middle class was always ambivalent, *though our reading*

of it has been biased by the commentators of the twenties, like Mencken, who preferred to find in works like Main Street and Babbitt a reflection of their own cynical attitudes. Today, we might say they had thematized the "great" novels, and we later readers are reading not the works themselves, but those earlier thematizations. In fact, Lewis never comes close to rejecting the values of his childhood. His fictional pose is mirrored in his own homes, a series of solid, middle-class dwellings, culminating in Twin Farms, the Vermont country estate. Other critics of the bougeoisie were (and are, no doubt) indulging in similar lifestyles, but they remained as uncritical of their own personal habits as they were of Lewis's. Life, for them, was distinct from art: thus, their misreadings of his novels of the twenties and their almost uniform rejection of his novels of the thirties, of which It Can't Happen Here marks the centerpiece.

If one reads Babbitt—or any of the earlier works—carefully, one gets an overwhelming sense of atmosphere from them. However crass George Babbitt may appear, whatever follies he may stoop to, that atmosphere remains idyllic. The second half of Babbitt, like the second half of It Can't Happen Here, depicts a fall from the middle-class dream world. Babbitt's tragic flaw is that he does not recognize--despite his assertions to the contrary—the idyll of his own existence. He sets about to idealize an already utopian state, and this excess of the ideal causes his fall. That fall, of course, serves to humanize Babbitt's character, and make it dynamic. Reading the earlier novels with the utopian formula in mind reveals quite a different meaning than reading them as straight satire: middle-class existence is the ideal. If it seems shallow or mundane, that is the nature of commonplace reality. The danger to those who already live in utopia is that they may not be aware of the fact. Instead of simply living their idyll, they try to rationalize it, or worse yet, to generalize it.

After he became the first American to receive the Nobel prize for literature in 1930, Sinclair Lewis turned an intellectual corner. He had made it as a writer. Consequently, he moved in his newfound freedom toward a more honest critique of his beloved middle class. That meant sympathy, and sympathy for the middle class among the intelligentsia between the wars was anathema on both political and aesthetic grounds. Naturally, Lewis fell out of favor with the critics, though his novels continued to sell extremely well. First, in Ann Vickers, he turned to an examination of the problems facing the career woman. Against the demands of career he placed the possibility of true love, another conflict that has resumed currency in corporate American life. Ann Vickers dramatizes and objectifies Lewis's conflict with his second wife, Dorothy

Thompson, whose reputation as a fo eign political correspondent increased steadily during the early thirties. This conflic carries over into It Can't Happen Here, where the staid Doremus maintains a devoted vife and a passionate, political mistress.

Work of Art marks another of L wis's attempts to write a labor novel. The title refers to the hotel business, which Le vis experienced ever-so-briefly as a boy in Sauk Centre, and the book soundly ridicule the poetic aspirations of one of its two main characters. This project seems not to have satisfied Lewis, since he continued to research another labor novel into the l te thirties. He proved unequal to the task of writing about factory life because he k new nothing of the lower classes. A more thoroughly bourgeois writer than Lewis c annot be imagined. Prodigal Parents followed It Can't Happen Here in 1938. In its investigation of the effect of a generation of politically radical parents on their chi dren, this book completes the apparent reversal of Lewis's earlier satire. It served to incense further the leftist intellectuals of the day. The high point of Lewis's vindi cation of middle-class values, however, comes in It Can't Happen Here, a better bo k than these others because it retains the old ambivalence of the twenties and devel ps it in a new arena. If its hero is the bourgeois newspaper editor, its villain is corpora e America. Because of this ambivalence, even Communist critics found cause to praise the novel.

The influences on It Can't Happe Here led Lewis almost inevitably to this equivocal position. For political models, h e had both domestic and foreign demagogues. The Kingfish, Huey Long, rose to th political dictatorship of Louisiana during the same period that Sinclair Lewis rose to the pinnacle of his literary career. His agrarian populism, embodied in the "Share-th -Wealth" movement, provided one model for Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, the dictator of It Can't Happen Here. After his joint tenure as governor and U.S. Senator, Long c allenged Roosevelt and the New Deal, and his candidacy for president posed a real t reat, because of its potential to split the vote in the 1936 election. The real life d magogue was assassinated, however, about six weeks before the publication of Lew s's novel, swelling the book's popular appeal. Dorothy Thompson reports in her mem ir of Lewis that he composed and recited many of Windrip's speeches at the dinner tabl . He was fascinated by the power of rhetoric—think of Babbitt's speech—and the ora ory of Huey Long combined with the novelist's own familiarity with American populis n (upper-Midwest style) to convince him that a dictatorship could, indeed, happen he e. Those who dismiss the real possibility underestimate the political tension of the p riod and read the novel purely as an allegory

of Hitler's Germany.

Certainly, Hitler provided the other pattern on which Lewis modelled Windrip, but the German demagogue differed less from the American than we might like to believe. Naturally, Lewis gained special insight from his wife, an insight complicated by his growing irritation at her success and notoriety. Dorothy Thompson's 1931 interview with Hitler, widely reprinted, and the small volume that followed it the next year, I Saw Hitler, put the man into a context Lewis could readily understand and use. That context, probably a result of Lewis's influence on his wife, was populism. Thompson's view of Hitler, in the pioneering pieces and the subsequent evaluations that led to her expulsion from Germany in 1934 (an event that made her a hero among the foreign press corps), was that he, unlike the other modern dictators, had been elected by his people. The German people, to her correspondent's eye, had given up their state democracy and their personal freedoms for the security of a Fuhrer. This phenomenon proved to be of immense psychological interest to Lewis. The allegory of It Can't Happen Here, embodied in its title, turns out to be one of contradiction. Windrip combines Long and Hitler, the domestic and the foreign dangers. Lewis expresses a real uncertainty about American democracy, about the stuff of the middle class. Seeing little real difference between Long and Hitler, Lewis questions whether, more importantly, the American people might imitate the German people by relinquishing their democracy for a dictatorship.

Since novels employ myths, and myths recur in every generation, it is usually not difficult to find literary ancestors for any given story. These ancestors are particularly important and revealing in the case of It Can't Happen Here. Let me take the more recent of the two first. The trend toward anti-utopian fiction that I already mentioned has something to do with a perceived loss of individuality in modern society. Looking at Jack London's The Iron Heel, the first great dystopian fiction of the 20th century, the relation of the individual to utopia becomes clearer.

Before his own career as a writer was established, Lewis had sold plots to London, including the plot for "The Abysmal Brute." However, this business relationship had not yet begun in 1906, when The Iron Heel was published. When Lewis actually arrived in Carmel over two years later, January 5, 1909, the details of London's horrifying vision were probably sunk into pat interpretations of the novel and softened by the failure of its prophecy. Yet, when Lewis came to write his own version of London's tale, his mind must have associated the violence of The Iron Heel with the quirkiness

of that California commune. This com| ound proved to be typical not only of the modern anti-utopia, but of the American utopia tradition as well.

The evil force in It Can't Happ en Here comes straight from London's fear of the corporations, rather than from L wis's political philosophy or from his intuition of the political climate of Europe and America in 1935. The Corpo regime is London's Oligarchy thinly disguised, and one c the major flaws in Lewis's plot results from his inability to explain the relation bet ween the corporate interests, the populist dictatorship, and the flaws in the middle-c ass character. Other details of It Can't Happen Here are borrowed from London's wor as well. The N.U. closely resembles the resistance group formed around Avis and Er est Everhard, the narrator and hero, respectively, of The Iron Heel. The resistance centered at Buck Titus's estate represents the same kind of opposition between cou ntry and city that London employs. Violence, inspired and fomented by the Oligarch or the Corpos, is largely confined to the cities. As Mumford points out in his discuss on of the utopian tradition, the most powerful social myths embodied in it are the ide ls of the country house and the modern industrial city. Lewis appears to follow London in both the American utopian tradition and the modern dystopian tradition by preferri g the country over the city. Also, the fictional time of It Can't Happen Here, which egins in 1936 meshes neatly with that of The Iron Heel, which purports to cover the period between 1916 and 1932, though it is set in the distant future, almost as thoug Lewis meant his book to be a continuation of London's story. Both writers anticipa e revolution from the Right, supported by the corporate interests, and centered in the cities.

Where Lewis differs from Londo , he agrees with an earlier precedessor, Hawthorne, in his optimism. Like Hawthor ne, Lewis was privy to an actual utopian experiment. Although Lewis's experience ca ne much earlier in life than Hawthorne's sojourn at Brook Farm, at Upton Sinclair's Heli con Hall he had the chance to observe the interactions of some of America's leading r adical intellectuals living in community. Lewis dropped out of Yale in 1906 to take a jo as janitor in the huge converted school building on the New Jersey Palisades. Though he left with a flourish of youthful cynicism, this unique opportunity planted the see d for a story that lay dormant for nearly thirty years. In fact, Helicon Hall figures sid e by side with Brook Farm in Doremus Jessup's list of failed utopias, and Lewis sing es out Sinclair—wrongly supposed by many to have been Lewis's namesake—for spe ial ridicule. Appointed ambassador to Great Britain by the corpo regime, Upton Si clair invites "King George and Queen Mary to

come and live in California."

Despite the fact that Hawthorne's story is a romance and Lewis's a dystopian fiction, one discovers at least three major similarities between the novels. The first comes in the main character. Although the point of view differs—Hawthorne narrates through Coverdale and Lewis installs an omniscient narrator—Miles Coverdale and Doremus Jessup bear a striking resemblance. Both are writers of a very minor kind, and their talent plays a major role in determining the action of the two stories. Both men are skeptical New Englanders, and their skepticism proves to be a mixed blessing when they are called upon to act. Both mix mild egotism with mild self-effacement, and both seem completely incapable of the demands of utopian vision. The major difference between them, that Coverdale participates voluntarily in a positive utopian experiment while Doremus is forced to suffer a negative totalitarian utopia, turns out to be a difference occasioned by the spirit of the times, conditioned by the strength of individualism in the two eras.

In a romance, we expect a discussion of love; in a utopian romance, a discussion of ideal love. That, indeed, is what Hawthorne gives us. In a dystopian fiction, we expect that love will function as a form of rebellion, as indeed it does in The Iron Heel, Brave New World, It Can't Happen Here, and 1984. Hawthorne's treatment of love in The Blithedale Romance strikes us today as astonishingly modern. Lewis's, on the other hand, seems romantic in an old-fashioned sense. In both stories, however, love is complicated by utopia. The ideals sustained by romantic love cannot co-exist with other ideals, positive or negative, brought into practice. Both writers were seriously considering the nature of love and marriage as they wrote their novels. During his stay at Brook Farm in the summer of 1841, Hawthorne was courting his wife. In the letters of the period, in fact, he already refers to her as "wife" and to himself as "husband." Ten years later, when he came to write the Romance, he found his memories of utopia inextricably bound to his memories of courtship. In some ways, Brook Farm is reduced to a mere setting for the relations among Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla, and Coverdale: love between men, love between women, rivalries and jealousies, passive versus active partners. All these questions pass intact into It Can't Happen Here, despite the difference in setting. Lorinda Pike plays the role of Zenobia, with her feminist awareness of the fundamental importance of the relations between the sexes, in utopia or in the "real world." The Corpo revolution offers Doremus the opportunity to have his cake and eat it, too. While he is forced to live in two worlds, he can maintain

two love relationships, one with his passive, apolitical wife, Emma, the other with his active co-conspirator, Lorinda. The narrator tells us that both relationships were longstanding, so the revolution simply enables Doremus to violate the ordinary social taboo. Lorinda, for her part, resembles Zenobia in both her physical power and her insight. When, in the midst of his anti-Corpo tract writing, Doremus threatens to lapse into a too comfortable relationship with her, Lorinda arranges to be sent on an N.U. mission to the Canadian border. She breaks their idyll at Buck's mansion for ideological reasons: "The world's in chains, and I can't be free to love till I help tear them off." When Doremus objects that the world will never be rid of its chains, Lorinda responds: "Then I shall never be free to love."

