

THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS
OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

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PREFACE

A few years ago I read, by chance, Sinclair Lewis's novel Ann Vickers, published in 1933, and I was surprised to find in its story the concepts and rhetoric of a feminist movement as contemporary as the current ideas and expressions being espoused by the various women's liberation and rights groups. The question of women's roles occurred to me: are women's roles today different from those in the earlier part of the century? What are the changes, if any, in their roles in fiction? I was particularly interested in Lewis's fiction because he was from the Midwest, wrote about middle-class people, and remains a severe critic of our towns and cities as well as of our social institutions and values. A study directed towards examining the images of women in his novels, which cover a period of about thirty-seven years of our history, would, I thought, not only shed light on who the midwestern woman is, but also on who we are all becoming.

Several people were especially helpful in assisting me with this study. The expertise in reading the chapters and valuable comments of my thesis adviser, Dr. Mary Rohrberger, enabled me to shape what at times seemed like a morass of material. Also, I am fortunate to have had as members of my thesis committee Dr. Clinton Keeler, Dr. Jennifer Kidney, and Prof. John Schweitzer, whose constructive comments and encouraging remarks made the work seem lighter.

Finally, I thank my husband, Roland, who shared the good moments as well as the bad, each step of the way, and who understood it all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over a period of thirty-nine years Sinclair Lewis published twenty-three novels, two collections of short stories, three plays, essays, reviews, and ephemera. He recorded middle-class America through periods ranging from the suffragist movement, prohibition, the depression, and two world wars. D. J. Dooley comments on Lewis's scope: "Looking outward rather than inward, he attempted to analyze the forces which affected the behavior of his fellow citizens in a confusing transitional period; he tried to discover what were the sources of hope and frustration in the lives of typical young women, white collar workers, engineers, and garage mechanics of his time."¹ Dooley adds that "he was influenced by H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, and Thorstein Veblen; his themes were: (1) the barriers of provincialism; (2) the waste of mis-education; (3) the possibilities of socialism; (4) the promise of science and technology; (5) the precariousness of marriage in modern society, especially as it is affected by job security."² Writers Carl Van Doren and E. M. Forster use such adjectives to describe Lewis's ability to record the ambience of the social scene as seismographic and photographic, respectively.

The subject of this work is the image of women in Lewis's novels; the original intention was to examine the American woman portrayed by a writer whose method of writing lent itself to the socio-cultural approach of criticism or examination, but after the novels were analyzed, some of the

portrayals were found to function aesthetically within the structure of the novel, as well as thematically as specific social types, so that the approach varies from the social-cultural to the formal. Further, this writer felt that one could find, in Lewis's fiction, many facets which Taine said "must be the principal method by which society and men are observed, analyzed, and classified. Fiction should be the scientific laboratory of society--the laboratory in which the complex components of our social system are mixed with each other, so that the race may watch the experiment, see the result, and be better able to make decisions affecting its life."³

By examining the roles of women in American society in the literature of an author whose photographic method and seismographic responses trace and reflect, over a long period in our history, a variety of images of women, we can, by "observing, analyzing, and classifying," better imagine ourselves.

Lewis's approach to his characterizations varies from the realistic to the satiric, or from the fully representational to the caricaturistic. With a major figure like Carol Kennicott, Lewis supplies many details concerning myriad aspects of her thoughts and actions, but with Peony Planish, Lewis limits the details to those aspects of her nature that reveal her acquisitiveness and her degenerate, rococo taste. This latter method, the satiric, is indicative of his concern with social injustices and reform. Sheldon Grebstein comments on this method of characterization, which he says stems from the Theophrastian Character:

The "Character" writer differs from the novelist in two special ways: (1) he deliberately ignores all qualities which would distinguish an individual; (2) he selects, invents, and borrows from a large number of individuals only those qualities or mannerisms or attitudes which express a particular type or trait

(the Flatterer, the Braggart, the Pretender to Learning); then he makes these into a composite character who becomes the perfect and typical representative of the desired trait. . . . The novel is an imitation of life, eliciting a direct response from the reader and permitting the reader's projection into it, while the creator of "Character" deliberately kept the reader and the work apart in order to evoke an intellectual response, an evaluation.⁴

Often Lewis's intention is to evoke an evaluation of the society or the forces that are shaping the characters, and one technique of his method is to show the relationship between the character and his possessions. He said, "'By your eyebrow pencils, your encyclopedias, and your alarm clocks shall ye be known.'"⁵ For example, if Lewis wants to emphasize a grasping, acquisitive woman like Fran Dodsworth or Caprice Chart he describes their bedrooms, elaborate affairs full of silver toilette articles, lavender chaise lounges, damask drapes, and other expensive clutter. Edith Cortright, on the other hand, enjoys the spartan simplicity of a small Italian villa of bare walls and shining stone floors, an indication that Edith's spirit reflects Lewis's deepest values. And Leora Arrowsmith, who, Lewis says, best exemplifies qualities of loyalty and love, is free from all acquisitive instincts; even her clothes show her disregard for appearance and fashion: buttons missing, a spot here and there, an uneven hemline. Another factor Lewis uses to shape or mold a character is that character's point of view which Lewis delineates in a ratio of realism to sentimentalism. Lewis's use of the two terms is the following: the realist views the world primarily intellectually or objectively, seeing behind appearances or through pretense, sham, and shoddy values; the sentimentalist views the world primarily through his or her feelings and emotions, and consequently, although the view may be enchanting, it often proves to be distorted. For example, Carol Milford

in Main Street views life in the small town of Gopher Priarie (before she actually goes there) through some blurred photographs that her husband-to-be, Will Kennicott, trying to entice her to marry him, shows her. What Carol sees in the photographs about Gopher Prairie springs from her romantic feelings--a pastoral beauty surrounding simple, hard-working, kind people; she sees herself in the town working hand in hand with the people to enrich their lives; in short, Carol's view is sentimental, distorted by her feelings for Will as well as by a thousand myths about the sunny decencies and the pure heart of the American village. When Carol actually goes to live in Gopher Prairie she views the town objectively and finds a vast distance between her closely observed impressions and her preconceived, sentimental view; hence Carol's character is shaped by the conflicting elements within her of realism and sentimentalism. Thus Lewis shapes character in two important ways: through the external (objects, possessions, etc.), he communicates the internal, and through point of view he projects thoughts and feelings which are of primarily two types, the realistic and the sentimental.

For the purpose of this work, the women in Lewis's novels are classified in seven chapters: the first deals with prototypes found in his apprenticeship novels; the second with Carol Kennicott and other wives who live in a small midwestern town in the years before the 1920's; the third with wives in cities and suburbs who, under the impact of mass production and mass communication become stereotypes; the fourth with an acquisitive woman, a product of a society bent upon consumption, who seeks culture and people for her own adornment; the fifth with women who concentrate their lives in careers rather than domestic affairs; the sixth with wives whose relationships with their husbands are, to a degree, destructive; and the

seventh with a woman who represents Lewis's ideal companion or wife.

Two major goals are sought in the course of this work: to define and classify types of American women, as Lewis delineated them, and to trace the pattern of development or change in the image of women in his novels over the period in which he wrote, from 1914 to 1951.

ENDNOTES

¹D. J. Dooley, The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 53.

²Dooley, pp. 58-9.

³Everett Carter, "Realism to Naturalism: Towards a Philosophy of Literary Realism" in Theories of American Realism, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer and Malcolm A. Griffith (New York: MacMillan, 1972), p. 385.

⁴Sheldon Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), p. 162.

⁵Grebstein, p. 163.

CHAPTER II

PROTOTYPES IN THE EARLY NOVELS

Sinclair Lewis wrote five novels before Main Street was published. They are, for the most part, breezy romances---light fiction written to appeal to readers looking for adventure and romance in swift-moving plots. In these apprenticeship novels, however, are the outlines of themes and traces of characterizations that appear repeatedly in his novels throughout his long writing career. For example, in the search for images of women in his early work, one finds four major types: the bohemian or "hobohemian," as Lewis calls a group of dilettantes who dabble in "culture," and who take puerile delight in deviating from the conventional; the very nice, respectable housewife or "the pretty pink face," as one of Lewis's characters calls them; the daring, imaginative "playmate," earliest of Lewis's romantic heroines; the career woman, ill-trained for jobs but persisting and determined to shape a better life for herself.

If one doesn't count the potboiler Hike and the Areoplane, a boys' adventure story, that Lewis wrote under the pseudonym "Tom Graham," Our Mr. Wrenn is Sinclair Lewis's first novel; it was published in 1914. The protagonist is a shy, lonely clerk living in lower Manhattan, but dreaming of travel and adventure. When he is not working he escapes from the gloom of Mrs. Lapp's boarding house by going to a "movie house" on Fourteenth Street called the "Nickeloron." It is at the movies that Mr. Wrenn finds material for his dreams, which like the dreams of Lewis's other

protagonists will cause conflicts; the wrong dreams must be resolved before the hero or heroine can find happiness. For example, as late as in his last novel World So Wide, Lewis's hero dreams of success, wealth, and a beautiful companion, a dream which he actually achieves before he realizes that "it seemed to him a dream of luxury fabulous and wasteful and a little vulgar."¹ Mr. Wrenn, too, like the later hero, must search beyond the easy dream for lasting happiness.

This dream often includes the wrong woman, one who is unsuitable for the hero. Shy Mr. Wrenn's first dream of a woman focuses on Istra Nash, a splendid looking creature who might have stepped off the screen, but who is actually first seen by Mr. Wrenn in Mrs. Cottermole's tea room in England where Mr. Wrenn has ventured forth in search of excitement and romance after having been unexpectedly left a small inheritance. He gapes when he sees her: "Her red hair, red as a poinsetta, parted and drawn severely back, made a sweep about the dead white skin of her bored sensitive face. Bored blue-grey eyes, with pathetic crescents of faintly violet-hued wrinkles at the side. Thin, long cheeks, a delicate nose, and a straight strong mouth of thin but startlingly red lips."²

Istra Nash is the first of Lewis's "bohemians": those persons who attend to art but rarely work at it, who are easily bored and impetuous in their behavior, restless, yet imaginative, women who disdain the plodders like Mr. Wrenn but need their steadfastness. Istra is all of these things but she is also a woman who understands "play," which is the ability of two people to enter into a world of their own making, even if it is only over a Sunday walk or an afternoon cup of tea, in order to escape from their grim surroundings and deadening routines. Sheldon Grebstein, in his book Sinclair Lewis, notes that Istra Nash is a dual

prototype: "She represents not only Lewis's dislike for the bohemian (the "hobohemian" he called it), but also his rejection of the beautiful, clever, alluring, intellectual, yet emotionally shallow and destructive woman, a species culminating in Fran Dodsworth."³

Mr. Wrenn finds Istra, with her slim dresses, uncorseted figure, her leaf-green silk kimono, silver vanity articles, and gold cigarette case with long black Russian cigarettes in it, a revelation. "Gee! I bet that red-headed lady would be interestin' to know" (p. 77).

As Istra is momentarily at loose ends she takes up with Mr. Wrenn because his type amuses her. She is bored by Interesting Persons whom she defines: "An interesting person is a writer or an artist or an editor or a girl who's been in Holloway Jail or Cannongate for suffraging, or anyone else who depends on an accident to be tolerable" (p. 80). She takes Mr. Wrenn to the studio of Olympia Johns to introduce him to a group of people who are gesticulating through the smoke-filled room as they discuss Rodin, suffragism, varietism in sexual relationships, socialism, and the education of female children.

In her plan to teach Mr. Wrenn "how to play," she suggests, that same evening, that they throw on some hiking clothes and walk (after a brief train ride in a third-class compartment) to an inn, in Aengusmere, where some of the artists and writers Istra knows are staying. So it is that the amazed but willing Mr. Wrenn is dragged off into the night for tramping the English countryside with Istra. Sleeping in haystacks, walking in the rain, boiling eggs and tea along the roadside, Mr. Wrenn learns the fun of adventure.

However, an important episode occurs at a temperance inn when he and Istra stop for supper. It exposes a major flaw in the woman as "playmate."

She is a snob, intolerant towards those who do not know how to play. As Mr. Wrenn and Istra eat their meal, she complains that the inn is full of tourists--probably, she sneers, from "Davenport or Omaha." They are impossible, she concludes, because she has overheard them talking about "quaint English flavor," and nothing Mr. Wrenn can say will dissuade her (p. 120). Thus, the woman of imagination, games, and play is flawed by a disdain for those who are seemingly lacking in the play she fancies is a superior attitude.

Mr. Wrenn, however, is still enchanted by Istra, the first bright person he has met: "Mostly she talked of the boulevards and Pere Dureon, of Debussy and artichokes, in little laughing sentences that sprang like fire out of the dimness of the mist" (p. 116).

And he begins to learn to play. After they arrive, tired and rumped, at Aengusmere, Istra retires, but Mr. Wrenn is inspired to new energy by the thought of creating a special supper for Istra. He buys orchids for their table and a new Norfolk jacket and orange tie for himself; he then orders a special "high-tea" to be prepared with special dishes and to be served on the best china; he prepares a fanciful invitation and creates a mood and setting for a princess. But the play comes to an abrupt end when he learns that the restless Istra has impetuously fled for Paris leaving a short note saying goodbye. Never again does Mr. Wrenn play.

After Istra and England, Mr. Wrenn sensibly returns to his work; but he has the good luck to meet a man who introduces him to the joys of a jolly boarding house, where he meets a "pretty pink-face," whom Istra calls a type of wholesome, sweet, homebody woman. She is Nelly Croubel who embodies the perfect mother, housewife type, but who, also, is a career woman of sorts: she is a sweet, kind woman who is working at

Wanamacy's as an assistant buyer in the lingerie department. Nelly is only a half-hearted career woman waiting for the right person to marry so that she can settle into domesticity.

When she and Mr. Wrenn get married they take a flat in the Bronx where Nelly prepares sausages and "s'prise" deserts for their suppers; and although she misses her job because her days are long, she looks forward to that house in Jersey where, she blushes, their "kiddies" can play in the nice yard and she can keep a garden: for this she has "infinite hope" (p. 239).

It is an aspect of Mr. Wrenn's maturation that he has not succumbed to the dream of Istra; he knows that Nelly will be the best companion for him. Professor Grebstein notes that Mr. Wrenn "has learned enough about life and himself to be able to conquer his dangerous feelings for Istra and to choose Nelly Croubel. . . ."4

In The Trail of the Hawk, published in 1915, Lewis portrays three types of women: the girl from the East who is the "playmate"; the girl from back home who represents the respectable housewife; and the "hobo-hemian" who infests the parties and the studios in the city. The character of Istra Nash has been split, as it were, into two new persons: the "play" aspect of her nature is invested in the heroine, Ruth Winslow, and the destructive, "bohemian" aspect has been relegated to a minor, fringe figure, nicknamed "Tottykins." Nelly Croubel's type is repeated in Gertie Cowles, but the respectability, so appealing to Mr. Wrenn, is only restrictive to Carl Ericson.

The story is about Carl who grows up in the Middlewest, in a town not far from Gopher Prairie called Joralemon. He yearns for adventure and unlike Mr. Wrenn, who is not equipped for it outside the "movie house,"

Carl has the drive for real adventure. He becomes an aviator; he is a "hawk," a creature daring and brave, seeking unexplored trails.

The women he is attracted to reflect his degree of development for adventure: the first is Gertie Cowles, the girl down the block with the white muslin dresses, blue sashes, and a piano in her parlor; the second is Ruth Winslow, the woman from the East who fascinates Carl by her imagination and desire to explore the unknown.

Gertie Cowles is the richest child in Joralemon. When Carl first sees her she is described: "She was a very dressy and complacent child, possessed not only of a clean white muslin dress with three rows of tucks, immaculate bronze boots, and a green tam o' shanter, but also of a large hair ribbon, a ribbon sash, and a silver chain with a large, gold-washed, heart-shaped locket. She was softly plump, softly gentle of face, softly brown of hair, and softly pleasant of speech."⁵ Gertie is the stereotype of the sweet child in fiction who grows up to represent the sweetheart on the lace valentine, who upholds virtue and respectability, performing immaculately her duties as wife and mother. After Our Mr. Wrenn this type of woman is never chosen by the hero. In Lewis's novel The God Seeker published in 1949, thirty-four years after The Trail of the Hawk, the Gertie Cowles type is present in the character of Huldah Purdick: "Huldah Purdick had warm brown hair, not too neat, a face round and fresh and often dimpling, earnest eyes that could be gay with people whom she trusted. . . . She was in some peril of becoming too plump and heavy-breasted, but she fought it with vigor and cheerfulness."⁶ Huldah, like Gertie, is warmly feminine, but the edges of her being are too soft, too passive, and like Gertie she will not be the wife of the Lewis hero who chooses the sharply defined, daring woman.