In addition to the more immediate biographical significance of this scene, in which Lewis perhaps tries to resolve his complex conflict over his relationship with Dorothy Thompson, whose political commitments are mirrored by Lorinda, we see that, like Hawthorne, Lewis realizes that the politicization of women required by any utopia, positive or negative, will affect the very nature of the heterosexual love bond. This intuition, too, presents a microcosm of the novel's ambivalence. Doremus, who had entertained both relationships previously only in his fancy, is permitted bigamy by the revolution. His wives are passivity and activity. Under normal bourgeois circumstances, the active is illicit. After the revolution, the passive becomes superfluous, even a hindrance, and the active must be turned to social purposes. In short, in utopia, the love relationship is complicated by the social commitments of both sexes. In Blithedale, Hollingsworth and Priscilla are reduced to passivity, having abandoned their social mission, while Doremus is forced to abandon Emma, even though his relationship to Lorinda must be subjugated to their mutual political ends. Love begins to reflect political behavior as the two become inseparable.

The third major parallel between The Blithedale Romance and It Can't Happen Here lies in their attitude toward the reality of utopia. Again, Coverdale's experience is voluntary, Doremus Jessup's involuntary; yet, their musings follow the same lines. Before the revolution, Doremus rejects utopianism as inimical to individual liberty. Of course, this rejection satirizes the American newspaper editor, with his circumscribed view of human nature, defending freedom of expression. But his reasoning implies something more. "Is it possible," Doremus asks himself, "that the most vigorous and boldest idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress instead of its greatest creators?" To these "dangerous idealists" he opposes "plain men *with the humble* trait

of minding their own business." This amounts to nothing more or less than the Libertarian ideal: "I am convinced that everything that is worthwhile 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." This emphasis on individualism leads Doremus to a generalization about the utopian ideal: "The perfect, the inevitable solution[:] There is no Solution! There will never be a state of society anything like perfect." On this rejection of utopianism Doremus bases his new beatitude: "Blessed be they who are not Patriots and Idealists."

This reasoning, reminiscent of the "Revolutionist's Handbook" appended by Shaw to Man and Superman, differs in particulars but not in spirit from Coverdale's. To be sure, Hawthorne's narrator addresses the matter at once more personally and more metaphysically. "I rejoice," remarks Coverdale, "that I could once think better of the world's improvement than it deserved." When Coverdale proposes Utopia for the new name of Blithedale, he is "shouted down" by his associates, who suspect in his nomination "a latent satire." Arguing for the utopian ideal against Hollingsworth, he makes this solid assertion: "When the reality comes, it will wear the every-day, commonplace, dusty, and rather homely garb, that reality always does put on." The net effect of Coverdale's reasoning, whom Zenobia calls the "transcendental Yankee," informs Doremus's thinking and underlines his ambivalence. Both characters hold high ideals, and their reservations pertain not to the impossibility of improving the lot of humankind, but to the impossibility of an ideal state. Both novelists uphold the object of utopian thought—the perpetuation of the ideal of human improvement—and both reject the stasis implied by a perfect society.

Coverdale and Doremus resemble Marx in the contrast between their thinking and their personal habits: one is radical, the other bourgeois. Coverdale vacillates not because he lacks ideological commitment to Blithedale, but because he misses the physical comforts of his bachelor apartment in Boston. Doremus is married, but he too has his hide-away, furnished to suit his individuality: his attic study. Finally, the message of both novels is clear. Both writers are committed to the ideal of human progress. Early in life, Lewis dabbled in socialism, even joined the Socialist Party. The author he most admired was the great utopian thinker H. G. Wells, after whom Lewis named his first son. But he, like Hawthorne, believed that progress should be spiritual as well as physical, individual as well as social. The worst pitfalls of utopianism in their eyes involve a confusion of the two kinds of progress, the elimination of one

in favor of the other, the failure to recognize that progress in either realm is dynamic, and the subjugation of individual freedom to social ends.

Lewis's depiction of his characters' confrontation with a negative utopia requires him—and them—to formulate a definition of a positive utopia. In order to do this, said R. P. Blackmur in a review in Nation (Oct. 30, 1935), Lewis makes "a declaration of things to come sprung from a faith of which the substance is things hated, not hoped for," a pretty fair definition of the modern dystopian fiction. Blackmur suggests that, in addition to the influence of London and the political climate both at home and abroad, Lewis had a personal reason for casting his novel in the dystopian formula. His novels of the twenties provide the catalogue of "things hated," the bad qualities of the middle class. The Corpo state is Babbittry elevated to the status of political philosophy. Yet the overthrow of that state depends entirely on the good qualities of another type of Babbitt, Doremus Jessup. The revolution in It Can't Happen Here alters neither the class structure nor the class affiliations of individual characters. Buzz Windrip and Shad Ladue retain their class demeanor and lifestyle despite their new-found power. The difference between those in control and those in submission is that those in power seek to democratize their own ideals; in other words, they don't mind their own business. The fault of this horror of a utopia devolves on the middle-class Everyman: "It's the fault of Doremus Jessup! Of all the conscientious, respectable, lazy-minded Doremus Jessups who have let demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest."

Here we have a development of Lewis's critique of the middle class that merges, in Blackmur's terms, the things hated with the things hoped for. If the middle class—in Germany or Louisiana--can be blamed for the rise of without dictators, they must also be depended on to overthrow them. In this paradox culminates Lewis's reconciliation with his own class. Malcolm Cowley could only explain it by suggesting that Babbitt had murdered Sinclair Lewis and written It Can't Happen Here to redeem and glorify himself. Neither Cowley nor Blackmur--for different reasons—could perceive that Lewis never hated the middle class as they perhaps hated it. In It Can't Happen Here, the things hated and the things hoped for stand as the two sides of the class personality. Doremus Jessup is not so much a reincarnation of George Babbitt as his alter ego. If this type of the middle-class hero proved unacceptable to contemporary reviewers, it seems in retrospect more honest and more consistent. It certainly endeared Lewis further to his readers and swelled the popularity of the novel.

I hope my application of the term ambivalence to Lewis's method and message

is clear, but let me add one further point. The novel is the literary art form of the middle class, which has always made up the bulk of its readers. Blackmur, in the same review I cited before, called Lewis a publicist rather than a novelist, and It Can't Happen Here "a weapon of the intellect," rather than a novel. Though his New Critical rationale is clear—It Can't Happen Here is certainly not as shapely a novel as The Blithedale Romance—Lewis's emotional investment in it is clear. It is more than a topical political critique, as I have tried to elaborate. It confronts serious social, artistic, personal—and intellectual—problems in terms unique to Lewis and consistent with his earlier novels. Lewis here attempts to define utopia as the mundane reality of middle-class American life. Doremus, after all, fights only to restore his former way of life. Lewis accepts the givens of his literary tradition—the contrast between city and country in both Hawthorne and London, for instance—and uses them to his own ends. Buck Titus's country house becomes the center of N.U. resistance against the urban Corpo repression. The figures of Emma and Lorinda play out in stark allegory the attractions men like Lewis feel for both active and passive women. Finally, the intellectual weaponry is typical of Lewis's earlier satire. The caricatures, in a common kind of literary propaganda, are loaded in the Corpo camp: "Buzz" Windrip, Lee Sarazen, Hector MacGoblin, Effingham Swan, Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch. As a vestige of oral folk humor, even stereotype is the tool of satire most calculated to appeal to middle-class readers. Add these together and you get something far more complex than an intellectual weapon; you get a novel. And every novel is a species of utopia, a model of society. It differs from other utopias—intellectual weapons—in that it offers analysis and structure, but no proposal. It enters reality not as an action, but as a story about action. Because of its very nature, the novel rquires a certain ambivalence of its creator.

Its irony makes It Can't Happen Here the perfect title for Lewis's contribution to utopian literature. Literally, the title purports to be a typical middle-class protest, a complacent rejection even of the possibility of a dictatorship in America. For several years after the publication of the novel, Lewis went around the country lecturing his audiences with excerpts from Doremus Jessup's meditation under the title "It Has Happened Here." Another meaning of the title underscores the nature of utopia: it can't happen here because utopia is nowhere. What can and does happen anywhere happens in the tarnished commonplace of Coverdale's reality, not nowhere. Third, the title has an artistic sense. A story makes nothing happen, to paraphrase Auden, because it is itself the event.

Let us conclude with the last line of the novel, a line indicted for being the worst piece of prose ever written, a capital crime indeed. Unfortunately, the charge does not aid our understanding. "And still Doremus Jessup goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die." The tone, obviously, is sentimental, even sappy. Sentimentality, like stereotype, constitutes another device of oral folk art. This line, like the concluding image of The Grapes of Wrath, is intended to tap an existing reservoir of feeling, in this case, optimism. Sentimentality contravenes not only the accepted canons of criticism, but also the conventions of dystopian fiction, which ends usually in the total defeat of the individual. In the context of the novel at hand, the conclusion does not ring true. Doremus, organizing in Minnesota, far from his native Vermont, has just fled his farmhouse refuge on a tip that a Corpo posse is on its way to arrest him. His future seems anything but certain. Then there is the red sunrise, omen of bad weather. The tone, the content, even the intent of the sentence seem to be at odds with the multiple irony of the title.

I suggest the following: substitute George Babbitt for Doremus Jessup. Is the meaning more acceptable? Certainly, we often prefer to believe that the things hated will persist, while the things hoped for will perish. Conventionally, the sophisticated reader is trained to reject bald optimism and unrefined sentiment. And yet there is a sense in which this line does substitute Babbitt for Jessup, since it marks a direct appeal to the middle class. The important shift in the sentence occurs between Doremus Jessup and "a" Doremus Jessup. The character—and this can happen here—becomes his class. To come to such a reading we must revaluate Lewis's career, disabusing ourselves of the prejudices of past readings. The utopian perspective rehabilitates all of Lewis's work. What can, and usually does, happen in fiction is that an idea reverses itself under scrutiny. Lewis seems useless to us now because the strength of outmoded readings overpowered the novels. We are, however, beginning to see that Lewis was a more honest, even-handed, and consistent critic of the middle class than perhaps even he wanted to be. In the novels of the thirties, especially in the utopian vision of It Can't Happen Here, Lewis tried to correct the lopsided satire of the twenties. The critical establishment refused this correction (in fact, resented it), and so demolished the reputation it had helped build. My own hope is that future readings will restore Lewis to the canon of American literature, and that, if I were to suggest to the next generation of readers that America's first Nobel laureate in literature be eliminated from the anthologies, those readers might respond: "It can't happen here."

THE GOD SEEKER IN SINCLAIR LEWIS'S NOVELS

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Critics have virtually ignored Sinclair Lewis's The God Seeker. No articles examine the work. Mark Schorer in his 818-page study of Lewis devotes a scant four pages to it, and dismisses it as "that dull work," quite different from anything else he had written or was to write (779). Sheldon N. Grebstein finds that "the narrative is not without interest" and that Lewis's descriptions of "frontier Minnesota of the 1840's are written with verve and consistent tonality." Still he considers it "ill-contrived" and ruined by melodramatic incidents, extraneous characters and mawkish romance (159). Finding the book interesting "because it provides portraits of the pioneering ancestors of Lewis's modern adventurers" and because it justifies Lewis's "whole vision of contemporary characters," Martin Light sees it as a book in which Lewis's "imagination and energy have failed" (100). James Lundquist's only assessment of the novel is to lump it with Mantrap and Work of Art as one of the "bad" novels (12). Stephen Conroy simply calls it a "flat failure" (361). Early reviews of the book were not bruisingly unfavorable, but were lukewarm. If I want to defend the novel, and I do, I have my work cut out for me.

But Lewis himself is an ally. He felt that the novel might be his best book, and certainly "the most serious" (qtd. in Schorer 776). In this paper I want to take it as seriously as Lewis did and to question Light's assertion that in The God Seeker "We see . . . Lewis's ideas embarrassingly naked and weak" (130).

My focus will be on its religious ideas, particularly on Lewis's effort to embody the search for God, in the character of Aaron Gadd. I want to examine these ideas in the light of Lewis's major characters, all of whom are seekers—but Aaron is the only God seeker. Carol Kennicott, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, and Elmer Gantry are all aware of God, but none are God seekers.

Carol Kennicott yearns to "drink life" (Main Street 1), to find the good life. It does not take her long, however, to find that Gopher Prairie will not satisfy her desire for something more than dull respectability, certainly not religion. In a town where, as Miles Bjornstrom put it, "the dollar sign has chased the crucifix right off the map"

(115), where Mrs. Bogard is God's confidant and assistant, where the Rev. Mr. Zitterel has long since found God and speaks for him on such profound matters as the dangers of Mormonism and the need for Prohibition, Carol's search does not lead her to God. Gopher Prairie does not need another God seeker; it already has enough. Yet, a seeker to the end, she sums up her failure in her last speech with an echo of St. Paul in I Timothy 6:12: "I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith."

Like Carol, Babbitt, too, is a seeker. It isn't, except incidentally, a search for God or religion, unless it is the religion of business. Babbitt, dissatisfied, despite his good business, six-cylinder car, good house and character, dreams of the fairy child with whom he could sail away from the awakening of milk trucks and a plain, somewhat overweight, wrinkled, aging wife, from the "great gray emptiness" (91), which perplexes and frightens him, and which neither the Elks, Boosters, Chamber of Commerce, the Republican Party, the Good Citizen's League or the Presbyterian church can fill. Religion offers no more than "a dry, hard church shut off from the real life of the streets, inhumanly respectable as a top hat" (187).

Martin Arrowsmith's search for meaning is more focused. As a medical student he develops an intense desire to know the truth. Hungry for knowledge and skill, trying but never succeeding in finding the Gottlieb's laboratory "the way that made everything so" (52), he gives up his search for truth in order to become a practical physician. But after a few years he longs for the laboratory, "for the thrill of uncharted discoveries, the quest below the surface and beyond the moment, the search for fundamental laws which the scientist . . . exalts above temporary healing as the religious exalts the nature and terrible glory of God above pleasant daily virtues" (112). Arrowsmith's search is indubitably a religious one, but it is not a search for God. For Arrowsmith, as for his mentor, Gottlieb--a lover of God as the name implies--being a scientist is like being a mystic or a poet. "The scientist," Gottlieb tells Arrowsmith when he rejoins his old teacher at the McGurk institute in New York City, "is intensely religious--he is so religious that he will not accept quarter-truths because they are an insult to his faith" (226).

Hearing Gottlieb's charge, Martin Arrowsmith dedicates himself to his research with a prayer:

> God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work left slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness where 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. (267)

But Arrowsmith fails in his quest. After he has discovered an organism that destroys bacteria, he goes to a West Indian island where an epidenic has broken out and instead of using a control group, he indiscriminately gives the vaccine to everyone, thus invalidating the experiment. He tries again to find trust by setting up a laboratory for pure research with a friend on a Vermont farm.

Elmer Gantry, also a seeker of sorts, wants everything: sex, status, power not only to change the world but to become the moral emperor of the world—and God on his own terms. Bored with Terwilliger College, whiskey and women, Elmer is converted and begins a search for God. He has moments when he is seriously seeking God, at least he thinks so, but these are usually only when he is in trouble, and they never last very long. Assuming that he is the center of the universe and that "the rest of the system was valuable only as it afforded him help and pleasure" (14), Elmer does not so much want to find God as to use him.

Whatever hope the reader may have had for Elmer as a seeker for God or anything else worthwhile disappears in the scene with the Rev. Mr. Pengilly. After listening to Elmer brag about the classes at his New York church on show-window dressing which have raised the salary of several of the fine young men in his church, increased business, improved the appearance of the show windows and added to the beauty of the downtown streets, Pengilly asks Elmer a simple but devastating question: "Mr. Gantry, why don't you believe in God?" (353).

The most ardent God-seeker in Elmer Gantry is Frank Shallard, who wants a church that gives people that mystic something stronger than reason and a community in which people take care of each other. Frank's search comes to an end in the darkness of reeling pain and an unanswered prayer—"Oh, God, won't anybody help me?"—to a God in whom he is not sure he any longer believes when he is beaten up by thugs who run him out of a Southwestern city where he was lecturing against the menace of Fundamentalism (379).

To this company of seekers Aaron Gadd belongs. While Carol, Babbitt, Arrowsmith and Elmer occasionally consider God, Aaron is a committed God-seeker. He is no more successful in his search than the others, or if he is, that success is not totally convincing. Aaron, dissatisfied with the restrictions of his society, wants to find God, but his search is often distracted. It is, we are told, a "perpetual *quest of God,*" but

the narrator quickly adds "or New Bedford rum" (6).

Aaron's search is from the beginning a misguided one. Sincerely wanting to find God, he does not know how. He has no models. His father, Uriel Gadd, deacon of Clunsford Congregational Church in Adams, Massachusetts, interested as he is in helping slaves escape, isn't sure that slaves have souls, and he gives them sanctuary not so much for their sake as for the sake of his own soul. He is a hard, unloving man who cannot serve as a model for his son.

Nor is the traditional conversion much help in Aaron's search for God. Impressed with Charles Grandison Finney's appeal at the revival to know "excelling joy in the presence of the living and all-merciful God, who is here now, right now, calling you to glory" (48), Aaron heeds the call. He feels cleansed, exalted, but he is aware that he is still "only Aaron, son of Uriel and Hazaria," his grandfather who had resisted the preacher and Uriel who wanted him to get right with God since Hazaria had been, he felt, on good terms with God for eighty-five years.

After his conversion Aaron wants to know what God would have him do. He waits for a vision. Those which come are strangely uninspirational: his girl friend Nadine's way of drinking cider, the Adams banker driving his red wheelbuggy, the red dish of pork and beans he had had for supper, a fascination for Selene's "supercilious worldly leer," and a strong desire to visit Nadine who works at the local bar. "I don't seem to get one celestian vision," he laments (73).

In 1848, when Aaron is twenty-five and an accomplished carpenter, he leaves Massachusetts to go to an Indian mission in Minnesota to work for the Reverend Mr. Harge, a man who is usually certain that he knows God's will, at least for others, if not always for himself. Here on the frontier, Aaron hopes to find God. But the cold Minnesota air is no more conducive to his search than the warmer air of the Clunsford Congregational Church or the Adams saloon. Harge is of little help and the rest of the missionaries, including Huldah Purdic, young, not very pretty, but feminine nevertheless, are just as quirky as Harge. Tempted by Huldah, who tries to teach him the mystical presence of God but succeeds more in troubling him with unmissionary thought, Aaron has difficulty keeping his mind on his search for God, particularly at night since only a curtain separates his bed from Huldah's

Unable to pursue his theological studies because of the innumerable odd jobs that the Rev. Mr. Harge finds for Aaron to do, Aaron laments the absence of the "sense of God as a tangible presence" (95). He never finds that presence. "'Can't I seek God

and report thereof as confidently as . . . Squire Harge,' he asks himself. 'I doubt it,' said his soul" (125).

Aaron is tenacious, if not single minded. He does not stop with the missionaries. Going among the Indians to learn their language, he discovers from Black Wolf, a young chief, that the Indians worship a God not so different from the one he seeks, but the Indians prove to be as dogmatic in their religious views as the missionaries. He visits Caesar Lenark, the atheist, rich trader, whose daughter Selene he had met at Adams and whose seductive beauty still disturbs his dreams. Though not as repelled as the missionaries at Lenark's heterodox views, he cannot accept Lenark's offer to take him into his business and make him a rich man. "I am chased" he tells Lenark, "by what some call a vision—probably a poor one" (262), the vision of God. But no one shares his particular vision, not even Black Hawk, who tells him: "I used to think you were with us searching for truth" (277).

When Selene comes to visit Lenark, Aaron hopes that she will give him further incentive for his search, or, perhaps, something different and more satisfying for which to search. She does. After an argument with her father, Lenark disinherits her, and she comes to the mission. In one of the most unbelievable of the unmotivated character switches in the novel, the formerly rich and spoiled Selene becomes one of the hardest workers at the mission: sewing, washing, and playing the melodeon in chapel. She comments: "I've never worked before. I think I like it" (317).

When Selene fears that her father will kidnap her, she convinces Aaron to take her to St. Paul. Aaron agrees, and with their departure on a cold day, Aaron's search at the mission comes to an end, but Selene's has just begun. They stop at the home of Gideon Pond on their way to St. Paul, and here Selene is converted and wants to be baptized immediately. Aaron is able to forstall her baptism by convincing her to leave immediately for St. Paul to get married.

In St. Paul, Aaron has no trouble getting a job as a carpenter, and Selene becomes a waitress at the St. Paul House. Soon Aaron becomes part owner of a construction company employing forty carpenters. Selene does not give up her desire to be baptized and "to keep the vision of God and not just a vision of getting ahead" (354). Aaron assures her that they will both keep that vision, but he has become convinced that it makes more sense to build the houses which he could build than to teach children a gospel which he did not altogether understand in a Sioux language he could not speak.

But Aaron cannot easily give up his quest. At the home of Gideon Pond he is,

like the others, awed when Samuel William Pond describes the true religious experience as:

> first an unmistakable perception of God, through the reason and through all the senses—sight, hearing, touch, and the finer sense of whose existence and nature we consciously know nothing more than we do of the instinct that directs the wild fowl on its path unerringly at sixty miles an hour.
>
> Then second, it is a wondering realization that God is so much greater than anything else that we know or can know, brighter than light, vaster than the universe, yet smaller than the bee, and more tender than all human love together since time first was. And third, it is a surrender to God so complete that you simply cannot remember what it was like to have been outside the rapture of its majestic power. (342-43)

But Aaron has become suspicious of God language. Like Arrowsmith, he wants unclouded eyes, a relentless anger against pretense and the strength not to trust in God. Aaron recognizes that these apparently poetic and noble words are still only words. No longer willing to sit at the preachers' feet and trying to make himself become what they say he ought to become, Aaron decides to do his own thinking.

Aaron shifts his allegiance from words to actions and finds in his carpentry satisfactions which he had not been able to find in his search for God. Convinced that secular organizations can be more effective in bringing about his dream of a brotherhood of man in which Caesar Lenark would sit down with Charles Grandison Finney and stay sitting, Aaron suggests to his employees that they should organize a labor union. In that union he hopes to find the church that he had always wanted. It doesn't happen that way. The members of the union are as, or almost as, quirky as the church members he has left. They threaten to strike when Aaron, who like his father has become a slave runner, brings Henry Oldham, a slave whom he has given sanctuary, to work as a carpenter. Neither he nor Selene can change the minds of the union members; they will strike before they will work with a slave. But when the owner of the runaway slave interrupts the meeting and orders the union in the name of the law to surrender the slave, they quietly send one of their members to warn him, and before his owner can reclaim him, Henry is on his way to Canada. The union quickly elects Henry to membership and also elect Aaron and Selene as members.