It is not, however, just this passiveness that discourages Carl from choosing Gertie to be his wife when they grow up; it is her attitude which is safe and respectable that eventually cools his attraction for her and it is present in one of her first conversations with him: "'Are you a nice boy? . . . Maybe my mamma will let me play with you if you are a nice boy'" (p. 10).

After they have grown up and Carl is well-known for his skill and bravery as an aviator and he is working in a profitable business in New York City he renews his acquaintanceship with Gertie, who with her mother and brother have moved to the city. Gertie is still a very nice girl giving chafing-dish parties where her guests do "stunts" and play charades and Gertie performs her rendition of a dance, after the painting Bringing in the Sheaves. Gertie doesn't work, it's not really respectable; she takes dancing lessons until she finds out that, too, is really work so she takes up, instead, ceramics. When Carl tries to warn her that she is wasting her time and is in danger of becoming a dilettante he uses the word "hell," in his excitement of trying to make her see her error. Instead of listening to the substance of his speech, Gertie flies at him for using such vulgar language, telling him that it is not nice. Carl finally realizes that, as attracted to her as he has been, she can no longer figure seriously in his future. He understands that Gertie will make a rarebit with the same skill and controlled emotion as she will dance or apply a ceramic glaze but that she will claw and scrap with passion to uphold the restricting nice values of manners and of propriety, as she knows it.

The second type of woman in the novel who does not figure seriously in Carl's life but who is nevertheless a part of the scene, influencing,

in some degree, the other women, is the bohemian "Tottykins":

She was of the kind who look at men appraisingly, and expect them to come up, be unduly familiar, and be crushed.

A small, thin female with bobbed hair was Tottykins, who kept her large husband and her fat, white grub of an infant somewhere in the back blocks. She fingered a long, gold religious chain with her square, stubby hand, while she gazed into men's eyes with what she privately termed "daring frankness."

. . . Tottykins the intensely cultured and inquisitive about life, the primitively free and pervasively original, who announced in public places that she wanted always to live like the spirit of the Dancing Bacchante statue, but had the assistant rector of St. Orgul's in for coffee, every fourth Monday evening (pp. 243-4).

This type of woman, ridiculous in her postulating and hypocritical behavior represents the fragmenting of the woman in a society where women's roles were undergoing rapid sociological changes. A world war, industrial growth, and the tremendous influence of mass communications, in the field of travel, as well as in radio and movies, had brought foreign manners, customs, and life styles close to home. Another important change was the migration to the city for individuals, both men and women, as well as families, to find work to replace the lonely, back-breaking work of the farm. It is no wonder that women, finding possibilities for new roles, and new freedoms, and yet not knowing how to cope, often appeared ridiculous.

The third type of woman is the heroine, Ruth Winslow, the girl from the East, from drawing rooms full of laughter and good talk about books and music, the girl whose imagination invigorates each day and whose daring leads her to see and understand life beyond those drawing rooms. At least this is how Carl Ericson sees her. He is smitten at the first sight of Ruth, on a trolley, and notices that she is a "dark-haired girl

with humor and excitement about life in her face. . . ." (p. 253). He speculates that she is "born a good comrade. Her laughter marked her as one of the women whom earthquake and flood and childbearing cannot rob of a sense of humor. . . . There was no hint of the coquette about her" (p. 255). In Ruth there are qualities that will appear in all of Lewis's heroines; they will be good comrades, willing to share adventure or to attempt the unconventional, and they will do it with humor and style.

Ruth is the first of the real "playmates." Martin Light, in The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis, defines the concept of "play":

"The Adventure of Love" is the title of Part III of the novel. We are now fully exposed to Lewis's concept of "play," which he had introduced briefly through Istra Nash in Our Mr. Wrenn. Play expresses Lewis's romantic, as opposed to his satiric, view of life. It is what most of his women and many of his men yearn for. It is their answer to oppressive reality. Play means games, make-believe, fantasy, and escape into nature. It nourishes the flagging spirit. The dreams are lost, childhood has flown, but the yearning remains, and an unhappy man or woman, knowing no way to recover, feels an upsurging hope in the discovery of a playfellow; they will be "kids," or brothers and sisters to each other.⁷

Ruth and Carl exemplify this concept; they share a love for the romantic and for fancy. One spring day, as they are walking in New York City, she tells him, "'You've guessed my secret, I'm the Spirit of Spring . . . I thought it all out and decided that I shall be the American Sappho. At any moment I am quite likely to rush madly across the pavement and sit down on the curb and indite several stanzas on the back of a calling-card, while the crowd galumps around me in an awed ring. . . . Buy me a book with spring in it, and a princess, and a sky like this corn-flower blue with bunny rabbit clouds'" (p. 334). As they continue their walk Ruth

insists the people are "'like maids of honor and young knights, disguised in modern dress! They're charming!'" (p. 335).

Carl feels a twinge of disappointment. Elegant people, he thinks, are useless; but under her spell he gives himself up to the pleasures of youth and love: "It was too great a day for earnestness about anything less than joy and life; a day for shameless luxuriating in the sun, and for wearing bright things. In shop windows with curtains of fluted silk were silver things and jade; satin gowns and shoe buckles of rhinestones" (p. 335).

Under the influence of youth and love and spring Carl accepts Ruth's romantizing about the idle, Park Avenue strollers, but Ruth's attitude will become a serious conflict in Lewis's future heroine "playmates." Ruth also exposes, in her little game, another attitude which will become destructive in human relationships. It is her need for attention, and her egocentric position in relation to others. She will be writing poetry while "the crowd galumps around me in an awed ring." It is just this sort of posturing that Lewis's hero, Sam Dodsworth, will find intolerable in his wife Fran, and Hayden Chart, thirty-six years later, in World So Wide, despises in his wife Caprice. Ruth Winslow's speech pattern is another clue that the playmate heroine will change into a much less attractive character. She speaks like Istra Nash, "little laughing sentences that spring like fire," but embedded in the sentence is the superficiality of a woman like Fran Dodsworth, who also talks much like Istra and Ruth--whimsical, bright talk--but who is a shallow, acquisitive, and destructive woman.

Another aspect of this scene is that it is rare in later novels that Lewis's characters find happiness or even momentary enchantment in the

city which in Lewis's work is a metaphor for eroding forces on human nature. In Hawk, Ruth and Carl "play" outside of the city; hiking in the Palisades, skiing on wooded hillsides, picnicking on secluded beaches, swimming in mountain lakes in the Berkshires. When Ruth and Carl marry and take an apartment in the city their love encounters difficulties. Ruth cannot sustain, through the tedium of her days while Carl is at work, the romance of their early courtship. As she peers out her window she sees, in the nearby tenement buildings, the countless faces of women leaning on window sills, looking vacantly into the streets for some sign of excitement or drama to alleviate the grinding dullness of days spent in listless, slovenly housework and poverty. Ruth is depressed by such sights and her relationship with Carl loses some of its enchantment.

Although Ruth and Carl's marriage takes up little space in the novel, Lewis does introduce, at least, some of the conflicts, which in his later novels, he will explore in depth. They quarrel because he works too hard at a job he does not really respect, and she has no work to occupy her. They quarrel seriously over a friend of Carl's whom she finds boorish. Over this disagreement Carl leaves their apartment and spends the night walking and thinking about their life together, reaching the conclusion that they must run away from the pressures and routines of the city which are destroying them. He returns to the apartment to tell Ruth that "'People don't run away from slavery often enough. And so they don't ever get to do real work either. . . . Perhaps if enough of us run away from nice normal grinding we'll start people wondering just why they should go on toiling to produce a lot of booze and clothes and things that nobody needs'" (p. 407).

They decide to sail for Argentina, where Carl has taken a demotion in order to work in a new country, fantasizing that all will be happy. The novel ends as they sail on the S.S. Sangreal; the ship's name, the holy grail, and symbolic of their search for happiness.

In writing the happy ending Lewis has left unresolved the conflicts in the Ericson's marriage but the problems have been, in part, presented, to be dealt with in later novels. It will be thirty-six more years of writing before Lewis will find a resolution for his hero and heroine and that it should come in a weak novel should not detract from the essential significance of the meaning. It is not by chance that in World So Wide, an identical ending occurs. Hayden and Ruth Chart are sailing, from Italy to Symrna, to Alexandria, to distant cities and countries to find, as the youthful Carl and Ruth promised each other, "new horizons for each other" (p. 404). The difference is, in this novel published posthumously, that the conflicts have been resolved, in part, by Lewis's having created the ideal woman.

Sinclair Lewis was married to Grace Livingstone Hegger in 1914; she is a model for Lewis's early heroines. Sheldon Grebstein notes: ". . . most of the romantic love in Lewis's early novels is abstracted from his own courtship and marriage of Grace Livingstone Hegger . . . we know also that Lewis used some of her experiences and characteristics in his portrayal of Una Golden in The Job. In short, Lewis's sophisticated and eastern heroines are based on his first wife, who was a stylish dresser, who had a British accent which by her own admission varied in degree with the company she was in . . . and who, we may infer, was a snob on more than one occasion."⁸

She was much like Ruth Winslow in her speech, dress, attitudes (toward the "galumping crowds"), and willingness for "daventuring," the Lewises' word for adventuring together. Lewis drew heavily on types he knew well; he was to use Dorothy Thompson, his second wife, and Marcella Powers, his companion for five years, for models in his later novels, drawing upon them for his fictional characters.

In The Job, published in 1917, Lewis portrays the prototype of the career woman; he uses Grace Hegger's experiences as a junior editor for Vogue Magazine where she was working during their courtship and early months of marriage, in his account of the heroine's career.

It is the story of Una Golden, a young woman from Panama, Pennsylvania, a one-street, sleepy town, who is left penniless with a mother to support, when her father dies. Una has three choices: because she is attractive she may marry one of the local boys she has grown up with and become a housewife, hoping that her husband will accept her mother in their household with good grace; or, because she is not in love, she may yet choose to stay in Panama where she feels secure among the people she knows, but having to work in some mean paying position such as that of librarian, milliner, or seamstress, living meagerly and timidly with her mother in a couple of rooms; her third choice is to take her mother and move to the city--in this case, New York City--and to look for a promising job which will enable her to shape a life of possibilities other than the slow, thin-gruel existence she knows awaits them in Panama. This last choice is not without its difficulties. Una has no training for a city job; the pressures of competition will be great and she doesn't know the ways of the business world, and also there is the unfriendly resistance

of society, in general, towards a single woman trying to shape a career; nevertheless, Una chooses the city.

One of Lewis's recurrent themes is the necessity for a person, man or woman, to find fulfillment through work. Women are often handicapped by undirected leisure; they become discontented consumers and legendary naggers; they do not have the self respect of the non-parasitic individual. In Main Street, one of Carol Kennicott's problems is that she is unable to use her energies in work that the community respects (which is not the lip service paid to those who volunteer for charitable duties) and she becomes a figure of mild ridicule, a butterfly beating its wings against its sense of ineptitude and uselessness. Una's fate is different; she is, through circumstances, forced to train herself and to work, which will enable her to extricate herself from the usual fate of women: the tedium of indifferent marriages or the circumscribed life of the poorly paid, meanly employed.

In order to show the vast step that Una was taking it is convenient to begin with an examination of her mother, a woman who is untrained for work except for the tasks of housekeeping and child raising and who, for mental stimulation, lives on the small romantic dreams she feeds by reading pulp fiction and women's magazines:

Mrs. Golden was one of the women who aspired just enough to be vaguely discontented; not enough to make them toil at the acquisition of understanding and knowledge. She had floated into a comfortable semi-belief in a semi-Christian Science, and she read novels with a conviction that she would have been a romantic person "if she hadn't married Mr. Golden--not but what he's a fine man and very bright and all, but he hasn't got much imagination or any, well, romance". . . . She really did like people, liked to give cookies to the neighborhood boys, and if--you weren't impatient about her slackness--you found her a wistful and touching figure in her slight youthfulness and in the ambition to be a romantic

personage, a Marie Antoinette or a Mrs. Grover Cleveland, which ambition she still retained at fifty-five.⁹

If necessity had not intervened Una might have married and become very much like her mother, for the "Goldens were too respectable to permit her to have a job, and too poor to permit her to go to college" (p. 5). Ever since high school Una had to occupy herself by attending gossip parties, keeping house, and though she reads voluminously she reads indiscriminately. At twenty-four Una is thrown into making a decision which will change her debilitating hum-drum life: "All these years she had . . . been trying to find work that needed her. Her father's death had freed her; had permitted her to toil for her mother, cherish her, be regarded as useful. Instantly--still without learning that there was such a principle as feminism--she had become a feminist, demanding the world and all the fullness thereof as her field of labor" (p. 25).

With the small sum of money from Mr. Golden, Una and her mother depart for New York City where they lease a walk-up apartment and where Una enrolls in a business course. She learns typing, shorthand, and other secretarial skills before she hunts for a job which she eventually gets at the Motor and Gas Gazette, a trade magazine, for eight dollars a week. Her work proves to be enervating and tedious; she types copy and files letters day after day, week after week, month after month, becoming slightly stooped and nearsighted. She has noticed that, "Women aren't trusted in business, and you can't count without responsibility" (p. 72). However her spirits are not entirely extinguished by the deadly routine because she finds companionship in her fellow office mates, especially with Walter Babson, a briskly moving young man full of ideas for his work and smiles for Una.

They fall in love. For the most part Lewis depicts their romance in embarrassing, slick-magazine prose: "Una beamed and enjoyed her boy's youthful enthusiasm. Mother of the race, ancient tribal woman, medieval chatelaine, she was just now; kin to all the women who, in any age, have clapped their hands to their men's boasting" (p. 75). Or, "She encircled his neck with her arm, laid her cheek beside his chin, rejoiced boundlessly in the man roughness of his chin, of his coat sleeve, the man scent of him--scent of his tobacco and soap and hair. She opened her lips to his" (p. 87). Walter Babson exclaims, through tattered images, reminiscent of The Romance of the Rose: "'I feel as though I were a robber who had gone crashing right through the hedge around your soul, and then after that come out in a garden--the sweetest, coolest garden . . . I will try to be good to you--and for you'" (p. 87).

It is fortunate that the romance of Una and Walter is not the major focus of the novel; however, two points about their relationship need to be made; one is peripheral to their courtship and concerns a statement Walter makes to Una: "'I'm really as mid-Victorian as you are, in knowledge. Only I'm modern by instinct, and the combination will always keep me half baked . . . I'm a Middle Western farmer, and yet I regard myself about half the time as an Oxford man with a training in Paris'" (p. 104).

This is a statement Lewis might have made about himself. Certainly this schism is apparent in many of his heroes and heroines and it undoubtedly affected the way in which they view the world and the persons they love. For example, in the Trail of the Hawk, Carl Ericson imposes on Ruth Winslow an aura of glamor and enchantment, seeing in her all of those qualities which he, the "Middle Western farmer," lacks. This view of Ruth, this half-seeing, causes conflicts in their relationship because

Ruth cannot sustain his image; she cannot supply all of the romance and enchantment that the man, because of his lack of understanding and his immaturity, craves. As the Lewis heroes mature the women are relieved of this burden. This is not to say, however, that the woman does not, initially, enjoy her role as enchantress; she, as much as the man, falls into the trap. The second point is that Lewis could, occasionally, honestly depict sexual feelings. Walter and Una hike up through the Palisades and at one point he gently unfastens the top button of her blouse and tenderly kisses her neck. His action leads to a discussion of their feelings for each other, their predicaments which prevent them from marrying, and their scruples which prevent them from having an affair. It is shortly after this that Walter takes an offer for a job in St. Louis, leaving Una, who knows it is better for them both, terribly lonely without him. With a group of friends she returns to the scene of his kiss and while the group is picnicking she walks off by herself: "She sat alone by the river. Suddenly, with a feverish wrench, she bared her breast, then shook her head angrily, rearranged her blouse, went back to the group, and was unusually gay. . . ." (p. 108). The passage contrasts sharply with such superficial statements as, "Una beamed and enjoyed her boy's youthful enthusiasm."

The story continues with Una's struggles against loneliness and with the treadmill of her office routine. Her job seems to be a deadend; she makes little progress and her future looks bleak. At this point the burden of her mother increases. Mrs. Golden is described bitterly, a contrast from the earlier description: "The woman who had aspired and been idle while Captain Golden had toiled for her, who had mourned and been idle while Una had planned for her, and who had always been a

compound of selfishness and love, was more and more accustomed to taking her daughter's youth to feed her comfort and her canary--a bird of atrophied voice and uncleanly habit" (p. 96). Mrs. Golden loves romantic novels: "Mrs. Golden loved to sit soft and read stories of young love. Partly by nature and partly because she had learned that thus she could best obtain her wishes, she was as gentle as a well-filled cat and delicate as a tulle scarf. She was admiringly adhesive to Una as she had been to Captain Golden, and she managed the new master of the house just as she managed the former one. She listened to dictates pleasantly, was perfectly charmed at suggestions that she do anything, and then gracefully forgot" (p. 97). Mrs. Golden is a version of Nelly Croubel, the sweet respectable wife, but from Nelly to Gertie Cowles to Mrs. Golden this type has changed into a less than admirable character.

Una's mother dies and although this relieves Una of some responsibility it also throws her into real loneliness. Alone she battles for her life, but forces are against her because society itself does not approve of what she is doing. Lewis illustrates this point in a scene in which an anonymous man, riding a trolley, is thinking about girls like Una whom he has noticed on public transportation: He often aphorized, "Frightfully hackneyed to say, 'women's place is in the home,' but really you know, these women going to offices, vulgarizing all their fine womanliness, and this shrieking sisterhood going in for suffrage and Lord knows what. Give me the reticences of the harem rather than one of these office-women with gum-chewing vacuities. None of them clever enough to be tragic!" He was ever so whimsical about the way in which the suffrage movement had cheated him of the chance to find a "grande amoureuse" (p. 127).

So far Una has not considered herself or her position in relation to outside factors or conditions; she is, for example, unaware of the opinions of the anonymous man, or the suffrage movement, except as a name, and she is unaware of the resistance to women like herself; she only knows that she is not getting anywhere and that she is becoming frustrated. Her frustration is delineated in a scene in which she expresses an inordinate loathing for a wet-grey rag lying in the corner of the office washroom. It becomes an objectification of her fears and frustrations; to her it represents her predicament, and Una becomes frantic. She goes from job to job hoping for a break and not finding one. She moves into a women's residence hotel to alleviate her loneliness and there, at least, she begins to find relief from her introspection through the expansion of her awareness caused by her exposure to other women's ideas and experiences.

She meets Mamie Magen, the hard working socialist who exclaims that "the capitalists with their profit-sharing and search for improved methods of production were as sincere in desiring the scientific era as were the most burning socialists. . . ." (p. 183). She meets Mrs. Lawrence, the divorcee, who tells her that women are exploited on their jobs: "The bosses give us a lot of taffy and raise their hats--but they don't raise our wages. . . . Women are a lot more conscientious on jobs than men are--but that's because we're fools; you don't catch men staying till six-thirty because the boss has shystered all afternoon and wants to catch up on his correspondence . . . most of the women--Lord! they're just cowed sheep" (p. 173). And Una notices that women together are quite different from women with men: "They were all splendidly casual and wise and good-looking. With no men about to intimidate them--or to

attract them--they made a solid phalanx of bland, satisfied femininity, and Una felt more barred out than in an office. She longed for a man who would be curious about her. . . ." (p. 175). Later she finds out that Mrs. Lawrence, too, thinks about men a great deal: "'I want love and that's all there is to it--that's crudely all there ever is to it with any woman, no matter how much she pretends to be satisfied with mourning the dead or caring for children, or swatting a job or being religious or anything else. . . .'" (p. 184). And Una begins to question her own feelings about sex, about her relationship to Walter Babson, whether it was "a crude physical need for a man, instead of a mystic fidelity to her lost love" (p. 185). At any rate, listening to others and beginning to think, she is awakened to the possibilities that "life is too sacred to be taken in war and filthy industries and dull education; and that most forms and organizations and inherited castes are not sacred at all" (p. 185). And Una discovers the effect of routine on workers:

She knew that the machines were supposed to save work. But she was aware that girls worked just as hard and long and hopelessly after their introduction as before; and she suspected that there was something wrong with a social system in which time-saving devices didn't save time for anybody but the owners. . . . She could not imagine any future for these women in business except the accidents of marriage or death--or a revolution in the attitude toward them. She saw the comfortable average men of the office sooner or later, if they were but faithful and lived long enough, had opportunities, responsibility, forced upon them. No such force was used upon the comfortable average women! (p. 235).

Although Una is gaining perspective about herself and is beginning to understand her predicament she makes the biggest error of her life--she marries Mr. Eddie Schwirtz, the jovial salesman, who takes her out on the occasions when he is in town. Lewis illustrates that parallel

with Una's frustration with her job is her growing interest in marriage. Una rubs cold-cream on her face every night "standing before a milky mirror in the rather close and lingerie-scattered bedroom" (p. 238), speculating in a dreamy fashion about her life; and not being at all clear about what to do, she marries Eddie to discover on her wedding night that she had made a mistake:

He addressed her with volubility and earnestness upon his belief that now they were married, she must get rid of all her virginal book-learned notions about reticence between husband and wife. Such feminine "hanky-panky tricks" he assured her, were the cause of "all these finicky, unhappy marriages and these rotten divorces--lot of fool clubwomen and suffragettes and high-brow's expecting a man to be like a nun. . . . Tell you, the first thing these women have gotta learn is that a man's a man, and if they learn that they won't need a vote! (p. 254).

No wife of Eddie Schwirtz is going to work. Month after month Una sits in shabby hotel rooms waiting for Eddie. Their marriage deteriorates quickly because Eddie drinks, owes money, loses his job, and blames it all on Una whom he still will not allow to work to help them out of their financial difficulties. But a crisis comes when Una finally realizes that she is being pulled under by her marriage and she decides to fight to stay alive. She resolves to "learn to be calm and train all her faculties," so that she might work her way out of the morass of her marriage. The narrator says, of her decision, that "the important thing was not the form of it, but her resolve not to sink into nothingness. . . ." (p. 261). Eddie responds to Una's decision to work with great bitterness: "'You women that have been in business simply ain't fit to be married. You think you're too good to help a man. Yes, even when you haven't been anything but dub stenographers. I never noticed that you were such a

whale of success!" (p. 269). Una retaliates: "'No,'" she said, "not for marriage that has any love and comradeship in it. But I admit a business woman doesn't care to put up with being a cow in a stable.'" ". . . I wonder--I wonder how many millions of women in what are supposed to be happy homes are sick of being chambermaids and mistresses till they get dulled and used to it. Nobody will ever know. All these notions about women being emancipated--you'd think marriage had changed entirely. Yet right now in 1912 . . . not changed a bit" (p. 270).

Finally Una realizes that their marriage has been unfair to them both. Eddie's attitudes about women, she realizes, have been distorted by the society in which he grew up: "In small-town boy gang talks behind barns, in clerkly confidences as a young man, in the chatter of smoking-cars and provincial hotel offices, he had been trained to know only two kinds of women, both very complaisant to smart live-wires: the bouncing lassies who laughed and kissed and would share with a man his pleasures, such as poker and cocktails, and rapid motoring to no place in particular; and the meek, attentive, 'refined' kind, the wives and mothers who cared for a man and admired him and believed whatever he told them about his business" (pp. 274-5). The misfortune for Eddie is that Una is neither of these types. She would have been the latter had she become a woman like her mother, but through circumstances she is forced into situations which shape her thinking about herself and her actions quite differently from the usual stereotypes that Eddie knows.

Una goes back to work "with a vengeance," now that she knows what she must do, which is to make her work her career and to put aside marriage as an alternative life-style. She must always depend upon herself. "So long as her world was ruled by chance, half-training, and lack of clear

purpose, how could it be other than a hodge-podge?" (p. 197). Fortified with this new knowledge, Una no longer stumbles along in her new job. She attacks it, she thinks about what she is doing, she makes special studies she is not required to do and she succeeds in impressing her bosses. In making a study of business she advances rapidly in her job, and no longer is she a victim.

This in itself would have been a very happy ending indeed, in fact, somewhat incredible considering that few persons like Una, who are meant to be average, extricate themselves from daily misery. Unfortunately for the plot of the novel, Lewis reintroduces Walter Babson and plunges the story, which after the opening chapters has been an excellent realistic portrayal of a marriage and of a woman's life in the city, into a bath of silly cliches about men and women and babies. Mercifully, the ending is brief. Una says that she will keep her job "'--if I've had this world of offices wished on to me, at least I'll conquer it, and give my clerks a decent time But just the same--oh, I am a woman, and I do need love. I want Walter, and I want his child, my own baby and his'" (p. 327). Lewis is saying that women need biological and emotional fulfillment as well as the self-respect, admiration, and independence she receives from meaningful work. In this, of course, she is no different from man, but no author would put that dialogue in a male character's mouth. Lewis reverts to romantic stereotypical portrayals at the novel's end. However, it remains that Una Golden is not only the prototype of the career woman in Lewis's novels, she is also the first of his heroines to consciously shape her life.

In 1916 the Sinclair Lewises visited Sauk Center, Minnesota, where he was born and reared. After a short visit they bought a Model-T Ford and set off for Seattle, Washington, and down to Carmel, California. Lewis used this trip for background material on his next novel.

The plot of the novel, *Free Air*, published in 1919, involves a chase and courtship by Milt Daggert, a boy from the small middlewestern town of Schoenstrom, of Claire Boltwood, who is like Ruth Winslow, another eastern enchantress. Milt is a car mechanic and part owner of a garage in a muddy one-street town and he meets Miss Boltwood who has driven from Brooklyn Heights, New York, with her father, who is ill and tired from his work in the city. Her purpose in the trip is to cure her father from his various fatigues and, against his wishes, she is driving him to Seattle where they have relatives.

They stop at Milt's garage for a minor repair and Milt is so smitten by this goddess from the east (they exchange a sentence or two), that he dashes to his boarding house room to throw a few clothes into a cardboard suitcase, make arrangements for the garage, put gas in his small Ford, and collect his cat Vere de Vere. The name of the cat is a clue to Milt Daggert's romantic capabilities. In Our Mr. Wrenn, when the hero had traveled with Istra Nash to the Aengusmere, he had nearly learned to play the fanciful games Istra invented and, as has been noted, he designed a supper for Istra as a part of a fancy he was creating for her. The note she was to have received for the occasion from him was signed "Duke Vere De Vere." Mr. Wrenn is never again anyone but himself; he is satisfied with his name William and is even a little uneasy if someone calls him Bill. But Milt Daggert, with his cat Vere de Vere, picks up where Mr. Wrenn left off and persists in his role of

errant knight in his muddy armor of Ford to pursue the fair Miss Boltwood until she consents to marry him.

The novel is slick and breezy, full of slang and cliches, but in it Lewis makes a statement about a conflict that was to bother him throughout his life: how to correlate the world of the provincial with the world of the sophisticate. Lewis himself personally never did know. He grew up in the one and became a part of the other; he was restless in both and he was critical of persons who held easy opinions of either. But in his late novels he will create a fictional resolution.

In this novel, Milt is caught between trying to impress Claire's family and relatives and being loyal to an old Schoenstrom friend who has just discovered him in Seattle: "He had been snatched from the world of beautiful words and serene dignity, of soaring mountains and companionship with Claire in the radiant morning back to the mud and dust of Schoenstrom, from the opera to "city sports" in a lunch room! He hated Bill McGlowey and his sneering assumption that Milt belonged in the filth with him. And he hated himself for not being enough of a genius to combine Bill McGlowey and Claire Boltwood."¹⁰

Lewis's perfect heroes and heroines are few and when they exist they figure as minor characters, but one thing they have in common is that they have, to some degree, resolved this problem and their perspective of both worlds is compassionate.

Milt is not one of these perfect heroes by any means; he simply knows what he wants and goes after it. At one point on his trip he gives a pretty school teacher a ride, and he pauses to consider two very different types of women who appeal to him and who appear in Lewis's early novels--the good housewife and the daring playmate. The school

teacher obviously likes Milt: "She glowed at him. . . . 'She's a nice comfy fire, and here I go like a boob, chasing after a lone, cold star like Miss Boltwood, and probably I'll fall into all the slews from hell to breakfast on the way. But--I'll get sleepy by a comfy fire'" (p. 92).

Unlike the "comfy" school teacher, Claire, like Ruth Winslow, is a woman with imagination and courage (it takes determination to drive across the country with an invalid father). But, like Ruth, she is also a snob. She becomes irritable in small town hotels, complaining of the spotted table cloths, sloppy waitresses, and cold bedrooms. She misses her world of gardenias and "talk of Parisian imagists." However she chooses Milt over a man of her own society because Milt offers her more scope for her own development: "'Milt likes his womenfolk to be daring. Jeff wants his harem admiring and very reliable'" (p. 169). Life with Milt will be full of adventure which will challenge her and keep her, she hopes, from becoming rigid in custom and manner.

That Claire knows she needs a man that will not cloister her is apparent when she warns Milt not to be carried away by his "he-man" pursuit of her:

"You have been reading fiction, about this man--sometimes he's a lumberjack, and sometimes a trapper or a miner, but always he's frightfully hairy--and he sees a charming woman in the city, and kidnaps her, and shuts her up in some unspeakable shanty, and makes her eat nice cold boiled potatoes, and so naturally, she simply adores him! A hundred men have written that story, and it's an example of their insane masculine conceit, which I, as a woman, resent. . . . You may not know it, but there are women today who don't live just to please. . . . If a woman like me were kidnapped, she would go on hating the brute, or if she did give in, then the man would lose anyway, because she would have degenerated; she'd have turned into a slave, and lost exactly the things he'd liked in her. . . ." (p. 215).

The heroine in Free Air has her way. She will not be enclosed, nor will she degenerate, because the novel, like most fairy tales, ends when the marriage begins. The two free spirits, Claire and Milt, ride off into the gold and garnet sunset, presumably to live happily ever after.

Lewis's next work, however, begins with a marriage, and the novel, his first, as far as many readers and critics are concerned, is Main Street. Free Air marks the end of his apprenticeship.

The Job is Lewis's best novel of this period primarily because of his attitude toward his material which he is treating seriously; the careful structure and, for the most part, concise prose are indications that Lewis had respect for his subject. The protagonist, Una Golden, is not memorable; one knows that she has pluck and courage enough to extricate herself from forces which ordinarily overcome people, but of the complexity of her feelings and of her essential humanness one learns very little. Lewis portrays an American woman, who knew what to do because the possibility of freedom was there, and in writing of her goals, her methods, and her determination, he delineates the prototype of the career woman. In The Trail of the Hawk and Free Air Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood typify the youthful sophisticate, the woman from the East, a companion in adventure and imagination. She is the charming escapist, the forerunner of the "jazz baby" and the "flapper" of whom Zelda Fitzgerald is the epitome and F. Scott Fitzgerald popularized in his fiction. In Our Mr. Wrenn and The Trail of the Hawk, the third type, the bohemian, is cast in the personages of Istra Nash and "Tottykins," who are depicted as restless, would-be intellectuals; they are a variation on an old type--the eighteenth century blue-stocking who was also derided for her show of intellectual endeavor. It can be

assumed however that Lewis admired women of true intelligence who were hard working; he married Dorothy Thompson and admired greatly such women as Francis Perkins, Secretary of Labor, and Edith Wharton, the novelist, but he distrusted the pretentious and the dilettante. The last stereotype of Lewis's early novels is the respectable wife and mother. Nelly Croubel, in Our Mr. Wrenn, is the type at its best; she is pleasant, kind, and understanding and given to small enthusiasms for card games, impromptu suppers, and doorstep conversations. With Gertie Cowles, in The Trail of the Hawk, the image shifts; she is also rather pleasant and kind but she uses respectability as a means for confining others to her over-furnished drawing room of unaired opinions and values; and, with Mrs. Golden, in The Job, Lewis refutes the type, creating a sighing, passive woman who clings (with a cushion and box of chocolates in one hand) to others, enervating them through her helplessness.