Presumably the novel ends with Aaron having discovered, if not God, then a better organization to promote his own beliefs and a more realistic goal for which to search. The critics are right in calling the novel melodramatic and the actions of the characters unmotivated. But they are only half right. At least until the last scene Aaron is aware

that his quest, important and worthwhile as it was, could only result in failure. But then all important quests end in failure. With Hawthorne's Coverdale, Aaron could have said: "If the vision has been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure" (10-11).

Aaron accepts failure and is satisfied with a much less ambitious search. But first he must reject Squire Harge's fanatical sectarian Calvinism, Black Wolf's militant pantheism, Huldah's dubious mysticism, William Pond's appealing description of the religious experience, and the visionary Dr. Munce's utopian beliefs: abolition, equality for women, hatred of racial hatred, or at least Dr. Munce's methods. And he has to reject his own obsession to find the visible presence of God. Most difficult of all he has to answer Selene's questions: "Well then, all right then, what do you believe in?" He can only answer that he does not believe in divine vengeance, that he is willing to settle for justice and equality, and, above all, that no words can express his faith (379). Selene is still not satisfied: "And God—have you left God out? Can we only have woodsheds now? Can't we have temples? Don't you believe in God?" He tells Selene to stop drinking words. He has not found God, but he has learned that "There are many things I don't ever expect to know, and I'm not going to devote myself to preaching about them but to building woodsheds so true and tight that they don't need ivory and fine gold—stright white pine, cedar shingles, a door that won't bind—glorious" (379).

Perhaps Lewis should have ended the novel there instead of adding the section about the labor union and the return of his brother Elijah. Even so, Aaron is convincing. Stubbornly individualistic, Aaron questions the accepted models. He has tried them and found them wanting. Aaron fails, but it is a grand failure.

Nor are the ideas in the novel weak. To move the realm of religion from an affirmation of faith in a definable God, once and for all revealed to a select few, to the realm of this world and to the building of tight woodsheds, to consider what religions have *in common*, to think of religion as that which unites rather than separates people, to dare to present a young man who for all of his ambivalence is able to search for God in a time when such a search seemed less and less feasible is to consider ideas and themes which are not "weak" as Light suggested, though they may at times be "embarrassingly naked." Still I would argue that Lewis has, more carefully and successfully than his critics have realized, embodied important ideas in the characters who move and have this being, even though they do not always live, in this novel.

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READING IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE WITH COLLEGE FRESHMEN

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This study comes out of my experience using It Can't Happen Here in an expository writing class for high-risk freshmen at St. Cloud State University. The students had been admitted under a special program in which they were required to take, among other things, a writing course paired with a content-based general education course, in this case, a political science course in American government. I designed my half of the course pairing so that students would read Nineteen Eighty-Four (since it was 1984) and It Can't Happen Here, writing papers analyzing and evaluating the two political novels in the light of what they were learning in their introductory political science course. We studied Nineteen Eighty-Four first and things went well enough that I was unprepared for the reaction to the first reading assignment in It Can't Happen Here.

The students protested that the book was incomprehensible. There were too many characters to keep up with, they complained, too many conversations going on with too many people talking. There were too many references to an unfamiliar period of American history and too much detail packed into sentences that were too long. There were too many shifts from one person and place to another, the pace was too rapid, and the words too difficult. My first response was to take my carefully prepared notes for the day, walk over to the wastebasket, and reluctantly drop them in. We could not begin to discuss such issues as class conflict, social injustice, propaganda, the role of religion in politics, militarism, fascism, etc., until the students had achieved at least a literal understanding of the events and the background of the novel. It was not enough to tell them to use a dictionary, slow down, reread, outline, and take notes, though that would certainly have helped. As the most up-to-date reading research proclaims, reading is a highly complex perceptual and cognitive process in which text and reader interrelate in a variety of ways. The problems my students were having with It Can't Happen Here could not be solved by techniques that simply involved "studying" the text.

According to the Gunning-Fog readability formula, a page from the middle of

Nineteen Eighty-Four reads at a twelfth grade level, two levels above that of Time magazine. A page from the middle of It Can't Happen Here reads at a tenth grade level, the same as that of Time. If the students could read Nineteen Eighty-Four, why were they having so much trouble with Lewis? For one thing, It Can't Happen Here is much more inconsistent in readabililty levels. Page one of Nineteen Eighty-Four reads at a tenth grade level, whereas page one of It Can't Happen Here reads at a whopping 19.5. Measured this way, the demands on reading ability would, initially at least, be much greater with the latter novel. Indeed, I would suggest that the initial demand of the Lewis novel on reading ability is unreasonably high for college freshmen with below average high school records. My students' complaints were justified.

Another reason the students were having more trouble with Lewis than Orwell is that It Can't Happen Here assumes much more background knowledge. The readability formula measures only quantitative, physical features of a text—length of words and sentences. It Can't Happen Here puts even greater demands on a reader than those revealed by the Gunning-Fog index. That challenging first page of the novel contains no less than ten specific allusions to a historical period (pre-1936) and social milieu (small town Vermont upper crust) that are far removed from the world of the middle class Minnesota teenagers I was teaching in 1984. Even though Nineteen Eighty-Four is set in a British rather than American environment, it is more accessible because less topical. The first page of Nineteen Eighty-Four evokes an imaginary (though distinctly British) setting that requires only the vaguest familiarity, if any, with the period of World War II and its aftermath. Indeed, Nineteen Eighty-Four in many ways created an image of life under totalitarianism that is familiar to young people today who have never read the novel. The world of Big Brother and doublethink is already familiar to a reader coming to read Nineteen Eighty-Four for the first time. It Can't Happen Here, however, did not enter into the popular imagination in the same way, though it was popular in its own time and has enjoyed a number of revivals. In addition, the density of its topical allusions, ranging from the Green Mountain Boys to Huey Long, assume a high degree of familiarity with both American history and a Northeastern cultural heritage. Recent research into the reading process has emphasized the important role of a reader's prior linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge in achieving comprehension (Burke; K. Goodman; Y. Goodman; Hirsch; Koenke; Rosenblatt; Smith; Spiro, et al.; Steffensen, et al.). Though it might seem to be simply a matter of common sense, data now exist from controlled studies to

show that what E.D. Hirsch calls "cultural literacy" on a given topic improves comprehension of a text about that topic (Hirsch; Langer; Steffensen, et al.). As classroom teachers interested in improving reading skills as well as teaching "literature," I would think it advisable that we anticipate not only the linguistic problems our students might have processing such physical text features as readability formulas reveal, but also the kinds of cultural background knowledge assumed by a particular text. In the case of It Can't Happen Here some pre-reading assignments involving independent research and oral reports would be very worthwhile. Some possible topics might be the Great Depression, the Rotary Club, the women's suffrage movement, Prohibition, the KKK, the Red Scare, and the DAR, as well as historical figures such as Hoover, Coolidge, and FDR. Actually, my students were confused by the background knowledge they did have. Historically, they knew, Roosevelt had never lost a presidential election, but Lewis has him defeated in 1936 by the fictional Buzz Windrip. This confusion of history and fiction would have been less troublesome, I suspect, in a less topically demanding book. The students' historical background knowledge was already strained to the breaking point without adding the fictional twist. Another way of establishing context for this type of novel might be to have them write their own political utopias and anti-utopias before reading the novel. My students had already read Nineteen Eighty-Four, but some personalized experience with the literary genre might have stimulated interest and ego-involvement, both of which contribute to reading comprehension (Asher; Spiro, et al.).

Another reading difficulty presented by It Can't Happen Here, but not measured by any readability formula, is that of tone. Obviously, if students fail to recognize the narrator's ironic tone, whatever literal comprehension they achieve completely misses the full satiric force of the novel. And, indeed, my students were missing it. In the first chapter they thought that Adelaide Gimmitch was an admirable character and that Lorinda Pike was a "busy-body." In other words, they had adopted the point of view that Lewis was satirizing. I did not entirely break through their confusion until I compared Adelaide Gimmitch to the Harriet Olson character of Little House on the Prairie. As we went through this first chapter and later as I read the students' journals, I realized that the problem of tone is closely related to that of cultural background knowledge. Verbal irony especially depends upon a contradiction between something understood and something said. If the understanding that comes from cultural literacy is not there, the irony is lost. Therefore, the pre-reading assignments suggested

above would help students detect Lewis's ironic voice by establishing the necessary context. Another way of sensitizing students to the mode of satire might be to have them write their own satires—ironic commentaries on or descriptions of their own hometown, the college community, their state, or national politics. Just as writing their own utopias and/or anti-utopias might serve to arouse a personal interest in this genre, so producing their own satires might stimulate their interest in this mode.

Since tone may be more easily detected through listening than through silent reading, sensitivity to irony (and other tones) could also be developed by concentrating first on characters in the novel, examining their traits and motives, reading aloud conversations in which different voices are heard, and even role-playing certain passages of dialogue. It might then be easier to focus on the narrator's voice and the fictional device of point of view.

Not only do readability formulas fail to measure qualitative text features such as context demands and tonal complexity, they fail to measure quantitative features of text content as opposed to syntax and morphology. Another of the stumbling blocks It Can't Happen Here presents to inexperienced readers is the sheer quantity of characters, detail, and allusions. In addition to the ten allusions on page one of It Can't Happen Here, four fictional characters are introduced and four details of setting are mentioned. Without consideration for conceptual demands, this one page calls for a short-term memory load of eighteen units, eleven more than authorities say is the most that can reasonably be expected (Miller). It wasn't enough to simply encourage my students to take notes, underline, and make lists to sort things out and separate important from unimportant details. They had to be shown. We listed characters on the board, discussed them and decided which were most important and why. We listed the events and shifts in setting in chronological order on the board and again decided which were essential. The course journal my students were keeping was very useful for building active reading skills. We used it for writing subjective responses and sharing them in class; we used it for summarizing, raising questions, developing interpretations, and arriving at evaluative judgements.

The journal-keeping was successful because it reinforced and raised to a conscious level the active, inferential construction of meaning through hypothesis formation and testing that current reading research maintains is central to the reading process (Spiro, et al.). Psycholinguistic research stresses that in reading comprehension physical characteristics of a text are secondary to cognitive structures and the reader's active

search for meaning (K. Goodman; Smith). Good readers are not merely those who are perceptually adept at letter and word identification but those who are experienced in the use of cognitive strategies such as inferencing (Collins, et al.), anticipating, forming hypotheses, and correcting hypotheses.

Among the most useful devices for developing these skills are student generated comprehension aids used during, not before or after, the reading process itself (Anderson; Alexander, et al.). Adjunct aids include record-keeping systems such as notetaking, outlining, and highlighting; adjunct questions; self-questioning; and summarizing. T.H. Anderson found adjunct questions, both teacher and student generated, to be the most effective study aid, with outlining and summarizing running a close second. King, et al., found that adjunct summarizing was more effective than pre-questioning. These studies and that of Alexander, et al., suggest that the key factor is the timing of study aid use rather than the nature of the device. Cognitive activity during reading is more effective than such activity before or after reading. Students working in small groups during the reading process could be put to work developing sets of questions on assigned chapters for large group discussion. Attention to student expectations as they read and to the points where they are surprised and where their expectations are fulfilled could lead to a discussion of conventions, both social and literary. Summaries, both oral and written, can be constructed as reading is going on rather than after. While plot summaries can be tedious, a discussion of what different students have included or left out of such summaries is very productive and leads directly to discussion of different interpretations. Finally, the writing of interpretations, especially when diversity is encouraged, requires students to retrace their cognitive steps, to sort through the evidence on which inferences are based, to re-evaluate and thereby refine interpretive hypotheses.

While inexperienced readers who are not widely read will never arrive at sophisticated critical evaluations of novels, they will, given the kind or practice and study suggested above, form judgements of much greater depth and substance than the superficial responses that emerge from the kind of inadequate engagement of text that my students experienced in their initial encounter with It Can't Happen Here. On the final exam, some of my students concluded that It Can't Happen Here is a more effective anti-utopian novel than Nineteen Eighty-Four (I disagree) because it is more realistic—this from students who on our first day's discussion of the book could not understand it well enough to judge whether it bore any relation to reality of any kind.

Beyond their experience with It Can't Happen Here students learned that while what reading specialists call "effort after meaning" (Spiro) can be difficult, it is not impossible, and, given the appropriate strategies, can be very manageable. In the end, students took a great deal of satisfaction in knowing they could speak and write intelligently about a book with a reading level as high as 19.5 in some parts.

My interest in this article is to draw from my experience teaching It Can't Happen Here certain practical, pedagogical implications for the improvement of general reading skills through development and reinforcement of appropriate cognitive strategies. Another article could be written on implications specifically for the teaching of literature. One of the most valuable resources for such a study is the work of Louise Rosenblatt, whose "transactional" theory of reading has been applied to the teaching of reading in general and of literature in particular. Like much current reading research, her theory emphasizes the active role of the reader in text comprehension, interpretation, and enjoyment.

Other important areas of reading research overlooked in this study are the reading situation itself (in this case a classroom situation), the reader's perceived purpose for reading, and the reader's attitude toward the reading task, all of which have been shown to be important factors in the reading process and in the success or failure of reading comprehension. A relatively recent development in reading research which covers the broadest range of factors affecting reading comprehension is that of ethnographic studies (Kantor, et al.).

James Lundquist has written that the "central problem" in reading Lewis is his inconsistency: "If he can be so good on page 10, how can he be so bad on page twelve?" (65). My students did not reach a level of critical judgement to enable them to recognize the inconsistencies of Lewis's style and art. For them the central problem was simple comprehension (which, I hope it is now clear, is hardly "simple"). The kinds of problems they had, however, are not only attributable to their lack of background knowledge, of "cultural literacy," of reading experience, and of social sophistication, but also to the characteristics of Lewis's style from which his works derive both their strength and weakness. The topicality of It Can't Happen Here, which overwhelmed my students in 1984, made the novel quite popular when it was first published in 1935. It sold 300,000 copies and was simultaneously produced in thirteen cities as a Federal Theater Project play (Lundquist 111). Because of the "perennial" threat of fascism in the U.S., says Lundquist, the novel was revived during the McCarthy hearings of

the fifties and the "white-backlash" of more recent years (113).

The novel was written in just four months, "the product of a great flood of enthusiasm" (Dooley 191), and what power it has derives in part from the rapid pace and onslaught of detail, which serve to reinforce our sense of the irresistible force of Buzz Windrip's fascist demogoguery. Lundquist (111-112), Dooley (192-193), and others (e.g., Blackmur) agree, however, that for all its topicality the novel is more fantastic than realistic. Though the journalistic, documentary quality of the book led my students to see it as more realistic than Nineteen Eighty-Four, the critics are able to see beyond the surface features of realism and recognize that the characters and events of It Can't Happen Here are as exaggerated as anything in Nineteen Eighty-Four. It is this exaggeration, however, that contributes to the book's appeal—the nightmarish, horror-story quality that both fascinates and repels—an enduring characteristic of popular fiction.

Irony and satire are notoriously difficult for inexperienced readers, and, as I have pointed out, this problem is compounded in It Can't Happen Here by the book's dependence on cultural literacy. Another complicating factor of this novel, however (and of Nineteen Eighty-Four as well), is that its "horror story" quality often overwhelms the satiric effect, making the irony even harder to detect. As Martin Light writes

> It is evident from the first chapter of It Can't Happen Here that the satiric types are operating in such a context of social and moral danger that our comic responses are stifled. Here we are shown not humbugs but evil men. Those who address the guests on ladies' night at the Rotary Club of Fort Beulah, Vermont . . . are not simply fatuous this time. No common booster is General Edgeways and no harmless feminist is Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch. (123-124)

According to Light, Lewis's characters often fit a "familiar formula": "If you expect the worst of such fellows, you'll find it, but they can be good fellows, too—that is the surprise" (125-126). In It Can't Happen Here the "worst" is so bad that the "good," when Lewis tries to point it out, cannot be taken seriously. In other words the moral confusion at the center of the novel leads to confusion in its satiric effect. It was not simply a matter of my students' cultural illiteracy and verbal insensitivity. Part of the confusion is in the text. Finally, while the rapid rush of detail and event gives the book its power, it is ultimately excessive—self-indulgent rather than disciplined, saturated rather than selective.

Thus while my students did not entirely realize it, their initial response to the book, based as it was on a superficial reading experience, *contained a partial truth*

about the failures of the book. My students gained respect for the book (and for themselves) after they achieved a working level of comprehension. They did not achieve a level of critical judgement that enabled them to sort out which of their reading problems were attributable to themselves and which to the text. That would require a much wider reading experience in Lewis's work in particular and serious novels in general. However, the kinds of comprehension problems these students had with the book can partly be explained by the weaknesses of the text that have been noted by numerous critics. These weaknesses affected my students at the level of comprehension whereas they affect literary critics at the level of evaluation.

Overall, I hope this study demonstrates the dynamic relation that exists between reader and text in the reading process. Further, reading takes place at a number of levels--perceptual, conceptual, critical--and the reader-text relation moves back and forth reciprocally and recursively from one level to another. Finally, as current reading research proclaims, the reading experience depends upon the active, constructive role of the reader as well as the structure, style, and linguistic features of the text.

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CAROL KENNICOTT, SURVIVOR

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The Sinclair Lewis centenary prompted me to re-read Main Street, which I had not taken off my shelf for the 10 or 15 years since I last taught it in a college American literature course. I had read it then with students because of its regional interest, its portrayal of a social phenomenon in American life and its use of satire to do that, and—most importantly—because of its presentation of a woman like Carol Kennicott. I always noted the fact that Main Street was published in the year American women got the vote.

Since my previous reading of Main Street I have become increasingly involved with literature by and about women--and now I look at Carol in the company of women like Edna Pontellier of Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) and Lily Bart of Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth (1911). These two women characters were created two decades and one decade respectively before Lewis created Carol. Each of these women--Edna, Lilly, and Carol—is caught in a very closed society with a strict code which interferes with her freedom to be herself.

Both Edna and Lilly struggle valiantly, with a certain amount of inner strength, and although it is arguable that they may or may not have triumphed morally, they succumb as victims to the society they have struggled against. They literally die, possibly in each case by suicide (although that is arguable in the case of Lily).

Carol is different in two important ways: she is a reformer, or thinks she is, and so she puts her efforts into trying to change the society that she finds oppressive; and she is a survivor who does not die, like Edna and Lily, but gives birth to a daughter who will carry on the fight against smugness—in a vehement, even violent, way if we are to believe Carol's rhetoric on the last page of the novel:

> 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 2000! She may see an industrial union of the whole world, she

may see aeroplanes going to Mars." (432)

And in her very last words in the novel Carol says that she has "won" because although she "may not have fought the good fight," she has "kept the faith" (432). If Carol has "won," or thinks she has, in a way that Edna of The Awakening and Lily of The House of Mirth have not, what is it that makes Carol a survivor?

At the beginning of Main Street Carol Milford is "a girl on a hilltop . . . drinking the air as she longed to drink life" (7). She is eager, alive, observant, full of enthusiasms, versatile. Sometimes "critical," sometimes "credulous," she questions and examines "unceasingly" (9). "Whatever she might become," says the author, "she would never be static" (9).

Carol has a wide, if changing, range of interests. Daughter of a Mankato judge who encouraged his children to read, she is a student at Blodgett College where she has indulged her changing aspirations of studying law, writing motion picture scenarios, becoming a nurse, and marrying a hero before deciding on sociology where she could be a great "liberator" (10).

If I had been a faculty member at Blodgett College writing a recommendation for the next stage in Carol's education, post-graduate study for a career in librarianship, I would describe her an as intelligent, well-educated woman with a wide range of interests and aspirations who desired further education and who intended to earn her living. I would recommend her as a young woman likely to succeed in her career, having overheard her say, "But I want to do something with my life" (14) and "I don't understand myself but I want--everything in the world" (15). As a faculty member on the Blodgett campus I might even have overheard her saying to her friend, Stewart, "I can't settle down to nothing but dishwashing" (15). I would consider my student Carol to be both able and ambitious, but I would reserve to myself the fact that she tended toward impractical dreaming which I would hope would be tempered by experience.

As a faculty member in my own classes of ten or fifteen years ago I was less sympathetic toward Carol than I am now. I saw her--with her dreaming, her artistic yearnings, her ideals—as a vehicle for showing up the insensitivity, the cultural poverty, and the petty realities of a town like Gopher Prairie. While I wanted *Carol* to achieve her ideals in the town that opposed her at every turn, I interpreted the conclusion of Main Street as more a vindication of Gopher Prairie than of Carol.

But as I reassess Carol Kennicott today, I see great significance in her final statement on the last page of the novel. Speaking more to herself than to the

less-than-sensitive Will, she admits the contradictions and accepts them as her reality:

> "But I have won in this: I've never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to have gone beyond them. I do not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous that Europe! I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women! I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith" (432).

This keeping of the faith is what makes Carol a survivor. Unlike the characters Edna and Lily of the earlier novels, Carol never loses her freedom to be herself. Her faith is in herself and in the future.

She has such faith in her Blodgett College days, but as promising Carol Milford with a successful career, she does not "feel that she [is] living" (16) until she meets Dr. Will Kennicott and exchanges city life and her career for Gopher Prairie and her role as the wife of one of the town's most respected citizens.

Carol Kennicott is so put off by the town and its ugliness and by the townspeople and their pettiness that she quickly focuses on the one goal she has had since she was a college student: to reform her environment. Carol's intelligence, education, interests, and experiences could have served her goal of reform effectively <u>if</u> Gopher Prairie had wanted to be reformed and <u>if</u> she had not had some weaknesses to offset her strengths as a would-be reformer. She is very impatient in her eagerness for change, she does not have perseverance in planning and promoting her activities, and she lacks confidence in herself and thus is extremely vulnerable to gossip.

She is quickly disillusioned and discouraged. By the end of the first winter she finds that she is "a woman with a working brain and no work" (86). Her failures in her encounters with the townspeople lead her to an inner struggle: "Reform the town? All she wanted was to be tolerated" (100). Alternately she wants to escape and to stick it out, and, although she calls Will "the Rock of Ages," she asks herself, "Was it all a horrible mistake, my marrying him?" (106).

What Gopher Prairie considers Carol's greatest failing is the way in which she performs her wifely role. The people of Gopher Prairie, even Will, do not see her as a model wife, at a time and in a place when being a good wife was thought to be a woman's chief duty. She is not particularly interested in domesticity and female gossip, and her desire to converse with Will's male friends is rebuffed or laughed at. Her relationship with Will is more on her terms than on his. She finds fault with his insensitivity and lack of imagination rather than admiring him for his efforts to be a dedicated doctor and husband. Will in turn finds Carol cold and lacking in passion.

The one characteristic Gopher Prairie admires is her ability to be a devoted mother, once Will says they can "afford" to have a child. She has already failed at several reforms by the time Hugh is born. Carol's restlessness and discontent subside for a time after she becomes a mother. In a way she becomes what Gopher Prairie expected of her and for two years "nothing else existed" (235) except Hugh and motherhood. Carol, never less than extreme in her ideals and actions, throws herself wholeheartedly into motherhood: "Hugh was her reason for living, promise of accomplishment in the future, shrine of adoration—and a diverting toy" (235). Lewis cannot resist the final phrase of this sentence to suggest, as he does many times, the inconsistencies of Carol's enthusiasms. Nevertheless, her devotion to Hugh never diminishes.