In Lewis's novels of the following decade, the twenties, the four prototypes will undergo further change: the "hobohemian" becomes the grotesque, over-blown figure of Sharon Falconer in Elmer Gantry; the respectable mother will become a figure of irony and scorn in Elmer Gantry; the young sophisticate or playmate will become neurotic and destructive in Dodsworth; and, the career woman will all but disappear from Lewis's work until the 1930's.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Sinclair Lewis, World So Wide (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 30.
- ²Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentleman (New York: Harper, 1914), p. 75. Subsequent references to Our Mr. Wrenn are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.
- ³Sheldon Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Twayne Inc., 1962), p. 42.
- ⁴Grebstein, p. 42.
- ⁵Sinclair Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1915), p. 9. Subsequent references to The Trail of the Hawk are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.
- ⁶Sinclair Lewis, The God Seeker (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 134.
- ⁷Martin Light, The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1975), p. 51.
- ⁸Grebstein, p. 48.
- ⁹Sinclair Lewis, The Job (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1917), p. 4. Subsequent references to The Job are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.
- ¹⁰Sinclair Lewis, Free Air (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919), p. 341. Subsequent references to Free Air are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

CHAPTER III

CAROL KENNICOTT: VILLAGE WIFE

In The Job, a young woman leaves the village to search for a new life in the city; in Main Street the reverse action occurs when Carol Milford of St. Paul and Minneapolis marries Dr. Will Kennicott and leaves the relatively metropolitan area to live in the small town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Although The Job is acclaimed as the best of Lewis's early novels because of its realistic portrayal of white collar workers and of an oppressing marriage, it is ultimately a facile work because its plot is sacrificed to an improbable happy ending. Main Street is no such novel. Through its plot reversal, Lewis's protagonist finds herself having to work out her life in the defined, circumscribed area of the small town rather than in the multifaceted spaces of the large city, and, unlike Una Golden, without the benefit of a career through which to find independence and a focus for her creative energies: "She was a woman with a working brain and no work."¹ And Carol is an average person, whatever that is, but which means that she is half-equipped to confront and to solve all of the problems which stand between her and her happiness. One of the problems is that her family environment and her educational background nourished imaginative fancies and half-formed ideas which have little relation to reality. She knows just enough to be stirred to discontent. Carl Van Doren, Lewis's friend and critic, comments on Carol: "His Carol Kennicott was not, romantically,

a genius. He knew that a girl of genius would, even from Gopher Prairie, have been drawn away to the footlights and flesh-pots--the privacy and kind of anonymity--of a more shining neighborhood. Carol was barely superior to the village level in her gifts, except for her virtue of discontent."²

When Main Street was published in 1920 the majority of critics and readers praised it. D. J. Dooley in The Art of Sinclair Lewis notes that "even when there were reservations about Lewis's plotting, style, or methods of characterization, there was almost unqualified gratitude for so complete a casebook of stupidities, so massive a club with which to beat the philistines."³ John Galsworthy sent a letter to Sinclair Lewis praising Main Street and according to Grace Hegger Lewis, in With Love from Gracie, they cried with happiness after reading his letter.⁴ Galsworthy said that ". . . so wholesome and faithful a satiric attitude of mind has been rather conspicuously absent from American thought and literature. . . Every country, of course, has its Main Street, all richly deserving diagnosis, but America has found in you so poignant and just and stimulating a diagnostician."⁵

There were, however, exceptions to this chorus of praisers. One critic, H. W. Boynton, wrote, in 1920, that Carol is "'a skittish emanation of Mr. Lewis's fancy, a trivial, and pretentious little Phantom with no dignity of mind or soul--a caricature of the advanced young female of our kind and time.'"⁶ Boynton's remarks reflect the opinion of more recent critics who also do not like the character of Carol Kennicott. They do not criticize the way Lewis developed her; they are upset with her personality per se. Richard O'Conner notes, in his work Sinclair Lewis, that "viewed from half a century's distance, in fact,

Carol Kennicott becomes a somewhat tiresome female, and her long suffering husband, who has to listen to all those adolescent vaporings, is a figure more to be pitied than censured."⁷ Mary Austin, novelist and critic, who often wrote for the American Mercury, is quoted by Mark Schorer who notes:

One ambiguity in the characterization of Carol Kennicott may or may not be relevant here. Mary Austin early raised the question, "One wonders if he was fully aware of how much Carol Kennicott's failure to find herself in Gopher Prairie was owing to the lack of sex potency, a lack which he records without relating it to any other of her insufficiencies." Nor does he significantly relate it to the drama. That Carol is frigid, Dr. Kennicott, who should know, several times tells her; but the fact does not disturb him or, in itself, impair his happiness. Whether Eddie Schwirtz is an equally reliable witness in the case of Una Golden of The Job, where again the fact seems of little importance, one may wonder, but it is nevertheless to be remarked that this apparently gratuitous imposition of frigidity on so many of his heroines is a mark of Sinclair Lewis's fiction.⁸

It is a thesis of this chapter that Carol's dwindling sexual vitality is an integral part of Lewis's theme: that Carol's potential as an individual, in all of her aspects, sexual, psychological, and spiritual, is finally defeated as she becomes shaped by the mores of the small town. D. H. Lawrence writes of the eroding effects of industrialization and commercialism on one's sexuality and Sinclair Lewis, in Main Street, is writing of the stultifying effects of ingrown relationships and the ugly environment of the small town on one's sexuality.

The story of Carol Kennicott is the account of a woman who meets defeat in a small midwestern town, a defeat which lies, first of all, in her inability to effect any changes in her environment and, second of all, in the fact that the hostility arising from the community because of her attempts to change it causes her to become fearful and timid

of life. Maxwell Geismar notes that "her brief attempt to 'reform' the town subsides into the long drawn-out and sometimes quite desperate attempt to protect herself from the town."⁹ The novel is divided into two main parts; the first is the brief account of Carol's life before she meets and marries Will Kennicott and of her first five years in Gopher Prairie; the second is the story of Carol's growing desperation, her would-be love affair with Erik Valborg, her flight to Washington, D.C., and her final return to Gopher Prairie. In the first half, Carol is full of confidence, most of the time; she is a vivacious reformer even though she is unsure of her goals and motivations, but in the second half she undergoes a gradual change as fear takes the place of confidence until, at last, Carol acquiesces to the norms of Gopher Prairie.

Martin Light notes that Carol's behavior, like Madame Bovary's, to whom Carol has often been compared, is shaped by romantic notions. In Emma Bovary's case it was her convent education and the reading of many romantic novels that influenced her ideas about life. Carol, too, is nourished on illusions: "When seen as the story of a woman with a mind shaped by romantic notions, who challenges the community with her impractical idealism and suffers rebuffs and self-doubts, Main Street appears to have more purpose, unity, and psychological interest than many readers have been willing to concede to it."¹⁰

Carol is reared in a home where the family plays out joyful fantasies peopled with characters like the "tarn htab" and the "skitmarigg," little spirits that inhabit various parts of their house. They have dress-up parties and Christmas is "a rite full of surprises and tenderness" (p. 13). Carol's father allows her the run of the library where she reads voraciously and indiscriminately: "Balzac, Rabelais, Thoreau,

and Max Müller" (p. 14). Carol's romanticism is portrayed through images as well as through exposition. In the first paragraph of the novel the reader sees Carol as though she were a figure in a Eugene Delacroix painting:

On a hill by the Mississippi where the Chippewas camped two generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the corn-flower blue of Northern sky. . . .

A breeze which has crossed a thousand miles of wheat-lands bellied her taffeta skirt in a line so graceful, so full of animation and moving beauty, that the heart of a chance watcher on the lower road tightened to wistfulness over her quality of suspended freedom. She lifted her arms, she leaned back against the wind, her skirt dipped and flared, a lock blew wild. A girl on a hilltop; credulous, plastic, young; drinking the air as she longed to drink life (p. 7).

This romantic image of Carol is a contrast to one in the closing chapter of the novel. She is seen hurrying down Main Street not looking at much of anything. She has just come from an hour's work at the townswomen's restroom and she is going to the "chatter" of the "Jolly Seventeen." Instead of the anonymous watcher whose "heart tightens to wistfulness," Carol is seen through glass by several local men, from inside the barber shop, who comment that she is a "nice looking skirt" who will get over her "funny ideas" after she has had a bunch of kids and settled down to teaching Sunday School and minding her own business. One says, "Of course she's like all the rest of these women--not solidly founded--not scholarly--doesn't know anything about political economy--falls for every new idea that some windjamming crank puts out" (pp. 427-28).

Between the two images of Carol Kennicott is the story of a woman who tries to come to terms with her life in a small town where one either conformed to the mores and customs or was ridiculed or ostracized.

Most women, in Carol's time, the early nineteenth hundreds, if they went to college at all, did so to acquire a veneer of culture or training for an ancillary position; in both cases their education was but a stopover between youth and the responsibilities of marriage. Carol, herself, spends time in college "stalking a thing called General Culture," playing tennis, and giving chafing-dish parties. She dances from course to course pursuing ideas and activities indiscriminately; "her versatility ensnares her" (pp. 8-9). She keeps, in her room, a miniature figure of the Dancing Bacchante, a talisman as it were, but also an ironical note on her education, a reflection of its frivolity and dilettantism, a portent of her troubles stemming from a lack of specific training and direction.

Rather than marriage or a teaching career, Carol chooses to become a librarian, to which end she goes to Chicago to study, and her study continues to be undirected. In the city she is exposed to a smattering of "Freud, Romain Rolland, syndicalism . . . feminism vs. haremism, Chinese lyrics, nationalization of mines, Christian Science, and fishing in Ontario" (pp. 15-16). If Carol finds a theme, so to speak, in all the hodge-podge of notions and ideas she is briefly exposed to, it is in her recurring dream of beautifying towns. She is susceptible to her surroundings, aware of ugliness but not quite sure of how to attain beauty; she has vague notions of turning villages into "Georgian houses and Japanese bungalows" (p. 16). As no one takes her seriously, she doesn't take herself seriously; and, even though her nature is intelligent and inquisitive, she is unable to find a structure upon which to build, in part, because she is not well educated and, in part, because she is not taken seriously--her role is marriage.

Carol returns from Chicago to St. Paul to work as a librarian; she is in limbo, neither happy nor unhappy, waiting undirected, fulfilling each day's tasks, not thinking about the future. During this period she meets Dr. Will Kennicott, who is attracted by Carol and tries to convince her to marry him and to live in Gopher Prairie, an "up and coming," beautiful little town. Carol is hesitant, but Will shows her some snapshots and she is won over. It is indicative of Carol that she makes up her mind upon seeing pictures, rather than reasoning from facts; she does not even visit Gopher Prairie before they are married; she looks at the vague, bleary snapshots, indistinct, except for one or two. Their beauty is seductive: "lakes: dark water reflecting wooded bluffs One winter picture of the edge of Plover Lake had the air of an etching: lustrous slide of ice . . . reeds in thin black lines, arches of frosty grasses" (p. 23). Carol is drawn by this beauty and predictably, the outlying land around Gopher Prairie will be her major source of spiritual solace and happiness: "They drove home under the sunset. Mounds of straw, and wheat-stacks like bee-hives, stood out in startling rose and gold, and the green tufted stubble glistened. As the vast girdle of crimson darkened, the fulfilled land became autumnal in deep reds and browns. The black road before the buggy turned to a faint lavender, then was blotted to uncertain grayness. Cattle came in a long line up to the barred gates of the farmyards, and over the resting land was a dark glow. Carol had found the dignity and greatness which had failed her in Main Street" (pp. 60-61).

Carol is one of many heroines and heroes in American literature for whom nature is identifiable with harmony and peace. It is a part of Lewis's innate romanticism (he greatly admired Thoreau's Walden) that

nature should be restorative and nurturing after the eroding and degenerating effects of society upon the individual. It is also noteworthy that Lewis's best novels are those in which a blending of this romanticism intermingles and plays against his satiric realism, creating a tension through the motifs and structure which shape his work.

Carol's romanticism is twofold: it stems from her love of and association with nature and it stems from her imagination or fancy which is not always trustworthy because it can be set in motion by false assumptions. The following scene is an example of Carol's romanticising through a set of associations that prove to have little relationship with reality. Before their marriage Will shows her a snapshot of a Swedish immigrant farm-woman "with tight-drawn hair, and a baby bedraggled, smeary, glorious-eyed" (p. 23). Four years or so later Carol meets the child and recalls the first time she saw his picture: "Magic had fluttered about her then--magic of sunset and cool air and the curiosity of lovers. She held out her hands as much to that sanctity as to the boy" (p. 185). Carol enchants the boy by telling him a fairy story, but the story is interrupted by a call for the doctor. Carol is brought back to reality; she cannot finish the story--she and Will leave abruptly. The irony of this scene is created by Carol's romantic or sentimental view of herself and others. When Carol first viewed the photograph of the child and mother she told Will, "'Oh, it would be sweet to help him --so sweet'" (p. 24). But what Carol actually does, what she accomplishes, is to tell the child a fairy tale, and it is this, the chasm between her imaginative but impractical view and her actions that creates the satiric realism brought about through the device of photograph, Carol's imagination, and the actual scene.

The device of the photographs is used again, toward the novel's end, when Will travels to Washington, D. C. where Carol is working and trying to make a life for herself outside of marriage and Gopher Prairie. He tries to tempt Carol to return by showing her thirty snapshots:

"Without defense she was thrown into it. . . . She was seeing the sun-speckled ferns among birches on the shore of the Minniemashie, wind rippled miles of wheat, the porch of their own house where Hugh had played, Main Street where she knew every window and every face" (p. 417).

Carol succumbs to nostalgia and eventually returns to Gopher Prairie. There is a feeling that the photographs beguile Carol. Whether Lewis intended "thirty" snapshots to parallel the thirty pieces of silver in the biblical betrayal or not is a moot point, but one could argue that Carol is betrayed in going back to Gopher Prairie, because once there, the promise of her youth and individuality as reflected in the wind-blown image of her on the hill, in "suspended freedom," is forever lost.

There is one more aspect of the photographs; it is their relation to the "real." The writer creates pictures; note the image of Carol in the opening paragraphs of Main Street; such an image is clear, well-defined, a chiaroscuro of feeling and meaning. The photographs, on the contrary, are unclear and "smeary"; they function as representations of the medium of mechanical reproduction and are contrasted with the medium of the creative imagination which is, in this form, literary. Although Lewis approved of many aspects of a technological society he saw that standardization and stereotyping was a real danger; thus Lewis uses the device of shoddy reproduction methods such as the photographs or the "chromos" (mentioned in Dodsworth), to symbolize the artificial, the false, the imitation. Through the device of the photographs Lewis

foreshadows the dangers of standardization and the creation of types rather than individuals in a technologically-oriented society. Milton Grebstein makes a point about stereotypes: "The characters who are types and not individuals are such because their society--as Lewis sees it--does not allow them development as individuals. America, the land of personal liberty, and individual freedom, produces types: this is Lewis's recurrent thesis."¹¹

That Carol Kennicott is becoming a type of the small-town young matron is clear by the end of the novel. She is seen kowtowing to Vida Sherwin, the archetype of provincialism and conformity, taking orders and willing to do Vida's bidding in the town. Carol, ironically, wears glasses now, but she "sees" much less; she accepts her environment as it is. But it is her attitude toward her new-born daughter that best illustrates her submersion into a type of matron whose thoughts are gleaned from the brassy pages of women's fashion magazines: "Carol could not decide whether she (the girl) was to become a feminist leader or marry a scientist or both, but did settle on Vassar and a tricolette suit with a small black hat for her Freshman year" (p. 429). Carol Kennicott's defeat will influence the following generation who will be the daughters of mothers who "settle" for stylishly dressed girls going to smart women's colleges. Lewis's prognosis is painful.

Critics Mary Austin and Mark Schorer point out that Carol Kennicott's characterization is ambiguous because she lacks "sex potency." Mary Austin blames Carol's inability to find herself in Gopher Prairie on this lack. However, one could argue that Gopher Prairie, along with molding Carol into a stereotype, destroys her "sexual potency," and her frigidity is not ambiguous, but is integral to the theme of the novel.

Carol is not impotent on her honeymoon in Colorado: "It had been a transforming honeymoon. She had been frightened to discover how tumultuous a feeling could be roused in her" (p. 26). Carol muses on her happiness during their honeymoon as she and Will are sitting in a train travelling to Gopher Prairie, but encroaching on her happy thoughts is a fear developing from her sense of the ugliness that she views: scabrous towns, lonely farms, the gritty train, and people submissive in their poverty. She seeks Will's hand for comfort and she tries to explain her fear of ugliness to him, but, as Will has known the familiar landscape since he was born, he cannot understand what Carol means; he sees the towns as "hustling burgs," potential money-makers. He is unable to empathize with Carol. He attempts to distract her from disconcerting thoughts by playing a cat and mouse game with her fingers and she "for the first time tolerated him rather than encouraged him" (p. 27). Besides playing cat and mouse, Will tries to coax her into a good mood by alluding to making love that evening and, as this tactic seems to work, Will turns to a detective novel while Carol ponders, unemotionally now, upon the possibilities for the Middlewest and for the United States in general:

Here she meditated--is the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middlewest; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos like red towers of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. . . . What is the future? A future of cities and factory smut. . . . Youth free to find knowledge and laughter? Willingness to sift the sanctified lies? Or creamy-skinned fat women, smeared with grease and chalk, gorgeous in the skins of beasts and the bloody feathers of slain birds, playing bridge with puffy pink-nailed jeweled fingers, women who after much expenditure of labor and bad temper still grotesquely resemble their own flatulent lap-dogs? The ancient stale inequalities, or something different in history, unlike the tedious maturity of other empires? (pp. 28-29).

Carol, in her reflections, conjures up an image of women who symbolize the "ancient stale inequalities" of past empires. They are women who consume resources and expenditure of labor without offering up either beauty or usefulness in return; they are women who foreshadow the decadence and decline of societies and nations; they are women unacquainted with "knowledge and laughter" and truth. That their image is grotesque is an indication of Carol's revulsion to the goals and energies of societies which tend to shape such women. The irony is that Carol is not equipped to withstand such forces; indeed, her own energy will be consumed as she flails against Gopher Prairie and she will be, to a degree, at the mercy of such women.