For two years Carol, as Hugh's mother, is "part of the town," and she has "no apparent desire for escape" (236). However, content as she is as a mother, Carol sometimes uses Hugh as a refuge from her failures. It is the opinion of an indignant Vida Sherwin, who "was, and always would be, a reformer, a liberal" (248), that Carol is not "utterly fulfilled in having borne Kennicott's child" (248). Knowing Vida's earlier relationship with Will, we must view this opinion with caution, but it is true that Carol's relationship with baby Hugh does not enhance her relationship with Will. She becomes increasingly irritated and bored with him and finds that they are a "talked-out couple" (280). Longing for "a place of her own" (285) like so many twentieth-century women, Carol moves into the spare room. Although Will seems to tolerate this without apparent rancor, he complains to himself, "She ought to of been an artist or a writer or one of those things. But once she took a shot at living here, she ought to stick by it" (297).

Meanwhile Carol's "liveliest interest" is in her walks with the baby whose questions make her "attentive" to the simple things in nature so that she forgets "her seasons of boredom" (305). It is during these months, when she takes Hugh to play with Olaf, son of her former maid, that she finds true friendship with the Bjornstrams. Their simple lifestyle, which is so unlike that of the members of the Jolly Seventeen, attracts her. For the first time in the novel she show real love and self-sacrifice when she nurses Bea and Olaf stricken by typhoid and then grieves with Miles at their deaths.

That reality, however, is almost too painful for Carol, and she escapes it after she meets Erik Valborg while out walking with Hugh. At their first meeting Erik asks, "Why aren't you happy with your husband?" (331). Erik and Carol find the intellectual companionship for which each has longed, but their friendship scandalizes the people of Gopher Prairie who cannot imagine that Carol and Erik are not lovers.

Earlier in her marriage Carol's struggles had been with Gopher Prairie, but now she is concerned not about changing Gopher Prairie nor about fitting into the town but about her relationships with Erik and Will. She claims to Erik that she is "a normal wife and a good mother" (352). During a late night reflection in her own room, she acknowledges to herself that she does not want to hurt Will but to love him, and she calls Erik "my child Erik, who needs me" (353). Then almost immediately she tells herself, "I don't care in the least for Erik! Nor for any man" (354). Instead she wants "to be let alone, in a woman world--a world without Main Street, or politicians, or businessmen, or men with that sudden beastly hungry look, that glistening unfrank expression that wives know--" (354). Carol is indeed unsure at this point in her life, but somehow she is absorbed more in motherhood than in marriage. Erik is the second child who absorbs her interest.

It is in standing over baby Hugh's crib a few nights later, when Erik visits at her home during Will's absence, that Carol's motherhood is linked to an unreal fatherhood: "She did not think of Kennicott, the baby's father. What she did think was that someone rather like Erik, an older and surer Erik, ought to be Hugh's father. The three of them would play--incredible imaginative games" (355). But she realizes that her imaginings are just that, and she abruptly breaks with Erik.

Vida Sherwin minces no words with Carol about the whole affair: "you just play at reforming the world. You don't know what it means to suffer" (358). Carol realizes that she has been interested in "Erik's aspiration," an interest that has given her "a hesitating fondness for him" (360). Knowing that she is no heroine, she asks herself, "Is that the real tragedy, that I never shall know tragedy, never find anything but blustery complications that turn out to be a farce?" (360). This may be a moment of truth for Carol. And for a time Gopher Prairie turns its attention from Carol to gossip about the affairs of a young unmarried teacher, Fern, whom Carol has befriended.

But Carol's relationship with Erik revives briefly until Will rather forcefully tells Carol to "call a halt" (380). The affair over, Carol has "no plan nor desire for anything," and for "the first time in years" Carol and Will are lovers, but, even so, Carol still has "no plan in life, save always to go along the same streets, past the same people, to the same shops" (384).

It is at this point that Will takes Carol on a lengthy trip to California. She regrets having to leave Hugh behind and is overjoyed upon her return to be with him again. But she is aware that nothing has changed in Gopher Prairie. In some ways its booster-

ism, which she has always deplored, has become more intensified with the advent of world war. All of her dissatisfactions with the town, with her marriage, with herself come to the surface in a month of argument with Will.

The Carol Milford of Blodgett College who questioned and examined unceasingly and who "would never be static" (9) has reasserted herself in the older, more disillusioned, but far from daunted Carol Kennicott. She fights for her own identity in her arguments with Will: "I don't belong in Gopher Prairie. That isn't meant as a condemnation of Gopher Prairie, and it may be a condemnation of me. All right! I don't care! I don't belong here, and I'm going. I'm not asking permission any more. I'm simply going" (404). She is leaving perhaps for a year, perhaps for a lifetime, but she is going alone because she has to find out what her work is and what her life holds.

Although ultimately Carol chooses to be content as wife and mother, she fights for her right to be liberated from expectations, especially Will's. He tells her that her trouble is that she does not have enough work to do. "If you had five kids and no hired girl, and had to help with the chores and separate the cream, like these farmers' wives, then you wouldn't be so discontented" (404).

She reminds him that she has done these things, that she "did all the housework, and cared for Hugh, and went to Red Cross, and did it all very efficiently," (404) but that she was not happy. "It's work—but not my work. I could run an office or a library, or nurse and teach children. But solitary dish-washing isn't enough to satisfy me--or many other women" (404-05). She is prophetic when she tells Will that women are going "to chuck" dish-washing: "We're going to wash 'em by machinery, and come out and play with you men in the offices and clubs and politics you've cleverly kept for yourselves!" (405).

By taking Hugh and leaving she will not in her opinion be "running away," as Will puts it. She asks this man, content with a lifetime in Gopher Prairie:

> "Do you realize how big a world there is beyond this Gopher Prairie where you'd keep me all my life? It may be that some day I'll come back, but not till I can bring something more than I have now. And even if I am cowardly and run away--all right, call it cowardly, call me anything you want to! I've been ruled too long by fear of being called things. I'm going away to be quiet and think. I'm--I'm going! I have a right to my own life" (405).

And so she leaves with her small son for Washington and life on her own. Edna of The Awakening had tried a similar escape by moving out of her husband's home to a cottage next door and by leaving her children to their grandmother. But Edna

intended only escape from her responsibilities as wife and mother; she did not have the sense of purpose Carol has. Although Carol finds that "real work" has its monotonous side and that the Washington bureau was as full of cliques and scandals as Gopher Prairie, she finds a relief and freedom she had not known in Gopher Prairie. She feels that she is no longer "one-half of a marriage but the whole of a human being" (408).

Coming to accept the reality that pettiness and boredom can be found even in Washington, she gains "renewed courage, that amiable contempt called poise" (413). She is able to admit to Will, when he visits her after a year, that "it must have been pretty tiresome to have to live with anybody as perfect as I was" (419). Neither Edna nor Lilly was willing to make any such admission.

In spite of Carol's admission, Will wisely tells her that he will not ask her to come back to Gopher Prairie, and continuing to refuse to decide for her on their "honeymoon" in the Villa Margherita, he says, "I want you to be satisfied when you get there. . . . I want you to take time to think it over" (421).

After Will's return to Gopher Prairie, a woman suffragist grills Carol about her motives, and Carol admits, "I'm afraid I'm not heroic" (423). But Carol tells herself she can go on asking questions of Gopher Prairie and knows that if she were to return, "she would not be utterly defeated." She is glad of her rebellion but her "active hatred of Gopher Prairie" has run out (424). "I've come to a fairer attitude toward the town. I can love it now" (425). She assures herself that she has been making the town "a myth." However, she has not yet fully demythologized it, for she imagines it now "as her home, waiting fo her in the sunset, rimmed round with splendor" (425).

When finally, five months later, she returns to Gopher Prairie, she decides that she is "neither glad nor sorry to be back" (426). Now a more realistic Carol sees that the problems of the town are "exactly what they had been two years ago, what they had been twenty years ago, and what they would be for twenty years to come" (426). She can finally see Gopher Prairie's problems for what they are and knows that she does not have to solve them all. But she has not been home for long before she clashes with Vida and the new mayor over whose idea it was to get up an annual Community Day. Carol has not completely changed; she has not completely lost interest in what she thinks will better Gopher Prairie!

But her best hopes are in motherhood. She tells Will that she has learned from Hugh and asks, "Did you ever realize that children are people?" (430). She plans to bring up Hugh "as a human being" because [h]e has just as many thoughts as we have,

and I want him to develop them, not take Gopher Prairie's version of them" (430).

Her baby daughter, conceived in Washington and born in Gopher Prairie after Carol's return, is the focus of Carol's greatest hopes. Or are they dreams? Carol thrives on dreams and clings to them until they achieve some sort of reality. Carol's coming to terms with herself is in some ways a coming to terms with her aspirations. What she has not accomplished, her daughter will. Carol has kept faith in her aspirations and has survived with her ideals intact.

Whether Lewis intended to have Carol win out against Gopher Prairie or not, we can see, as we look back at twentieth-century American fiction, that her very survival, even as a dreamer, has feminist implications. Edna and Lilly did not survive their struggles with their New Orleans and Old New York environments, let alone dream of daughters who would carry on their hopes.

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SINCLAIR LEWIS AND THE MIDWESTERN TRADITION

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I. The Nobel Prize

In 1867 an anonymous visitor to Chicago and to what had been the Old Northwest only a generation earlier essayed an enthusiastic projection of the future of the region and its accomplishment:

> In good time the western bottom lands will spontaneously grow poets. The American mind will be brought to maturity along the chain of Great Lakes, the banks of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and their tributaries. . . . There, on the rolling plains, will be formed a republic of letters, which, not governed like that on our seaboard by the great literary powers of Europe, shall be free indeed. . . . The winds sweep unhindered from the lakes to the Gulf and from the Alleghenies to the Rocky Mountains; and so do the thoughts of the Lord of the prairie. . . . Some day he will make his own books as well as his own laws . . . all the arts of the world will come and make obeisance to him. He will be the American man and beside him there will be none else.

Sixty-three years later, in the late summer of 1930 it appeared that obeisance would finally be made by those who determined the recipient of the world's most prestigious literary prize. It was common knowledge in Stockholm that an American would be the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, the first American to be so honored in the twenty-nine-year history of the prize. William Dean Howells, Henry James and Mark Twain had been overlooked by the committee in their later years, but in 1930 the consensus of the committee was that American literature had come of age. Shortly before the awards were made, the Stockholm Dagens Nyheter published three articles on the new American literature, a general article and two specific articles on Sinclair *Lewis of* Sauk Centre, Minnesota, and Theodore Dreiser of Terre Haute, Indiana, believed to be the two Americans seriously considered for the award.

In the Nobel Committee, Lewis was formally nominated by Professor Henrik Schuk, University of Uppsala professor of the history of art and literature, and the special three-person literature committee of the Academy voted two to one for Lewis, Anders Osterling for Dreiser and Per Hallstrom and Erik Axel Karlfeldt for Lewis. Osterling himself later commented that Lewis's "gay virtuosity and flashing satire" prevailed

over the more substantial but "ponderous and solemn" Dreiser.

On November 5, when the award was announced, the reactions were predictable. Lewis, who had previously refused election to both the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Author's Club in 1922 and had turned down the Pulitzer Prize for Arrowsmith in 1926, commented initially that he would use the prize money "to support a well-known young American author and his family, and to enable him to continue writing." Dreiser brooded silently, and his friends sent him dozens of adverse criticisms of Lewis; Sherwood Anderson said that Lewis had received the prize "because his sharp criticism of American life catered to the dislike, distrust, and envy which most Europeans feel toward the United States"; Benjamin DeCasseres, in Bookman, wrote that in giving Lewis the award, "Europe gave America the worst back-handed crack in the jaw she ever got, for Babbitt is America." But the Manchester Guardian praised Lewis and the choice; Bernard Shaw commented that Lewis's criticisms were not true only of Americans, but that Americans are convinced they are unique. American newspapers in general, in spite of reservations about Lewis's subject matter, were delighted, agreeing with Harry Hansen in the New York World that "It is a recognition that evolving America is a suitable theme for the novelist, and that Sinclair Lewis is representative." But others compiled lists of American authors more representative or more deserving, and the award to Lewis remains controversial. Recently, his award has been called both a disgrace and a significant recognition of the maturity of American literature.

But the Swedish Academy was both more succinct and more effusive. The official citation stated simply that "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." Unprecedentedly, however, on December 10, 1930, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy and a supporter of Lewis, addressed that group at length. His topic was "Why Sinclair Lewis Got the Nobel Prize."

Professor Karlfeldt's address might have been written by that anonymous visitor to the Midwest sixty-three years earlier. First he discussed Lewis's origins in "Sauk Centre, a place of about two or three thousand inhabitants in the great wheat and barley land of Minnesota." He continued:

> It is the great prairie, an undulating land with lakes and oak groves, that has produced that little city and many others exactly like it. The pioneers have had need of places to sell their grain, stores for their supplies, banks for their mortgage loans, physicians for their bodies and clergymen for their

souls. There is cooperation between the country and the city and at the same time conflict. Does the city exist for the sake of the country or the country for the city?

The prairie makes its power felt. . . . But yet the city, of course, feels its superiority . . . lives in its self-confidence and its belief in true democracy, . . . its faith in a sound business morality, and the blessings of being motorized; for there are many Fords on Main Street.

He turned then to Lewis's works of the 1920s, from Main Street to Dodsworth. Of the former, he said, "As a description of life in a small town, Main Street is certainly one of the best ever written"; of Babbitt, "There are bounders and Philistines in all countries, and one can only wish that they were all half as amusing as Babbitt"; of Arrowsmith, "The book contains a rich gallery of different medical types. . . . He has built a monument to the profession of his own father"; of Elmer Gantry, "It ought to be unnecessary to point out that hypocrisy thrives a little everywhere and that anyone who attacks it at such a close range places himself before a hydra with many heads"; of Dodsworth, "America is the land of youth and daring experiments. And when he [Dodsworth] returns there, we understand that the heart of Sinclair Lewis follows him there." He concluded:

Yes, Sinclair Lewis is an American. He writes the new language—American—as one of the representatives of 120,000,000 souls. He asks us to consider that this 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.

Lewis's address at the ceremony in the Stockholm Stock Exchange two days later was equally unprecedented in the hallowed halls of the Swedish Academy. Genuinely moved by the award—yet two years later when refused admission to Club 21 in New York he was heard to exclaim, "What's the use of winning the Nobel Prize if it doesn't get you *into speakeasies*?"—much of the substance of his speech, a consideration of what he described as "certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature," had been discussed before, in interviews, reviews, and articles, especially in "Self-Conscious America," which appeared in The American Mercury for October 1925. In the address he prefaced his remarks by pointing out that "it will be necessary for me to be a little impolite regarding certain institutions and persons of my own greatly beloved land."

After dwelling at some length on adverse reactions to his award--citing in particular the comment of Henry Van Dyke--anonymous in the speech--that Lewis's award was an insult to America, he speculated on the reactions had others been chosen: Dreiser would have produced the complaint that his "men and women are often sinful and tragic and despairing instead of being forever sunny"; O'Neill, that he sees life "as a terrifying, magnificent, and quite honorable thing"; Cabell, that he is "fantastically malicious"; Cather, that she has written "a story without any moral"; Mencken, that he is "the worst of all scoffers"; Sherwood Anderson, that he "viciously errs in considering sex as important a force in life as fishing"; Hergesheimer, that he is "unAmerican"; Sinclair, that he is a "Socialist"; Hemingway, that he "uses language which should be unknown to gentlemen."

Lewis's tributes to his fellow writers were more gracious than one might expect and certainly more gracious than most of them have been to him. But then he turned his attention to those institutions, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the universities, to which American writers might reasonably look for support. Of the former he said that it "cuts itself off from much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters," that it has "no relationship whatever to our life and aspirations. It does not represent literary America of today--it represents only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; it is so perfect an example of the divorce in America of intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality." "Our universities and colleges," he went on to say, "exhibit the same unfortunate divorce; our American professors like their literature clear and cold and dead; in the new and vital and experimental land of America, one would expect the teachers of literature to be less monastic, more human, than in the traditional shadows of old Europe--they are not."

After passing jabs at "an astonishing circus" called the "New Humanism," at "one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men . . . [with] the code of a pious old maid" named William Dean Howells, and at the taming of Mark Twain and Hamlin Garland by Howells, he turned to the future: "We are coming out . . . of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see I am a little too old to be one of them." There are "Ernest Hemingway, a bitter youth . . . Thomas Wolfe, a child . . . of thirty . . . Thorton Wilder . . . John Dos Passos . . . Stephen Benet . . . Michael Gold . . . William Faulkner . . . who, however

insane they may be, have refused to be genteel and traditional and dull."

Lewis's conclusion was dedicated to those young writers:

> I salute them, with a joy in being not yet too far removed from their determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities and lost far cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, to an America that is as strange as Russia and complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness.

II. The Legacy

When Sinclair Lewis stood before the Swedish Academy and distinguished guests on December 12, 1930, as the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, he was, although he was unaware of it, at the end of the second phase of his career and at the beginning of the third, the period that was to continue to his death, to the detriment of his literary reputation. The first phase, from Our Mr. Wrenn (1914) through Free Air (1919), was essentially that of Lewis's apprenticeship, the period during which he discovered a major theme that was to dominate his best work under the guise of satire; that is, that dull people are, in spite of—or perhaps because of—their dullness and their shallowness of the world in which they live, essentially likeable, even good.

During the second phase, extending from Main Street in 1920 to Dodsworth in 1929, with the single lapse of Mantrap (1926), Lewis created his best work as he earned the reputation that brought him wealth, notoriety, and the Nobel Prize. It was also the period that brought a series of best-sellers unprecedented among writers who purported to be serious: Main Street sold 200,000 copies shortly after publication; Babbitt sold out, and subsequent printings paralleled the sales of Main Street; Elmer Gantry's initial printing of 140,000, the largest in history, quickly sold out; Dodsworth, published in 1929, sold 80,000 in spite of the stock-market crash. These early successes were to continue: Ann Vickers (1933), his first novel after receiving the Nobel Prize, sold 130,000 copies; It Can't Happen Here, published in 1935, sold 300,000; Cass Timberlane (1945) sold over a million, and Kingsblood Royal (1947) a million and a half. A number of his novels have never been out of print, none was ever a popular failure, and no estimate has ever been made of continuing paperback sales. Foreign sales and translations beginning with Main Street were equally impressive. By 1930, various of his books had been translated into Russian, German, Swedish, Polish, Hungarian, Danish, Norwegian, Czech, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew. At the time he received

the Nobel Prize he was America's best-known writer at home and abroad, and he had added "Main Street" and "Babbitt" to America's vocabulary. That fame continued to the end. His death, in 1951, shortly before his sixty-sixth birthday, was, unlike those of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and many others of his generation, noted on the front pages of papers around the world.

Whether it was because of his success, as Lewis always believed (just after the publication of Main Street he wrote that "Every once in a while some friend indignantly tells me, that some bunch of the young juenes--say those at the Cafe Rotonde in the rive gauche--assert that if the damned book has sold so well, I must be rotten") or because of fundamental flaws in his work, Lewis has never been a favorite of his fellow writers. Early supporters—H. L. Mencken, T. K. Whipple, and V. F. Parrington--deserted his early, and until this centennial conference his works were almost never the subject of serious criticism. Conversely, from the publication of Our Mr. Wrenn in 1914 to the posthumous World So Wide in 1951, he was a favorite of the book reviewers in the popular journals.

Throughout his career and even yet Lewis remains the great paradoxical figure in our literary history. As early as 1922, in an essay in the New Republic, Sherwood Anderson wrote that "The texture of the prose written by Mr. Lewis gives me but faint joy and I cannot escape the conviction that for some reason Lewis has himself found but little joy, either in life among us or in his own effort to channel his reactions to our life into prose . . . one has the feeling that Lewis never laughs at all, that he is in an odd way too serious about something to laugh." More succinctly, on page 813 of his 814-page biography of Lewis, Mark Shorer comments that "He was one of the worst writers in modern American literature." Yet, in spite of his flaws as a writer, in spite of our condescension toward his work, in spite of our refusal to give his works serious critical appraisal, we not only do not ignore him, but we cannot. As Shorer goes on to point out, we cannot imagine modern American literature without him.

We cannot, I think, for reasons that are psychological, sociological, and historical rather than literary—qualities that, I suspect, are the source of his continued popularity as well as the reasons why he was selected to be the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. Unable to define the tragic dimensions of human life, incapable of expressing joy or revealing, even in moments, the subjective life, the inner life, of his people in spite of his sometimes grudging affection for them, he did, nevertheless, provide fleeting, distorted, but frightening moments of insight into our-

selves, into the reality of our lives, and into the myths by which we live.

Lewis was a product of the Midwest as it reached maturity, as it became Middle America, the mainstream that has given focus to American life in this century, and it is this Middle America that is not only the substance of the works—Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, Dodsworth—that we remember when we speak of Lewis, but it is also the substance of those glimpses of ourselves that fascinate and frighten us. In this sense, Lewis was, perhaps, the democratic literatus out of the West for whom Walt Whitman called, but he was not the voice for which Whitman listened, nor was he quite the American Man predicted by that anonymous visitor to Chicago.

Nevertheless, Whitman and certainly Mark Twain would recognize Lewis's people—or more properly his character-types—as they appear in the best of his works. His people are of the American past, the mythic, folkloric past of the Old West and the nineteenth century; they are the confidence man—Elmer Gantry; the hero—Arrowsmith; the uncertain seeker after an ambiguous fulfillment—Babbitt; the braggart—Lowell Schmaltz, the man who know Coolidge; the helpless romantic—Dodsworth; the reformer—Carol Kennicott—all of them caught up in an age that distorted their weaknesses and perverted their strengths, the age of Gopher Prairie and Zenith, of prosperity, prohibition, and the culmination of the American myth of success, the age Lewis describes in the opening of Main Street: "The days of pioneering, of lassies in sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest."

In the nineteenth century each of Lewis's people would have been larger than life; in the twentieth, however, the age of the bewildered empire of Gopher Prairie and Zenith, values defined and perpetuated by place and by things rather than by people have become Lewis's gargantuan reality. Lewis's people are one generation removed from their fathers and mothers, those who had crossed the Appalachians and followed the rivers to a wilderness that they were determined to make orderly. But they were not the sons and daughters of American Adams and their virtuous Eves in search of a new Eden to replace that lost in the misty myths of a past that never was. They were possessed—or driven—by a curious combination of eighteenth-century idealism—the search for an open society—and nineteenth-century realism—the very practical search for cheap land. They were willing to pay the price, to do the work necessary for both, and they were constantly aware of the price of failure. These were the people whose

determination Sherwood Anderson described in terms both realistic and metaphoric in the revised ending of Windy McPherson's Son in 1922: "In our father's day, at night in the forests of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and on the wide prairies, wolves howled. There was fear in our fathers and mothers, pushing their way forward, making the new land."