The closer Carol and Will get to Gopher Prairie the more of a stranger he becomes: "'Who was he? . . . He wasn't of her kind! His neck was heavy; his speech was heavy. . . . She could not believe that she had ever slept in his arms'" (p. 30). But once they detrain and get through the jovial welcomes from a group of Will's friends and arrive home--the final trap she thinks--she nevertheless responds to him: "She was close in her husband's arms; she clung to him; whatever of his strangeness and slowness and insularity she might find in him, none of that mattered as long as she could slip her hands beneath his coat, run her fingers over the warm smoothness of the satin-back of his waistcoat, seem almost to creep into his body, find him strength, find in the courage and kindness of her man a shelter from the perplexing world. 'Sweet, so sweet,' she whispered" (p. 34).

Her pleasure and refuge in their sexual relations continue even though she fluctuates between despair and hope in her relations with Will.

On their way home from a party, at which Carol shows too much of her ankle and shocks the solid citizens by talking about gold stockings, Will reprimands her and she is plunged into despair because he makes her see that her effort to amuse them has, in effect, made her appear ridiculous. Nevertheless, by the time they reach their front porch they are reconciled and "he lifted her, carried her into the house, and with her arms about his neck she forgot Main Street" (p. 56).

Carol also finds pleasure in riding with Will or hunting with him in the countryside. She senses his virility and she relaxes in his company: "As the sun warmed the world of stubble into a welter of yellow they turned from the highroad, through the bars of a farmer's gate, into a field, slowly bumping over the uneven earth. In a hollow of the rolling prairie lost sight even of the country road. It was warm and placid" (p. 57-58). Her response is fully sensuous.

However, as time goes on Carol finds she cannot sustain herself with these infrequent rides into the countryside and she knows by now that she cannot talk to Will without being criticized for not understanding his town and people; "she wanted someone to whom she could say what she thought" (p. 66). She also discovers "that she had nothing to do" (p. 86). As the wife of a doctor she has a position to retain. She cannot be employed; they have a maid so Carol has very little housekeeping to do; they have no children and she cannot find meaningful volunteer work in the community. As she drifts along, mostly to avoid criticism and to be accepted by Will and the townspeople, a crisis occurs which illustrates the extent of the town's hostility towards her and which ends in a scene depicting, for the first time, a dull dreariness in their sexual relations.

The crisis is precipitated by the women in the Jolly Seventeen bridge club. It is indicative that this group of women is only a generation or two away from being the "grotesques" that Carol envisions on her way to Gopher Prairie; what prevents them at present is that they are not wealthy enough to indulge, totally, in themselves. The bridge group rejects Carol because they sense in her a critic of their way of life and they are right. From the moment Carol steps into the "sirocco of furnace heat" of Juanita Haydock's "new concrete bungalow," she inwardly finds fault with everything from the angel food cake to their insensitive attitudes toward their hired girls (pp. 87-94). Carol feels their dislike of her: "She walked home. She reflected, 'It was my fault. I was touchy. And I opposed them so much. Only--I can't! I can't be one of them if I must damn all the maids toiling in filthy kitchens, all the ragged hungry children. And these women are to be my arbiters, the rest of my life!' She ignored Bea's call from the kitchen; she ran up-stairs to the unfrequented guestroom; she wept in terror, her body a pale arc as she knelt beside a cumbrous black walnut-bed, beside a puffy mattress covered with a red quilt, in a shuttered and airless room" (p. 94).

Four days later, Vida Sherwin, the school teacher who is supposed to be the town's "woman intellectual" and Carol's friend, stops by Carol's to gossip and to tell her what the town is saying about her, that they think her speech is affected, her conversation is a matter of name dropping, that she is too flip with store clerks, too friendly with her maid, too eccentric in refurnishing her living room with a broad couch, and that she does not go to church often enough.

Devastated by Vida's visit Carol turns to Will for solace only to

find that on many points Will agrees with Vida and the town. The day ends with their going to bed. "He yawned, went out to look at the thermometer, slammed the door, patted her head, unbuttoned his waistcoat, yawned, wound the clock, went down to look at the furnace, yawned, and clumped upstairs to bed casually scratching his thick woolen undershirt. Till he bawled, 'Aren't you ever coming up to bed? She sat unmoving" (p. 99). This is the first time Carol does not find comfort with Will. Their going to bed is a sterile process: he is unaware; she is devitalized.

With the approach of spring and the opportunity to be outdoors and in the country Carol's vitality returns and with it a normal relationship with Will; but, again, as autumn approaches and with it the cloistered activities of the town, centered in over-headed rooms, on activities such as bridge, gossip, and heavy desserts, Carol's vitality diminishes. She admits to herself that Will no longer stirs her (p. 159). Their bedtimes are a series of yawns and scratches, of checking doors, windows, and the furnace. The scene of their first quarrel, significantly, is in bed: "The room was drab-colored and ill-ventilated--Kennicott did not 'believe in opening the windows so darn wide that you heat all outdoors.' The stale air seemed never to change. In the light from the hall they were two lumps of bedclothes with shoulders and tousled heads attached" (p. 165). The room is an objectification of their sexual relationship; in it Carol and Will are reduced to objects with no life or feeling.

Carol tries to respond: "She turned toward him trying to be affectionate. But his eyes were pink and unlovely in the flare of the match with which he lighted his dead and malodorous cigar. His head drooped, and a ridge of flesh scattered with pale small bristles bulged out under

his chin" (p. 168). Carol is highly responsive to the way things look, to images, to her surrounding: she responds aesthetically to the beauty of the countryside and retractively to the sights and sounds of Main Street. It is significant that on her honeymoon, her discovery of "tumultuous feeling" occurs in the beauty of the mountains "high among the pines" (p. 26). Now, in the airless, drab bedroom she cannot respond.

The novel moves forward in episodes which record a pattern: Carol begins, hopefully, to work towards a goal or on some project only to be defeated; then she begins again and the pattern is repeated. After her quarrel with Will she sets out to recapture their early love; she courts him with surprises and attentions and thinks of herself as the wife of the heroic country doctor: "She tried to free herself from the speculation and disillusionment which had been twitching at her; sought to dismiss all the opinionation of an insurgent era" (p. 180). She wants to be thought of as a pleasant, happy wife, not a discontented critical woman. She nearly succeeds; she interests herself in Kennicott's hobbies: medicine, land-investment, motoring, and hunting. But then they quarrel over the movies, and Will's basic patronizing attitude toward her reasserts itself as her critical attitude toward his town resurfaces. Desolate again she can only repeat "I must go on" (p. 199).

Will is successful in completing a lucrative land deal which leads him to suggest to Carol they might start their family. Carol "feared and longed and did not know; she hesitatingly assented, and wished that she had not assented. And as there appeared no change in their drowsy relations, she forgot all about it, and life was planless" (p. 227-28). However, "that autumn she knew that a baby was coming, that at last life promised to be interesting in the peril of the great change" (p. 234).

Her pregnancy, although normal, is not without the tedium of ungainliness and morning illness and Carol feels "that willy-nilly she was being initiated into the assembly of housekeepers; with the baby for hostage, she would never escape; presently she would be drinking coffee and rocking and talking about diapers" (p. 235). In effect, Carol does not enjoy the pregnancy, but after the child is born she devotes herself to him: "for two years Carol was a part of the town. . . . Her opinionation seemed dead; she had no apparent desire for escape; her brooding centered on Hugh" (p. 236).

Her sexual relations with Will are resumed in a drowsy fashion but Carol is moved to reflect upon her sexual feelings by the arrival of the town's famous man, the wealthy, influential Percy Bresnahan who returns periodically to fish and to flex his reputation. Carol is attracted to him: "His large hands, sensual lips, easy voice supported his self-confidence. He made her feel young and soft--as Kennicott had once made her feel" (p. 277). Clearly, Carol is not without sexual feelings. Beside Percy, Carol thinks, Will is dull and untidy--his hands "were wise, kind hands, but they were not the hands of love" (p. 281). She meditates, "'Was it possible that those days of fumbling for each other were gone so completely? He had read books, to impress her; had said (she recalled it ironically) that she was to point out his every fault; had insisted once, as they sat in the secret place beneath the walls of Fort Snelling--. She shut the door on her thoughts. That was sacred ground. But it was a shame that--'" (p. 281). Carol is not really able to face the reality of their sexual relations, nor does she really understand, and because she cannot, her irritation, as well as Will's, builds into many frustrations until on a hot summer night they quarrel and Carol faces

the facts: "'There are two races of people. . . . His calls mine 'neurotic'; mine calls his 'stupid.' We'll never understand each other, never; and it's madness for us to debate--to lie together in a hot bed in a creepy room--enemies yoked'" (p. 284).

Carol moves to the guest room, furnishing it with a small bed and shelves for her books; Will muses that she is cold, "doesn't know what passion is " (p. 297). But the type of woman Kennicott finds "knowing what passion is" is Maud Dyer, the pharmacist's wife. Will knows that Maud is "neurotic, religiocentric, faded; her emotions were moist and her figure was unsystematic. . . . But her milky skin was delicious, her eyes were alive, her chestnut hair shone, and there was a tender slope from her ears to the shadowy place below her jaw" (p. 297). Although Carol does not know that Will is surreptitiously seeing Maud, she has never felt comfortable in her presence, which she finds "super-feminine. . . . Her skin was fine, pale, soft, suggesting a weak voluptuousness. . . . Carol did not quite know why she was uncomfortable in this talcum-powder atmosphere. . ." (p. 132). Both Carol and Will respond to Maud: Will with lust, and Carol with discomfort; but, the image of Maud seen through either's eyes is essentially unattractive: she purrs and whines, whimpers and begs. If she is supposed to be sexual or "full of passion," she is also unattractive to both Carol and Will.

While Will finds relief from a now sexless marriage through his visits to Maud, Carol finds solace from loneliness and isolation in her visits to the Bjornstams. Miles is the village atheist and socialist; Bea is Carol's former maid and a good friend, but tragedy befalls the Bjornstams; Bea and her son Olaf die of typhoid and Miles leaves Gopher Prairie. Again Carol is defeated but again she fights back, this time

through a friendship with a newcomer, a tailor who reads Keats and whom the townspeople call "Elizabeth." Carol is attracted to him because like herself he is an outsider and like herself he is concerned with beauty, but she is not sexually attracted to him. Valborg's feelings are different; when he tries to kiss her she tells him, "'--Can't you understand? Everything crushes in on me so, all the gaping dull people, and I look for a way out--'" (p. 365). Carol is not looking for a lover; she is looking for a friend and confidante to whom she can say what she thinks, but that is not what Erik wants nor what the town expects of them both. Will Kennicott saves her from the town's condemnation by forcing her to look at herself and Erik through the town's eyes; she is shattered that she looks cheap and that Erik looks juvenile and tawdry. After their would-be romance is dissolved Will tells her "'But of course I knew how cold you were, I knew you wouldn't stand it even if Valborg did try to hold your hand or kiss you, so I didn't worry. But same time, I hope you don't suppose this husky young Swede farmer is as innocent and Platonic and all that stuff as you are!'" (p. 380). Ironically, Carol is innocent, only because Erik does not sexually appeal to her. Earlier, when Vida Sherwin Wutherspoon also accuses Carol of becoming involved with Erik, she protests that she is innocent, but later, alone, she admits, "'I'm not a falsely accused innocent, though! If it were some one more resolute than Erik, a fighter, an artist with bearded surly lips--!'" (p. 360). She sees her incipient affair with Erik as "peeping at love from behind lace curtains--on Main Street" (p. 360). And she is not moved to sexual passion.

Although Will calls her "cold," the next evening after their talk about Erik, Carol flees to his arms "and for the first time in years

they were lovers. But she knew that she still had no plan in life, save always to go along the same streets, past the same people, to the same shops" (p. 384). That their renewed love is juxtaposed against the dullness or "sameness" of Main Street reinforces the significant force that Main Street has upon their sexual vitality. Their marriage suffers from this "sameness"; Will's yawns and checklist before going to bed are as detrimental to passion as Carol's finickiness. One of the differences between Carol and Will is that, while Will seeks sexual attentions from Maud Dyer, whom he finds primarily unattractive, Carol is not able to do so with Erik, not because she is cold but because she sees herself as cheap. The problem is partially one of image. Carol's friend Vida warns her against an affair; the other women en masse would be scandalized, but the contrary is true for Will; his men friends applaud extra-marital affairs, encourage each other and share stories about their exploits. In effect, Will's sexual prowess is encouraged, Carol's is not. As time passes Carol realizes that she must leave Gopher Prairie and eventually she convinces Will to let her and their son Hugh go to Washington, D.C. It is wartime and she plans to find work there. Carol, significantly, equates her imminent freedom with love: "her discovery that she really could get away from Main Street was as sweet as the discovery of love" (p. 406). Her escape from Gopher Prairie is similar to the "discovery of love," that time, when on her honeymoon, she realized what "a tumultuous feeling could be roused in her" (p. 26). Her sense of passion is in proportion to her sense of beauty and truth (the freedom to say what one really thinks and to be understood, loved, or, at least, tolerated); and, as she finds neither in Gopher Prairie, her vitality has dwindled.

In Carol and Will's courtship days, in their secret place in the round stone tower at Fort Snelling, and on their honeymoon, they shared beauty and truth; that is, they spoke honestly together and loved each other for speaking so; but, in Gopher Prairie, where their visions differ (Carol sees ugliness and barbarity while Will sees "God's Country," his childhood and home), they no longer share truth. Will is hurt and angry by Carol's opinions and Carol is stifled by not being able to be truthful. Carol, in spite of her brief sojourn in Washington, D.C., capitulates; she returns to Gopher Prairie to adopt, in part, Will's truth or vision and in doing so she is diminished, her potential is checked, she adjusts herself to life in Gopher Prairie.

Mark Schorer states that it is an ambiguity in the characterization of Carol Kennicott that she is frigid and Mary Austin remarks that "One wonders if he [Lewis] was fully aware of how much of Carol Kennicott's failure to find herself in Gopher Prairie was owing to the lack of sex potency. . . ." ¹² Carol's sexual vitality is clearly an integral part of the theme of the novel which is that the eroding effects of the prairie town, its commercialism, and provincialism, deplete the individual in all his vital aspects (imagination and critical acumen as well as "sex potency") until the individual leaves or becomes at one with the town.

As Carol Kennicott becomes a part of the town and its women, it is necessary in order to understand the pressures on Carol to examine the images of women in Gopher Prairie. First of all, the attitude of the men of Gopher Prairie, in general, is that they have little respect for women. This fact is evidenced by their derogatory use of words connoting femininity. Will speaks of "some fool woman" as if the adjective

and noun are compounds; when he wants to insult a fellow doctor he says that he is on a par "with this bone-pounding chiropractor female" (p. 163). Will speaks of Carol's friend Vida: "'She's a brainy woman, but she'd be a damn sight brainier if she kept her mouth shut and didn't let so much of her brains ooze out that way'" (p. 165). Erik Valborg is called "Elizabeth" and derided for his femininity: he reads poetry and he enjoys designing women's clothes and talking about them, activities the men ridicule. And Maud Dyer's relationship with her husband reveals his contempt for her. He often makes her beg him for money in front of his coffee-drinking cronies--seeing a man "dangle" a woman is an amusing sport for them.

The women themselves do little for their image. The upper class wives whose husbands are in professions or who own their own businesses belong to clubs like the Jolly Seventeen or the Thanatopsis. In the former they play bridge and eat afternoon snacks of potato salad and angel food cake while gossiping about their husbands' foibles or their maids' incompetencies; in the latter they nervously approach culture through an afternoon's study of a topic (one afternoon it was all of English literature, another time it was China). A lower income group of women is represented by the hard working German and Scandinavian farmers' wives whose scant leisure time is spent in church activities. With these women there remains a vestige of dignity as expressed in their hard work and pride in customs and habits expressive of their individual cultures, but when prosperity comes along these women rush to ape the prosperous per se, which means the members of the Jolly Seventeen and Thanatopsis.

The leader and spokesman for the women in Gopher Prairie is Vida Sherwin. She, like Carol, has had a college education; Vida is trained to teach French and English to high school students but she is an enemy to people like Carol. During her first visit with Carol they become friendly over tea and talk about beautifying Gopher Prairie. Vida is enthusiastic about committees and clubs and projects and when Carol suggests they ask an architect from the city to lecture in Gopher Prairie she tells her that it is much better to work within "existing agencies". Another clue to Vida's character is her remark on a book Carol is rereading which is The Damnation of Theron Ware by Harold Frederic, a novel Carol admires for its realism, its honesty of observation. Vida says, "'Yes. It was clever. But hard. Men wanted to tear down, not build up. Cynical. Oh, I do hope I'm not a sentimentalist. But I can't see any use in this high-art stuff that doesn't encourage us day-laborers to plod on'" (p. 68). The two women are, without knowing it, natural enemies; the one is a reformer, the other is a revolutionist, and in their thinking they are far apart while appearing close together: "Vida was, and always would be, a reformer, a liberal. She believed that details could excitingly be altered, but that things-in-general were comely and kind and immutable. Carol was, without understanding or accepting it, a revolutionist, a radical, and therefore possessed of constructive ideas, which only the destroyer can have, since the reformer believes that all the essential constructing has already been done. After years of intimacy it was this unexpressed opposition . . . which held Vida irritably fascinated" (p. 248). Vida defeats Carol. In a key passage Carol comments as she broods, looking at herself in a mirror, "'Wasn't she growing visibly older in ratio as

Vida grew plumper and younger?" (p. 265). And in another passage, at the novel's end, Vida's victory is secured. Carol says to her, "'I think I shall work for you. And I'll begin at the bottom.' She did. She relieved the attendant at the rest-room for an hour a day" (p. 427). Thus Carol is initiated into the life of Gopher Prairie whose archetype of respectable matriarchy is Vida Sherwin Wutherspoon.

Vida's technique which defeats Carol is varied. For example, she will agree with whatever Carol says and then qualify it so that the idea is tailored to Vida's way of thinking. For example, Carol rejects Vida's suggestion that she teach Sunday School because, she puts it politely, "'My religion is so foggy.' 'I know. So is mine. I don't care a bit for dogma. Though I do stick firmly to the belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the leadership of Jesus. As you do, of course.' Carol looked respectable and thought about having tea" (p. 67). In another instance Carol proposes a long term project to provide decent low-cost housing for the poor; the project, with Vida working in the background, turns out to be a once-a-year clothing handout. She is also cruel. Under the guise of friendship Vida repeats petty gossip to Carol, telling her what the townspeople are saying about her, thus shaking Carol's confidence in herself and making her self-conscious with the townspeople. And her nature is revealed in another act which concerns Carol's only allies and true companions in Gopher Prairie, Bea and Miles Bjornstam. Miles, unlike Carol, is on to Vida's techniques. He tells Carol that "'Miss Sherwin's trying to repair the holes in this barnacle-covered ship of a town by keeping busy bailing out the water'" (p. 116). Miles, like Carol, is philosophically a revolutionist and consequently the village pariah, but when he marries the jolly Bea Sorenson and they have

a son he wants to be a part of the community. Carol senses this and asks her friends, Vida included, to visit Bea, her former hired girl, to make her feel welcome, as a new homemaker in Gopher Prairie. The women ignore the Bjornstams. Then Bea and Olaf become ill with typhoid and Carol nurses them. Vida, not to be outdone by Carol's act of mercy, arrives at the Bjornstams with a couple of women in tow and a bunch of grapes and some women's magazines. Miles turns them away; when Bea and Olaf die a few days later no one from the town attends their funeral. Vida, spurned, has spread lies about Miles, claiming that his ill-treatment of his family has caused their deaths. Now the town will have nothing to do with Miles and he leaves Gopher Prairie and so Carol's hope for friendship and an ally goes also.

Vida gains influence and strength in Gopher Prairie as Carol retreats. When Vida quits teaching high school and marries Jamie Wutherspoon she "explodes into self-confidence and happiness" (p. 253). She is indomitable in her role of housewife and influential matron, pushing and cajoling other women into club work, Sunday School teaching, and Campfire Girl's activities. Her crowning glory is the erection of a new school-building, "with its cheerful brick walls, broad windows, gymnasium, classrooms for agriculture and cooking" (p. 427). It is there for all to admire, a building Vida had worked long and hard for; and there is no Miles Bjornstam to ask questions about teachers' pay or the quality of the teaching or the curriculum inside its lovely walls. And Carol, by this time, is far too timid to ask these questions.

As a type in Lewis's fiction, Vida Sherwin follows Nelly Croubel, Gertie Cowles, and Mrs. Golden, respectable housewives who uphold the values of their communities, women who are the watchdogs of the status

quo, but Vida differs from them in that she has more punch. She is college educated and through the years of practicing a career has had time to speculate on her position and her goals. She realizes that she wants the security and role of the housewife and she knows best how to use it for her benefit and how to protect her position from the truly revolutionary types like Carol or Miles Bjornstam.

Carol is a revolutionary in the sense that she questions and critically examines the status quo; that she is ill-equipped to effect any real change is another matter. Lewis says of Carol that he had planned it "that she should be just bright enough to sniff a little but not bright enough to do anything about it. . . ." ¹³

Carol does question the roles of women:

"I think I want you to help me find out what has made the darkness of the women. Gray darkness and shadowy trees? We're all in 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? Will Kennicott there would say that we need lots of children and hard work. But it isn't that. There's the same discontent in women with eight children . . . and you find it in stenographers and wives who scrub, just as much as in girl college-graduates who wonder how they can escape their kind parents. What do we want? (p. 197).

Carol answers her own question by saying that it is not only women who are discontent but that it is also "industrial workers . . . the farmers and the Negro race and the Asiatic colonies. . . . It's all the same revolt, in all the classes that have waited and taken advice. I think we want a more conscious life. We are tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists" (p. 197).

For Carol, a part of that "conscious life" is an awareness of environment and of beauty, hence her early attempts to beautify Gopher

Prairie. This awareness can be seen in her involvement with art as well as with her daily life. She asks the dramatic group she is rehearsing that complains of the work and "no fun" in putting on a play, "'I wonder if you can understand the 'fun' of making a beautiful thing, the pride and satisfaction of it, and the holiness!'" (p. 219). After reading Yeats she is stimulated by the beauty of the poem: "She was in the world of lonely things--the flutter of twilight linnets, the aching call of gulls along a shore to which the netted foam crept out of darkness. . . ." (p. 120). Or at a play she feels "transported . . . to the stilly loft . . . where in a green dimness . . . she bent over a chronicle of twilight women and the ancient gods" (p. 210). Her response to beauty, her desire to synthesize thought and feeling arises not only from art but from nature. Crossing an ice-covered lake by a horse-drawn sled she discovers, "the moonlight . . . stormed on the snow, it turned the woods ashore into crystals of fire. The night was tropical and voluptuous. . . . She repeated: 'Deep on the convent-roof the snows / Are sparkling to the moon.' The words and the light blurred into one vast indefinite happiness, and she believed that some great thing was coming to her" (p. 201).

And, as Carol is affected by beauty, she is affected by ugliness. Main Street is "cluttered with electric-light poles, telephone poles, gasoline pumps. . ." (p. 41). The view from her bedroom window is of "the side of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church--a plain clapboard wall of a sour liver color; the ash-pile back of the church; an unpainted stable; and an alley in which a Ford delivery wagon had been stranded" (p. 35). Approaching Gopher Prairie by train Carol sees that "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. Only the tall red grain-elevator and a few tinny church-steeple rose from the mass. It was a frontier camp. It was not a place to live in, not possibly, not conceivably. The people--they'd be as drab as their houses, as flat as their fields. She couldn't stay here" (p. 31).

But she does, and in her early attempts to beautify Gopher Prairie she begins with her own home. She enlarges two small rooms by removing a connecting wall; she decorates the room in blues and yellows, installs a broad, comfortable couch and hangs an "ultramarine and gold" Japanese obi against a maize wall. The townswomen, reports Vida, "'think you were eccentric in furnishing this room--they think the broad couch and that Japanese dingus are absurd'" (p. 97). And throughout the novel her attempts or suggestions for environmental changes are rebuked, partially because the townspeople are more interested in making money than on spending it on projects where they do not get a return on their investment, and partially because Carol is ineffectual in knowing how to instigate change. She tells Vida, who has been discussing the feasibility of "'practical things that will make a happier and prettier town. . . .'" 'Yes . . . I know. They're good. But if I could put through all those reforms at once, I'd still want startling, exotic things . . . Strindberg plays, and classic dancers . . . and a thick, black-bearded, cynical Frenchman who would sit about and drink and sing opera and tell bawdy stories and laugh at our proprieties and quote Rabelais and not be ashamed to kiss my hand!'" (p. 262).

The dark Frenchman "to laugh at our proprieties" is Carol's objectification of her wish to bring light and air to the stale customs and habits of the smug small town, but Carol's manner of stating it is

unfortunate because it allows Vida to ridicule her: "' . . . but I guess that's what you and all the other discontented young women really want: some stranger kissing your hand!'" (p. 262). Carol gasps at being so misunderstood, but the episode is, in other forms, to be repeated throughout the novel as she continues to be misunderstood and rejected until, near the end of the novel, in a final irony, Carol's efforts to beautify the town, having been reduced to the absurd, are somewhat acceptable: "She relieved the attendant at the rest-room for an hour a day. Her only innovation was painting the pine table a black and orange rather shocking to the Thanatopsis" (p. 427). In effect, the painting of the table is a parody on Carol's attempts to beautify her environment and it underscores the distance between her hopes and her accomplishments.

One final point to emphasize Carol's initiation into the mores of Gopher Prairie: after working at the restroom Carol hurries to the Jolly Seventeen, that group which a few years ago she found detestable because of their stale chatter about husbands, housekeeping, and maids; but now, once in their midst, she finds benign and pleasant company. Now, even though Maud Dyer coyly suggests that Carol tell them all about the officers she met in Washington, Carol only yawns when once she would have flinched.

The story of Carol Kennicott is that of a woman who is aware of the possibilities, that life may be shaped by the imagination and that one can affect the beauty of one's surroundings, but who is unable to live by this consciousness in her role of housewife and mother in a small midwestern town.

In the struggle between Carol and Will Kennicott, the casual reader, as well as critics, often sympathize with Will and Gopher Prairie;

however, it is a danger to dismiss Carol as a "tiresome female" and to overlook that she is a victim of the Will Kennicotts. Sinclair Lewis wrote an article called "Main Street's Been Paved," for The Nation, in 1924, in which he states that "'We've been bullied too long by the Doc Kennicotts and by the beautiful big balloon tires that roll over the new pavement on Main Street--and over our souls!'"¹⁴ There is no doubt that in the shaping of Carol Kennicott by the forces of Main Street Lewis meant to call attention to the individual as victim.

ENDNOTES

¹Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920; rpt. New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. 86. Subsequent quotations are from this edition of Main Street and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

²Carl Van Doren, Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1933), p. 23.

³D. J. Dooley, The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 75.

⁴Grace H. Lewis, With Love from Gracie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 189.

⁵Sinclair Lewis, Letters of Sinclair Lewis: 1919-1930 from Main Street to Stockholm, ed. Harrison Smith (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), pp. 47-48.

⁶Dooley, p. 62.

⁷Richard O'Conner, Sinclair Lewis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 66.

⁸Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 295.

⁹Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915-1925 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1947), p. 85.

¹⁰Martin Light, The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 61-62.

¹¹Sheldon Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 163.

¹²Schorer, p. 295.

¹³Sinclair Lewis, The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950, eds. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 217.

¹⁴The Man from Main Street, p. 327.

CHAPTER IV

STEREOTYPES: CITY WIVES

Sinclair Lewis published seven novels in the decade of the 1920s; five are considered to be his best work: Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and Dodsworth. Two other novels Mantrap and The Man Who Knew Coolidge were also written during the decade but they are examples of the incredible unevenness of Lewis's work. Robert Cantwell in his essay "Sinclair Lewis" comments on this unevenness: "For although Lewis has written two first-rate novels, and created a dozen powerful characters, and produced half a hundred masterly satirical sketches scattered throughout these books--as well as adding new works to the language and popularizing, more than anybody else, a new and skeptical slant on American life--he has also turned out as much journalistic rubbish as any good novelist has signed his name to, and he has written novels so shallow and dull they would have wrecked any reputation except his own."¹

Babbitt, Arrowsmith, and Elmer Gantry, however, are among his best novels and they are works in which men are the protagonists and women are ancillary figures, important as they are shaped by factors in a society which is characterized by its rapidly changing values. The women, trying to cope with these changes, attempt to do so through stereotype which T. W. Adorno in The Authoritarian Personality describes as a process that "helps to organize what appears to the ignorant as

chaotic: the less he is able to enter into a really cognitive process, the more stubbornly he clings to certain patterns, belief in which saves him the trouble of really going into the matter."² The characters who use the stereotype method are themselves stereotypes for through their patterns of thinking they become predictable and set, easily identifiable. Anthony Hilfer in The Revolt from the Village discusses this method of characterization through stereotypes in Lewis and other writers of the decade: "If their characters were largely stereotypes, one might keep in mind T. W. Adorno's warning that modern civilization produces stereotypes and that only by identifying stereotypical traits can this trend be resisted."³ An examination of the women in the following novels as stereotypical figures reveals their roles in society, their lack of individuality, and their subsequent dissatisfaction, even desperation, with their roles. The transformation of these characterizations from the more benevolent prototypes of Lewis's novels of the previous decade into stereotypical figures that are essentially either victims or grotesques (with one exception) is the result of Lewis's recording a period which reflected changes in life-styles and in ways of thinking of a population that was shifting to urban areas and being shaped by the forces of industrialization, masseconomics, and standardization.

J. B. Priestly in Literature and Western Man speaks of Babbitt as Lewis's masterpiece:

His best work is raised high above journalism; sheer drive, applied to a mass of recorded detail, and a rare exuberance, bringing the unconscious into action, turn him into a genuine creator, not a conscious deliberate artist but a myth-maker. So his masterpiece, high above Main Street, is Babbitt, which is at once something less and something more

than a novel, just as Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn are. This is a truly American creative imagination at work, uncontrolled and outrageous; rushing, in Babbitt, from heights of satirical buffoonery, often clowning for its own sake, to quick shuddering glimpses of depths where terror and despair are lurking.⁴

The women in Babbitt partially reflect this "terror and despair" because lurking alongside their commonplace lives is the shadow of disaster. They know that if they deviate from the tedium of their routines they will be ostracized.

Myra Babbitt, the wife of George F. Babbitt realtor, lives in a well-equipped two-story house in the suburb of Floral Heights, Zenith: "She made him what is known as a Good Wife. She was loyal, industrious, and at rare times merry. She passed from a feeble disgust at their closer relations into what promised to be ardent affection, but it drooped into bored routine."⁵ Myra is plump and motherly both to her children and to her husband. She caters to "Georgie-boy," as she calls him, rushing about to find him a clean shirt and dry bathroom towels as he threatens to throw a tantrum. Anthony Hilfer notes that the dominant image in Babbitt is the business man as baby--his very name suggests babble or baby. He is described as having a pink head, baby plumpness, and wearing baby-blue pajamas. He plays in his bathtub as he fantasizes (about a fairy child), and he collects gadgets as a child does toys.⁶ In order for Myra to be the mother-figure to her husband she must be as "sexless as an anemic nun" (p. 10). An episode which substantiates her role as mother occurs near the end of the novel after Babbitt, having tried to grow up by mustering a short-lived rebellion against Zenith society, capitulates. They are riding in an ambulance on their way to an emergency operation for Myra who has appendicitis. It is Myra who is

ill; it is she who must comfort George when he burns his finger on the car's heater, reassuring him that he will be all right. Even in a time of crisis their roles of mother-woman and baby-man do not change.

Myra Babbitt is indistinguishable from the other matrons in Floral Heights whose social lives include bridge, movies, and dinner parties. When Myra entertains she spends a great deal of time worrying and preparing, with the following results: "The dinner was in the best style of women's magazine art, whereby the salad was served in hollowed apples, and everything but the invincible fried chicken resembled something else" (p. 97). The wives of the friends and neighbors who attend the parties "all looked alike and . . . they all said, 'Oh, isn't this nice!' in the same tone of determined liveliness" (p. 94). The women in Floral Heights "worked perhaps two hours a day, and the rest of the time they ate chocolate, went to the motion pictures, went window shopping, and went in gossiping twos and threes to card-parties, read magazines, thought timorously of lovers who never appeared, and accumulated a splendid restlessness which they got rid of by nagging their husbands. Their husbands nagged back" (p. 102).

The essential idleness of the woman of Floral Heights exists primarily because she is the wife of a relatively affluent business man and functions as a symbol of his success: Her husband does not need her to toil in the field beside him or to work with him as the cottage craftsman did; on the contrary, she is an adornment, a sign of the husband's progress and wealth. As Eva Figes, in Patriarchal Attitudes in speaking of the wealthy middle-class business man points out, "It was an element in his social status that his wife should be kept in elegant

idleness, a sexual plaything, adorned with the fine clothes and jewels that he could afford to buy her."⁷

The predicament of such women is emphasized in Babbitt in the characterization of Zilla Riesling, a cousin of Myra's, a woman married to George Babbitt's best friend. Zilla and Paul have no children and they live in a small, modern apartment with all of the latest gadgets including maid service. When Zilla was young she attracted Paul because she could laugh and dance and "drew men after her plump and gaily wagging finger" (p. 75). Now in her middle age she tries to maintain that same image that attracted men; she bleaches and dyes her hair, uses heavy make-up and wears corsets to conceal her thickening figure--the result of lying about eating chocolates--and affects a raucous laugh to announce her liveliness and youth. Zilla feels the pressure to be an adornment, to be glamorous and sexual, to be a reflection of money and ergo of happiness and esteem. But, dwelling only upon her vanishing youth she becomes lethargic and slovenly in all other matters. Paul complains that her cooking is mainly "burnt steak, with canned peaches and store cake" (p. 54). She lashes back at Paul, nagging him to buy her more things and exploding in jealous rages over Paul's relationships with other women. Their hostility towards each other increases until Paul, maddened not only by their life together but by accumulated frustrations (of his business, he tells Babbitt "we cut each other's throats at the public's expense"), shoots Zilla, wounding her in the shoulder (p. 55). For this act Paul goes to prison leaving Zilla to her own devices which, as it develops, are a dingy boarding-house room and an affinity for a religion which espouses her ideas of revenge: "'It's the blessing of God himself that Paul should be in prison now, and torn and

humbled by punishment, so that he may yet save his soul, and so other wicked men, these horrible chasers after women and lust, may have an example'" (p. 246).