With cheap land cleared, crops planted and harvested, markets opened, railroads built, towns plotted to flourish or die, the Jeffersonian dream remained; the place where the new generation was convinced that the dream would become real—again at a price of both success and failure--was in the towns. And the people who sought, like their parents, to make that dream real, to rise in a new age with new values that were destined to become firmly entrenched in a new American myth, found their futures in the towns and young cities of an old Northwest rapidly becoming the new Midwest. The myth by which these children of the pioneers lived, the myth driving Anderson's people and Lewis's and those of a new generation of American writers, to find both success and failure, was also described by Sherwood Anderson: "When the land was conquered fear remained, the fear of failure. Deep in our American souls the wolves still howl."

Anderson's wolves, metaphorical and psychic, provide the counterpoint to the reality underlying the new myth of the towns, the region, and, by century's end, that of the nation, the myth that had begun when Abraham Lincoln, just turned twenty-one, accompanied his father West from the forests of Perry County, Indiana, to break the virgin prairie soil of Illinois. Thomas Lincoln still pursued an earlier dream, but his son carried with him trinkets to trade to isolated housewives. And young Abraham sought his success, not on the open prairie but in the promising town of New Salem, and not as a farmer but as a surveyer, a merchant, and finally as a lawyer. In so doing, he provided the basis for the contradictory images that dominate our memories and our myths: that of the self-made man following the successful path from log cabin to White House, and conversely, the shadow of a solemn, tragic Lincoln brooding over an alien landscape.

For Lewis's people, the twin images--the shining path and the mournful face, the dream become reality and the faint howls of psychic wolves--compete in the arena of Gopher Prairie, of Zenith, of the world beyond. The new dream, however near it may be to reality, threatens to become a nightmare for Lewis's people, just as it had for their fathers who had been threatened by earlier, more literal horrors that had

already for their children become myth. But Thomas Lincoln and many of the others had moved on, as much from something as to something; from Kentucky to Indiana to Illinois, to empty, lonely old age, Thomas Lincoln went, and he died hopelessly in debt. At the same time his son moved from a moribund New Salem to Springfield and then to Washington to provide a foundation in fact for the myth that drove Lewis's people.

The psychic wolves that howl deep in the souls of Lewis's people, the muted echoes of those that had threatened their fathers and the nightmare that threatens them, is compunded not only of the fear of failure, but the fear, too, of the concurrent price of success. Unlike Lincoln, unlike their nineteenth-century frontier counterparts, Lewis's people are not big enough to manipulate the new environment as the con men, the braggarts, the heroes, the reformers, the romantics, the political figures of their fathers' generation had manipulated theirs. And always the fear of failure, of rejection, perhaps of a metaphorical assassin's bullet, haunts them. To succeed in the new age is to see a dream forever beyond reach, always beyond a psychic horizon. Lewis's twentieth-century nightmare is neither grotesque nor horrifying; it is, like his people, terrifyingly ordinary, at once both glittering with material promise and more spiritually bankrupt than they can imagine.

Thus, contrary to the popular and critical reaction to Lewis's works of the twenties and to his Nobel Award, neither Lewis's people nor the environment that envelopes them is ever the enemy; both are, as the Nobel Committee perceptively observed, authentically American, authentically Midwestern. Fools his people may be, or knaves, or weak-minded, or hopeless romantics, but they are never villains, nor are Gopher Prairie and Zenith suitable settings for Dante-esque comedies. Lewis's people, limited in the breadth and depth of their lives, frighteningly ordinary, subscribe to dreams beyond their comprehension, and like Americans of his generation and ours, perhaps even like some of us, are innocent in corruption, insignificant in rebellion, unwilling or unable to accept ultimate defeat. Yet all of them are haunted by the wolves in their souls.

For Lewis, too, the towns and the cities that some of them became, are, beneath the veneer of satire, of exaggeration, of pseudo-sophistication, of vulgarity, the ultimate culmination of an ambiguous dream in an inevitable American pragmatic reality. In them, his people, our people, must find whatever survival they can, on whatever terms—emotional, psychological, spiritual—they can manage. Out of all the protagonists in

the novels of the twenties, only Martin Arrowsmith and Lowell Schmalz survive unscathed; Arrowsmith because he had found a new god, Schmaltz because he is a fool, because for him dream and reality are one.

While Arrowsmith endures, a new American hero for a new age, caught up in the lonely pursuit of a new dream, the wolves not exorcised but rationalized, the others pay the price of survival. For Carol Kennicott, drawn in the image of Lewis's stepmother, Isabel Warner Lewis, who had been transplanted from Chicago to Sauk Centre, there is the troubled conviction that she may not have fought the good fight, but she has kept the faith; for Babbitt there is the temporary conviction that the bright new world that eluded him will be his son's; for Gantry, the new-found conviction of faith is only briefly marred by a glimpse of charming ankles and lively eyes; for Dodsworth, a renewed happiness is so complete that he forgets to yearn for Fran for two whole days. For each, momentary echoes of howls grown faint suggest the price of survival, of social acceptance, of personal defeat.

For each of Lewis's protagonists except Arrowsmith, the acolyte of the new faith, survival is defined in terms of renewed acceptance of the values that govern their society. He or she may keep the faith deep inside for however long it remains more than nostalgic memory, but the battle is lost, and reconstruction has begun. The eighteenth-century dream of an open society must give way to the material facts of life; cheap land, metaphorical rather than real for the sons and daughters of those who had come into the West, is still cheap, perhaps in price, and little more expensive in sweat and toil, but its cost in the fading memories of a happiness and fulfillment once pursued, now forever precluded, is beyond their comprehension.

Perhaps all of Lewis's protagonists deserve the indignity of their forced surrender to the values of a society once rude, energetic, dynamic, now determinedly but dully respectable, but not because they are mean-spirited or small-spirited or flawed caricatures of a once-great people who had crossed the mountains to bring order to a wilderness. Rather, they are, like their fathers and mothers, seekers after an elusive fulfillment. But with frontiers closed, sod broken, towns become cities, rivers bridged, roads paved, the new frontiers of the spirit are forever out of reach. There is no place to go--except to Washington or to Europe or to small-town salons or to second-rate English pulpits—and then home again, to Gopher Prairie, to Zenith, to the place and people they know.

Intensely if two-dimensionally human, likeable in their humanity—where in American

literature is there a more delightful scoundrel than the Reverend Dr. Elmer Gantry? --even in a sense admirable in their weakness, Lewis's people live their lives as tragicomic players reading lines they don't understand in a play that baffles them before a set that threatens to overwhelm them. But they go on, in determined dignity to the end that has been written for them, to await reviews that can only be mixed. And they remain players who know their lines but fail to understand their parts.

But they are also members of what Lewis has called the "cranky, hysterical, brave, mass-timorous, hard-minded, imaginative Chosen Race, the Americans." Their history, he added, for nearly a century, can best be read in the pages of the long sequence of catalogues issued by Sears Roebuck and Company. Lewis's people seek God in their dreams, their work, themselves, but they find instead that they are trapped not only by the things of a wilderness become affluent but by their very humanity. The seemingly new beginnings, the apparently happy endings, the reasonably possible escapes for his people are, Lewis makes clear, neither the result of their own failure or that of their society, but of the cosmic irony inherent in a dream become both reality and failure.

With the publication of Dodsworth in 1929, Lewis had not only completed the cycle of novels, beginning with Main Street, that were to earn him the Nobel Prize, but he had completed his best work, the novels for which we remember him, and he turned in new, less successful directions. At the time, the nature of Lewis's achievement in the 1920s, his fictional record of a people who had, in little more than two generations, passed from youth to maturity without having known adolescence, and a land that had moved from wilderness to order and from agricultural beginnings to industrial domination, was better understood by the members of a Swedish Academy than it was by American critics of his generation and ours. Much American misunderstanding then and now is the result of a single essay by one prominent critic. Mark Van Doren had, in his essay "The Revolt from the Village: 1920," published in The Nation in 1921, given a simplistic and misleading interpretation of Lewis's works and those of a generation of writers who had come out of the Midwest in the first two decades of the twentieth century to give direction and substance to American literature in our time. For Van Doren and his followers, the Eastern critics, academic critics, and popularizers, Lewis had revealed the narrowness, the pettiness, the provinciality, the naivete, the inherent dullness of the Midwestern towns and cities and their people as they came into maturity. Lewis, consequently, was seen not only as a satirist, but as an exposer

of the innate hypocrisy of his time, his place, his origins, and his people.

What the members of the Swedish Academy had seen, however, while his contemporary and later American critics did not, was the nature of Lewis's accomplishment. More than any other writer of his time and ours, he had rescued from myth an epic age, that of the Old Northwest as it became the new Midwest, its history in regional microcosm the history of the nation, and he has restored it to our usable past. The substance of his work during the decade of the twenties is neither the result of the "fearless exposure of humbuggery," as an early critic insisted, nor is it the product of the "satirist's hard eye and the romancer's soft heart," as a more recent critic has commented; it is the result of Lewis's determination to interpret the time, the place, and the people of his origins to the nation, the world, and themselves.

Lewis prided himself on the faithfulness with which he reproduced and exaggerated the America he knew, and because he gave free rein to his gift of mimicry it has become a critical cliche to insist that he is out of date, that the Midwestern America of the teens, twenties, thirties, and forties has long vanished, that today, as Geoffrey Moore comments, the bankers and lawyers of Gopher Prairie have been to Yale and the storekeepers to the state university, and, of course, three generations of Midwestern males—and many females—have become sophisticated through government-sponsored junkets to virtually every part of the world.

The implication of these observations is clear: that Lewis's works today have nothing to say, that he merits little more than a footnote in literary history. But what these simplistic conclusions ignore is that the bankers and lawyers have read Lewis at Yale and the shopkeepers at State as part of their new sophistication, and Babbitt, Man Trap, and Cass Timberlane were published by the thousands in Armed Forces Editions during World War II and read by many on those government-sponsored tours of Europe, Africa, the South Pacific, and the Far East. And in spite of the apparent or alleged transformation of American society, sixteen of Lewis's works are in print now in twenty-three American editions, and new generations of readers continue to recognize, if not themselves, certainly their contemporaries, their families, perhaps even their professors. They recognize, too, that Lewis's world, beneath its apparently dated veneer, is the world, that Babbitt's "carrying on" is today's "lifestyle," that the Good Citizen's League and the Booster's Club are only a generation removed from the Old Newsboys, the Downtown Coaches Club, and the Chamber of Commerce, that the Elks, Rotary, and the Lions Clubs are with us yet, perhaps more democratic but

no more imaginative than in 1924. And what Lewis might have done with the Reverend Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, and an actor in the White House whose favorite predecessor is Calvin Coolidge! To emphasize Lewis's shortcomings as a writer is to ignore the accuracy with which he defined our lives and our world as we move toward the last decade of the twentieth century.

Lewis was not a great writer, nor perhaps was he good enough to win the Nobel Prize in literature—although who today remembers or reads R. F. A. Sully-Prodhomme, Theodor Mommsen, Selma Lagerlof, or dozens of others who received the award? But we continue to remember and read Lewis, and the best of his works, those that have added words to our language, those that give us greater insight into the moral shortcomings of our times and ourselves, those that define the victimization of the individual in a mass society, deserve better of us than we have been willing to give.

A SINCLAIR LEWIS CHECKLIST: 1976-1985

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The following checklist collects additions to Sinclair Lewis: A Reference Guide, by Robert E. Fleming and Esther Fleming: Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980. I have examined all but a half dozen items, which are marked with an asterisk (*).

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