Zilla Riesling is thwarted, even made grotesque, by a life in which youth and sexual attractiveness are her focal points and in which, through a lack of awareness or motivation, she cannot conceive of a role for herself outside of that of wife and adornment, a role she obviously cannot sustain.

The relationship between the Rieslings and the Babbitts is built on a parallel structure; the Babbitts dramatize the commonplace while the Rieslings, also of the commonplace, dramatize the tragic. The terror of this structure is that one is constantly aware that the patterns may be, at any time, altered only slightly to include the tragic in the commonplace. The closeness of their lives is established even in the fact that Zilla and Myra are related. They meet their prospective husbands in college. George is inordinately fond of Paul: "He was an older brother to Paul Riesling, swift to defend him, admiring him with a proud credulous love passing the love of women" (p. 50). Paul is bitter that he has to forego his dream to be a violinist and that he must work in his father's tar-roofing business. Babbitt, too, is discontent, but he is not quite certain why: "He beheld, and half admitted that he beheld, his way of life as incredibly mechanical. Mechanical business--a brisk selling of badly built houses. Mechanical religion--a dry, hard church, shut off from the real life of the streets, inhumanly respectable as a top-hat. Mechanical golf and dinner parties and bridge and conversation . . . mechanical friendships--back slapping and jocular, never daring to essay the test of quietness" (p. 234).

In this environment both couples are mildly unhappy, but the Babbitts have children who interest them and occupy time which otherwise might be taken up in brooding. However, when Paul goes to prison George Babbitt faces a crisis: " . . . and after saying goodbye to him at the station Babbitt returned to his office to realize he faced a world which, without Paul, was meaningless" (p. 218). This meaninglessness manifests itself in several ways: he snaps at Myra or ignores her; he instigates an affair with a pretty client; he refuses to be a booster and jolly good fellow by not joining the Good Citizen's League; he begins to question what he is doing and why. His behavior has its consequences: his business associates move against him and his income falls off, his friends admonish him and then ignore him, and his wife suffers.

Because Myra is isolated from George--he no longer pretends to be interested in her even as a mother figure--she seeks some support or meaning for her life outside her home and what she arrives at are the lectures of Mrs. Opal Emerson Mudge who speaks before the League of Higher Illumination on such topics as "Cultivation the Sun Spirit." And she now finds her former mildly pleasant routine household tasks tedious: "'Don't you suppose I ever get tired of fussing? I get so bored with ordering three meals a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and ruining my eyes over that horrid sewing machine, and looking after your clothes and Rone's and Ted's and Tinka's. . .'" (p. 282-3). The form of Myra's mutiny reflects the weakness of her resources. Nor does Myra share or understand George's rebellion; she does know, however, that in order for him to be brought back into the Floral Heights' fold he must make peace with his peers and business

associates by joining their newly formed Good Citizen's League, a group organized to oppose unions, labor strikes, or any faction which will threaten the security of the business men of Zenith. She cajoles him, begs him to capitulate, and her reasons are that "the nicest people belong" and "people might criticize you" (p. 298).

Thus Myra the respectable wife, supporting the standards of the community, pressures her errant husband to remain within its bounds. She, like Gertie Cowles in The Trail of the Hawk, carries the banner-word nice into battle against wayward proprieties. But George Babbitt is not a hero to withstand communal disfavor and pressure; he is like Carol Kennicott, aware of the inequalities and uglinesses but ill-equipped to do anything about them. In fact George is greatly relieved to give up the fight and to return to his old way of life. His surrender is brought about by a happenstance occurrence--Myra's appendectomy. In this emergency George is shocked back into his old thinking patterns: he recaptures the meaning of their life together and realizes that it is what he really wants and in a gush of emotion he tumbles into his neighbors' and associates' good graces and into his routinely comfortable life. His first act is to join the Good Citizens' League.

If it had not been for Myra's appendectomy, would, one speculates, the Babbitts' lives have been plunged into tragedy as the Rieslings' had? Whatever the answer is, the irony remains that for the Babbitts the alternative to tragedy lies in conformity to the community, a community where "standard advertised wares--toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters--were . . . symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom" (p. 81). The form these "substitutes" take can be

found in the behavior and lives of the women: Myra, puttering in her comfortable gadget-filled house, cries only once--when she realizes her dinner party, given to impress the city's socially prominent, is a failure. Such is her passion. Zilla Riesling struggles with the harping cosmetics industry's demands that she be glossily, sveltely beautiful, feeling that glamour is her means to joy. Both are shaped into types, the Good Wife and the Nagging Wife. There is, however, one more type of woman to be considered, the Other Woman, or a type of the bohemian--playmate, transformed, without imagination or an iota of artistic or intellectual interests, into a citified Maud Dyer, the smeary voluptuary of Main Street.

She is Tanis Judique, a widow, attractive in smart, chiffon dresses and romantic picture hats. She meets Babbitt in her search for an apartment; they become friends and then surreptitious lovers. Besides dressing well Tanis knows how to flatter a man; she effaces herself and her sex in order to make him feel important. She comments on his driving; he suggests that she, too, may be a good driver: "'Oh, no--I mean--not really. Of course we have a car--I mean, before my husband passed on--and I used to make believe drive it, but I don't think any woman ever learns to drive like a man.'" George replies, "'Well, now, there's some mighty good woman drivers.'" 'Oh, of course, these women that try to imitate men, and play golf and everything, and ruin their complexions and spoil their hands!'" (p. 227). Also, she refers to herself, as children often do, in the third person: "'Would you think poor Tanis dreadfully naughty if she smoked?'" (p. 262). She is able, in the role as the other woman, to supply the flattery that Myra cannot; also, she

instinctively knows that by appearing childish and sweet she projects an innocent image that makes the man feel strong and vastly superior; in short, she appeals to his immaturity.

Babbitt involves himself with Tanis's friends, a group of men and women who enjoy dancing, drinking, and fast driving: "They were the Bunch, wise and beautiful and amusing; they were Bohemians and urbanites, accustomed to all the luxuries of Zenith: dance-halls, movie-theaters, and road-houses . . . " (p. 267). "The conversation of the Bunch was exclamatory, high-colored, full of references to people whom Babbitt did not know. Apparently they thought very comfortably of themselves" (p. 266). The Bunch and Tanis, as an alternative to Floral Heights and Myra, is a statement on the quality of life in Zenith and it is an indication that, at least for those of the means and capabilities of Babbitt, there is no alternative; one is as enervating as the other.

When Babbitt has exhausted himself with the novelty of an affair, it begins to pall; the woman as docile sex-object becomes repellent through, paradoxically, both her demands and her passivity:

He had to assure her. She stroked his hair; and he had to look pleased under that touch, the more demanding in its beguiling softness. He was impatient. He wanted to flee out to a hard, sure, unemotional man-world--Through her delicate and caressing fingers she may have caught something of his shrugging distaste. She left him--he was for the moment buoyantly relieved--she dragged a footstool to his feet and sat looking beseechingly up at him. But as in many men the cringing of a dog, the flinching of a frightened child, rouse not pity but a surprised and jerky cruelty, so her humility only annoyed him. And he saw her now as middle-aged, as beginning to be old . . . He noted how the soft flesh was creasing into webby folds beneath her chin, below her eyes, at the base of her wrists (p. 293).

The preceding quotation reveals his feelings; not only does he lack respect for Tanis, he is also repulsed by her soft, effacing image. Her

ability to please Babbitt fails for two reasons: she cannot sustain the illusion of youth nor can she give him the sense of self-respect and social approval that his wife can, and although it was from this approval that he was initially fleeing in his revolt, he knows now that he must have it in order to live comfortably.

The citizens of Zenith are sacrificed to comfort; women are not only objects of comfort, they are purveyors of comfort, of a sense of ease and well-being, but, like Zilla, they sometimes fail. They are placed in comfortable houses or apartments and told to be good cooks, mothers, and companions, which essentially means "do not rock the boat." One of Myra Babbitt's virtues is that "she took care of the house and didn't bother the males by thinking" (p. 72). And not to bother about thinking is the first prerequisite in becoming a stereotype.

Thus Myra, Zilla, and Tanis are stereotypes of wives; all have modified their "joys and passions and wisdoms" to be acceptable in Zenith in a cloistered world where a woman either dispenses comfort and pleasure or, if beautiful and young, is a status symbol.

In spite of the popularity of Babbitt and Main Street several critics and many readers were upset with the pervading view of life presented in those novels. There were no idealized characters and essentially the prognosis for the American future was grim. Before Arrowsmith, according to Mark Schorer, Lewis was criticized for "failure to comprehend the American experience, that he lacked 'spiritual idea' However this may be as an argument, such dissent was now subdued: not only did Arrowsmith rotate on the basis of a 'spiritual idea' (self dedication to truth seeking), it also permitted its chief characters to

realize their 'spiritual' ambitions, to transcend the 'strain' and the sordid struggle."⁸ Arrowsmith, Lewis's next novel was published in 1925, a story of a doctor-scientist; it has a heroic type for its central character, and this fact evidently pleased critics and readers. Both American and English critics praised the novel: "'a stirring epic quality. . . .' 'It goes down to the roots of our day' . . . 'deeply understanding and unflinchingly honest.'"⁹ Lewis said that the best of himself, an idealized self, appears in a few of his fictional characters; two of these characters are from Arrowsmith: "There is really no Sinclair Lewis about whom that diligent scribbler himself could write, outside of what appears in his characters. All his respect for learning, for integrity, for accuracy, and for the possibilities of human achievement are to be found . . . in his portrait of Max Gottlieb, in Arrowsmith. Most of the fellow's capacity for loyalty to love and friendship has gone into Leora in that same novel."¹⁰

Leora Tozer, the wife of the hero Martin Arrowsmith, is an idealized characterization of a loyal and loving woman. D. J. Dooley notes that "Many male readers seem to have fallen in love with Leora: Harcourt called her 'just about the best woman character in American fiction that I know of.'"¹¹ Mark Schorer claims that "Leora seemed to Lewis's readers to be a 'realized' character, as no woman in his previous fiction had been, and she commanded their nearly universal praise."¹²

Such was the criticism of Leora in 1925; later, other voices were heard. In 1951, in With Love From Gracie, Grace Hegger Lewis states: "Leora is still appealing but even she, the most admired of all his women characters, is not three dimensional--he had pinned on her the placard 'undemanding wife every man dreams of' as he had pinned signs

on me and other women. And even Leora he had found inadequate when he turned to Joyce Lanyon, who is quite improbable."¹³ Martin Light, according to D. J. Dooley, "finds her incredible--'chiefly a convenience who does all the right things, especially in never interfering with her husband's plans, and who tops it all off by becoming a martyr to science.'"¹⁴

Along with such an idealized characterization, however, are the images of two other women, Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon. Martin Light comments: "By the writing of this book he had altered his ideas about women however. He had found sinister elements in the eager young feminists who wished only for self-realization. They had metamorphosed from the idealized Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood, from the more determined Una Golden, into the nervously reformist and uncertain Carol Kennicott. By Arrowsmith Lewis was bitterly portraying women he called 'Improvers.'"¹⁵ "Improvers" is an ironical term; "Restrainers" is a descriptive one, because these women keep the men within the circle of the community. They are not, however, new in Lewis's work: Gertie Cowles, Mrs. Golden, and Myra Babbitt are all women whose behavior and attitudes are regulated by the restraining concept of what is nice. But the "Improvers" in Arrowsmith are portrayed with an additional bitterness because they are the result of Lewis's discovery that the playmates such as Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood, for whom the hero strives and in whom he invests his life and happiness, turn out to be as restraining and as short-visioned as the type of small-town Gertie Cowles. Since this discovery Lewis portrays, in Arrowsmith, a composite of the nice housewife woman and of the playmate; that the characterization is bitter is the hero's awakening to the reality that the "pure" playmate does not exist, whether in the Middlewest or in the East.

Martin Light points out how the composite characters of Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon figure in the structure of Arrowsmith: "William Wrenn and Hawk Erickson each had a choice between two women. Now in Arrowsmith such a choice re-emerges as an important element in the form of Lewis's books. Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon, standing at the opening and the close of the novel, can symbolize grasping and selfish impulses in our society, while Leora Tozer represents generous and considerate ones. Arrowsmith can do his best work only in the atmosphere of Leora, or alone."¹⁶

The first of these women is Madeline Fox, a sometime graduate student in English, to whom Martin Arrowsmith is attracted. She is tall, beautiful, and a skilled hostess presiding over chicken salad and charades in her apartment off campus she shares with her mother. It is "full of literature and decoration; a bronze Buddha from Chicago, a rubbing of Shakespeare's epitaph, a set of Anatole France in translation, a photograph of Cologne cathedral, a wicker tea table with a samovar"¹⁷ Lewis's description of homes or rooms serve to betray or to enhance their inhabitants; here Madeline's apartment reflects her eclecticism, dilettantism, and pretentiousness. She is also an "Improver"; when Martin says damn, Madeline rebukes him. The narrator says, "Few women can for long periods keep from trying to Improve their men, and to Improve means to change a person from what he is, whatever that might be, into something else The moment the urgent Martin showed that he was stirred by her graces, she went at his clothes . . . and at his vocabulary and his taste for fiction, with new and patronizing vigor" (p. 46). Madeline is also characterized by her opinions of Professor Max Gottlieb, Martin's apotheosis of all that is good in

the scientific world. She sees Gottlieb as a failure, a shabby recluse, who is incapable of making money as the urbane and wealthy medical practitioners she admires do, thus her perceptions reveal her values.

Fortunately for Martin's career as a scientist he escapes marriage to Madeline through a timely meeting with Leora Tozer, the woman he does marry. Leora compares herself to Madeline: "'Perhaps you like me better because you can bully me--because I tag after you and She never would. And I know your work is more important to you than I am But I am stupid and ordinary and She isn't. I simply admire you frightfully . . . while She has sense enough to make you admire Her and tag after Her" (pp. 69-70). Her speech, embarrassing in its self-effacement, nevertheless is accurate in pointing to the fact that Madeline, in her egocentered world, is not capable of sacrificing for Martin, science, or anyone except herself.

After several years of marriage, years in which Martin's research and scientific career thrive, Leora dies of typhoid fever, and this time Martin does not escape "Madeline Fox," whom in the person of Joyce Lanyon he marries. Joyce, like Madeline, is a composite of the respectable, restraining wife and the imaginative playmate; she is also egocentric and selfish. Martin has not learned anything about women. It takes a friend from his youth, a reprobate with insight, to tell him, "'But what I can't understand is how after living with Leora, who was the real thing, you can stand a hoity-toity skirt like Joycey!'" (p. 431).

Joyce Lanyon is not wholly unsympathetic: "Behind all her reasons for valuing Martin was the fact that the only time in her life when she had felt useful and independent was when she had been an almshouse cook" (p. 411). She helps Martin during the typhoid epidemic in the Barbados;

but once back in New York City she, of course, returns to the enclosed world of the very rich, and she wants to bring Martin with her. This is not difficult for her to accomplish because Martin has always been fascinated by the aura of wealth. The only time in his previous marriage he is ever upset with Leora is by her refusal to care about the wealthy "elite". Leora, a true egalitarian, cannot be cajoled into the world of haute couture and amusing dinner-table repartee; she enjoys a hamburger with friends from medical school days as much as a six course dinner with their new affluent friends. But after Leora's death Martin is no longer restrained from admiring the rich. Joyce, the "soft-voiced mistress of many servants," easily lures Martin into her world (p. 402). She muses that "her man was prettier than any of them, and if she would but be patient with him, she could make him master polo and clothes and conversation . . . but of course go on with his science" (p. 413).

Her view of Martin's work is that it is an ornament, one that adorns her; but, when she discovers that his work keeps him away from home and that consequently she is frequently without a dinner companion or an escort to social functions, she buys him a complete laboratory and has it installed in their home. Its presence often affords her quests an after-dinner diversion--to tour the laboratory and to see the famous scientist at work. Martin cannot tolerate this.

Joyce, like Madeline, dwells on attention: "She expected him to remember her birthday, her taste in wine, her liking for flowers, and her objection to viewing the process of shaving. She wanted a room to herself; she insisted that he knock before entering; and she demanded that he admire her hats" (p. 414).

The crisis in their marriage occurs over the directorship of the scientific foundation because Joyce wants him to accept the position because it is prestigious and lucrative. She doesn't understand that if Martin is the director he will no longer be able to work on his research, nor does she care. They quarrel-- "'Now by God let me tell you--'" (p. 442). And Joyce, like her predecessors Gertie Cowles, Myra Babbitt, and Madeline Fox, scolds, "'Martin, do you need to emphasize your arguments by a 'by God' in every sentence, or have you a few other expressions in your highly scientific vocabulary?'" (p. 443). Joyce plays the "Improver"; the restraining voice admonishes the would-be rebel, the man who will not follow society's dicta for success.

Although he and Joyce have a son, Martin decides to leave her. In an argument against remaining and fulfilling his family duties, he tells her: "'I imagine it's just that argument that's kept almost everybody, all these centuries, from being anything but a machine for digestion and propagation and obedience'" (p. 443). Later he tells her: "'But you want a playmate, and I want to work'" (p. 446). Several critics have complained about Martin's leaving Joyce. Representative of their attitudes is Warren Beck's comment in College English: he states that Arrowsmith's retreat from "feminine domination, social intrusions or even any friction from colleagues" lessens his image as a hero, who would never behave so unscrupulously.¹⁸ Lewis has few heroes, Martin Arrowsmith is one, and, in a sense, Elmer Gantry is another and both are unscrupulous in achieving their goals. One of Lewis's points is that if a society is corrupt, the values it upholds must be ignored or broken in order for the individual or hero to function freely, which is what Arrowsmith does. Gantry, on the other hand, upholds the values. The irony

of Gantry's even being cast as a hero is that he only appears to epitomize society's values, and by this appearance he is rewarded through high offices in the church and prestige in the community. Consequently, in reading Lewis one must be aware of the upholders of the community's standards per se.

The women who uphold the values of the community over those of the individual function as foils to creativity and critical thought. Both Joyce Lanyon and Madeline Fox are such women; they admonish Martin for social indiscretions whether they be as trivial as breaking a dinner engagement or as significant as breaking up a marriage. As representative of the middle and upper classes they are accomplished in society's ways; they move gracefully in its circles, adorned with the correct clothes, manners, and conversations. They acquire culture in order to embellish their dinner-table talk. It is significant that Lewis's men often seek relief from such women in the companionship of other men. When Martin leaves Joyce it is to join his friend and colleague Terry Wickett, an iconoclast, who disdains society but who passionately loves his work. Even in Babbitt the would-be rebel George loves Paul Riesling "above women," and in Mantrap, the protagonist involved with a Canadian trapper and his wife, chooses the man's friendship over the wife's offer of love. Carl Van Doren comments on Lewis's attitude towards socially adept women: "Women of much intricacy he appears to rank, like many an American man, among the secrets of nature, beguiling but not entirely to be comprehended. Towards women in general he has about the attitude of masculine America when it is not wearing its conventional chivalry. That is, he tends to like and trust them, to depend reasonably upon them, and to look to men for his chief friendships and recognitions."¹⁹

It is not surprising, then, that in the characterization of Leora Arrowsmith, whom Lewis wanted to exalt, he created a woman different from the socially adept, one who exhibits many so-called masculine attributes such as directness, honesty, and an easy-going attitude. Martin's first impression of Leora is that, unlike Madeline to whom he is engaged, she is totally ingenuous:

He felt an instant and complete comradeship with her, a relation free from the fencing and posing of his struggle with Madeline. He knew that this girl was of his own people. If she was vulgar, jocular, unreticent, she was also gallant, she was full of laughter at humbugs, she was capable of a loyalty too casual and natural to seem heroic. . . . He found in her a casualness, a lack of prejudice, a directness. . . . She was feminine but undemanding; she was never Improving and rarely shocked; she was neither flirtatious nor cold. She was indeed the first girl to whom he had ever talked without self-consciousness (pp. 55-8).

The contrast between Leora and Madeline is also evident in their responses to Max Gottlieb, Martin's mentor and god. Madeline sees Gottlieb outside the mainstream of fame and wealth and consequently as a failure; Leora senses (at first sight) that he is "'the greatest man I've ever seen! . . . he's like a sword--no, he's like a brain walking'" (p. 122). She intuitively recognizes the meaning of Gottlieb, and her ability to understand without reason is an important aspect of her function in the novel: not only does she serve Martin by complementing his investigating, scientific soul with her intuiting and accepting one, she also serves as a presence rather than as an ego, diffusing action rather than collecting it to her. In this sense she resembles E. M. Forster's characterizations of Mrs. Wilcox in Howard's End and Mrs. Moore in Passage to India who also function as spirits or presences of harmony and love, foils to societies which stress aggressiveness, acquisition, and success.

Leora is never a part of society as Martin is, in spite of his dedication to science. During a period of their marriage while they are living in Nautilus, Iowa, they are adopted, so to speak, by the city's elite, and although Leora by her completely casual manner is accepted by the group, as she is wherever she goes, Martin nags her for not dressing or aping the other women: "'Why can't you take a little time to make yourself attractive? God knows you haven't anything else to do! Great Jehosaphat, can't you even sew on buttons?'" (p. 246). Eventually Martin learns that the group is incompatible with his work and he stops making demands of fashion on Leora who is oblivious to class. Her great quality is that she is truly democratic, accepting people on an individual basis rather than as representative of a particular group.

Leora is clearly androgynous; she is feminine in her appearance and sexually passionate with Martin but she is without those secondary sexual characteristics associated with femininity: flirtatiousness, sentimentality, squeamishness, egoism. Even her speech is different from Lewis's earlier heroines; it is masculine in the sense that she swears and uses slang that would have shocked both Carl and Ruth Ericson, or Milt Daggert and Claire Boltwood. Gone are the fanciful metaphors and clever phrases of the early heroines; Leora speaks simply and often her speech is homely: "'Do you want me to become a harem beauty? I could. I could be a floosey. . . . Do you want a real princess like Clara Tredgold, or do you want me, that don't care a hang where we go or what we do as long as we stand by each other?'" (p. 246). In her relationship with her husband she is more of a companion or "buddy" than what is often thought to be a wife. Both Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon, on the contrary, demand recognition for their femininity. Leora is the type of person

George Sand describes: "The question of sex, in a sense at which the thought of man or woman should never exclusively stop, obliterates . . . the idea of the human being, which is always the same being and ought never to perfect itself as a man or as a woman, but as a soul and child of God."²⁰

Leora, like Forster's Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore, must die in order for the hero to mature. Martin's maturation can occur only after a trial. He must marry Joyce Lanyon and leave her; he must excoriate his desire for wealth and power before he can dedicate himself totally to his life's work--science. In the following episode the transfer from Leora to Joyce takes place. Martin, on another island in the Barbados, away from Leora, meets Joyce whom he recognizes as his "double": "He beheld a woman who must be his sister . . . her paleness, her black brows and dusky hair, she was his twin; she was his self enchanted" (p. 384). This side of Martin is the other side of his dedicated self: it is his enthralled self lusting for the world of wealth and power; it is this self that must be exorcised before he can be the pure hero-scientist. Lewis is not a writer of mystical experiences, but in an examination of this episode there is an aura of the supernatural. Leora, alone on another island at the time of this meeting between Martin and Joyce, feels strangely detached: "She sat on the porch, staring at the shadowy roofs of Blackwater below, sure that she felt a "miasm" writhing up through the hot darkness. She knew the direction of St. Swithin's Parish--beyond that delicate glimmer of lights from palm huts coiling up the hills. She concentrated on it, wondering if by some magic she might not have a signal from him, but she could get no feeling of his looking toward her. She sat long and quiet. . . . She had nothing to do" (p. 389).

A few days later Leora is dead. Martin discovers her body, in the deserted cottage, upon his return. Her death frees him to test his own strength and wisdom, to make choices alone. His first act is to marry Joyce, who, representative of a class which is destructive to Martin's work, envelopes him in a milieu of leisure and wealth. However, this mistake, his marriage, leads him to knowledge upon which he acts, eventually leaving Joyce and his son and entering into his life's work, his dedication to his research complete.

The three women in Arrowsmith further the hero's development either through testing or spiritual succor; Madeline and Joyce are types of Lewis's early heroines--bright, clever, and sophisticated--characterized now by their egocentrism and their debilitating effect on the man whose work they resent because it engages the most part of his interests. Sigmund Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents writes on this aspect of women:

. . . women soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence. . . . Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable. Since a man does not have unlimited quantities of physical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.²¹

Freud's statements illuminate the characters of Joyce Lanyon and Madeline Fox as well as many other of Lewis's fictional women, but it is significant that Sinclair Lewis in portraying women such as Una Golden and Ann

Vickers created women as capable of "instinctual sublimations" and an "expedient distribution of the libido" as men. These women must overcome the hostility of their spouses in order to free themselves from their traditional roles and to get on with the "work of civilization." The fact that a major heroine, Carol Kennicott, cannot become free according to this line of thinking, is partly because, when she does exhibit an ability to sublimate instincts she is labeled "cold" and thus made to feel guilty, which paralyzes her for direct, clear action. In Lewis's novels, the fact that there are many more characterizations of women like Joyce and Madeline is probably because traditional feminine roles in society shape such characters. Women who are customarily consigned to ancillary roles often harbor hostilities and jealousies which consequently emerge in personality distortions. Only a saint like Leora can be subservient with grace, and she is, as are most saints, improbable. Thus the portrayal of Leora Tozer is unique in Lewis's novels: in fact, never again in his work will a major female character appear as sympathetic and loyal to the hero as she, the idealized helpmate to the man.

There is irony in the choice of the perfect helpmate for the hero of Lewis's next novel, Elmer Gantry, published in 1927. Her character reflects the hero's; Sharon Falconer, an evangelist, is a creation of the most rococo and distorted proportions. As a theurgist she amply mirrors the Faustian qualities of Gantry, the wonder-worker whose racket is religion. As in Arrowsmith the story of the novel is episodic, structured on the protagonist's relationship with three women whose basic types in Elmer Gantry are the mother, the whore, and the unscrupulous business woman. Mark Schorer comments on the structure:

Like most of Lewis's novels, it is a loosely episodic chronicle that breaks down into three large parts, each nearly independent of the others. In each part Elmer's progress is colored and in two of them threatened by his relation with a woman, but from each Elmer emerges triumphant. The first part takes us through his Baptist education, his ordination, his first pulpit and his escape from Lulu; the second takes us through his career as an evangelist with the fantastic Sharon Falconer; the third takes us through his experience of New Thought and his rise in Methodism, together with his decline of his marriage to Cleo and his escape from Hettie, who threatened to bring him to public ruin but who is herself routed as, in the final sentence, Elmer promises that "We shall yet make these United States a moral nation."²²

In Elmer Gantry, the focus of Lewis's criticism is religion in America which he declares to have failed in its essential purpose. Through his declaration he angered thousands; some even threatened to kill him. Lewis might attack small towns and cities and businesses but when he ventured to expose what he considered the machinations and hypocrisy of established religion he aroused the angry emotions of many. The book was banned not only in Boston but in cities from Kansas City to Glasgow. Lewis was "invited to a lynching party in Virginia; one cleric suggested that a prison sentence of five years was clearly in order."²³

Not only were people incensed by his attack on religion, they were infuriated by his treatment of relations between the sexes. Grace Hegger Lewis says "he had the smirking attitude toward sex characteristic of his time, which reached its height, or rather depth, in Elmer Gantry. In the first draft of this book, considerably subdued later, the bigness of the theme, the vast research, the devastating satire, were blanketed by a lechery which caused one to read with nasty curiosity rather than with literary appreciation."²⁴

Grace Lewis's remarks are an indication of the scope of the controversy and they also reveal a prevalent attitude toward the sexual

scenes; however, because the scenes are a facet of Gantry's innate character and colored by his point of view, the image of sex in the novel functions as an integral part of Gantry's character.

In creating Gantry, Lewis fashioned a protagonist diametrical to Martin Arrowsmith: Elmer the self-seeker, the panderer of chicanery; Martin, the truth-seeker, the scientist. In Elmer Gantry all of the episodes and characters are overpowered by his presence; those who would be good, like Frank Shallard and Cleo Benham, are crushed, not only by Gantry, but by the forces of society that promote the welfare and prominence of people like Elmer Gantry.

Before Gantry is "saved" he is rather attractive; he is a bulky young man with a sonorous voice whom the narrator says "would have been so happy in the prize-ring, the fish-market, or the stock exchange."²⁵ His values, however, are not attractive: "He could not understand men who shrank from blood, who liked poetry or roses, who did not casually endeavor to seduce every possibly seducible girl" (p. 16). In the opening chapter Elmer is at a bar having a beer and singing "The Good Old Summer Time," after having had sexual intercourse with his sometime-girl-friend Juanita. The puerile lyrics reveal Gantry's attitude toward the women he seduces: they are "baby-mine" or "tootsey-wootsies," or little cute toys to be played with and put away. The only other type of woman, as far as Elmer is concerned, is his mother.

Mrs. Gantry is the very respectable woman, another variation of Mrs. Golden and Mrs. Babbitt; she is a widow who "is owned by the church . . . She had always wanted Elmer to be a preacher. She was jolly enough, and no fool about pennies in making change, but for a preacher standing upon a platform in a long-tailed coat she had gaping

awe" (p. 34). Because Elmer is afraid of her goodness he studies for the ministry much against his will even though he knows that in doing so he is a hypocrite. But his mother pushes him and she manages to cajole and scheme to get Elmer to be saved at a revivalist meeting: "'Won't you make your old mother happy? Let yourself know the joy of surrender to Jesus.'" She was weeping, old eyes puckered, and in her weeping was his every recollection of winter dawns when she had let him stay in bed and brought porridge to him across the icy floor" (p. 51). Elmer's salvation is ironically the beginning of his death, so to speak; he learns to dissemble, to use people, to lie, to be cruel, and all in the name of piety and religion.

His character change can be seen in his relations with Lulu Bains, the deacon's daughter in a country church where Elmer is preaching while finishing his degree at Terwillinger College. He uses piety to seduce Lulu who is another "tootsey-wootsey" in Elmer's eyes: "Lulu Bains was a gray-and-white kitten with a pink ribbon . . . with sweet kitten eyes . . . small soft kitten who purred" (pp. 100-1). Lulu speaks to him in a little girl's voice telling him that his own "boom-boom" voice frightens her. In short she assumes the woman-as-dolly role with him. He speaks to her of sublime spirituality all of the time his arms tingling to hold her. He tells her, "'I'm really just a big bashful kid, and I need your help so. Do you know, dear, you remind me of my mother?'" (p. 106). Elmer seduces her and Lulu expects they will be married, but "he didn't want to marry this brainless little fluffy chick, who would be of no help in impressing rich parishioners" (p. 116). Lulu, the farmer's daughter, is his first victim; he jilts her through a piece of ingenious skullduggery and flounders on to another woman, Sharon Falconer, in whom he meets his match.

Sharon Falconer stands at the center of the novel, a bigger than life figure, a heroine for a hero like Gantry. She is an evangelist who uses her sex appeal to attract people to Christ. Martin Light comments on Sharon's image:

She is a monstrous creation who seems to grow in size with each revelation of her craziness. She appears to Elmer as a saint, arms outstretched, stately, slender and tall, passionate. Declining from this spirituality, she gives her gospel crew a pep talk: let's hit people hard for money pledges. She is an insane perversion of the sanctity of the elect She is the supreme fantasist. She has created an enchanted image of herself, and she has convinced her audience of that image, so that they see her as she wants to be seen, and only we, given glimpses of another self when she reveals herself to Elmer, come to know how complete and insane is her transformation. She is of the occult; she is a witch God talks to her. But shifting moods again, she can acknowledge that she is just an ignorant young woman with a lot of misdirected energy--and even an evil one."²⁶

She is an extraordinary person who creates out of her own needs: she is an orphan so she creates an old aristocratic family including a southern mansion. Sharon invites Elmer to spend a week with her at the mansion. Captivated by the setting and the gracious servants he exclaims "'I've come home,'" and he feels "free of all the wickedness which had daubed it [his soul]--oratorical ambitions, emotional orgasm, dead sayings of dull peers, dogmas and piety" (p. 179). But Elmer's moment of honest revelation fades quickly as he realizes that to have Sharon he must keep on with the evangelical business. He does a quick about-face: "'Besides! There is a lot to this religious stuff. We do good. Maybe we jolly them into emotions too much, but don't that wake folks up from their ruts? Course it does!'" (p. 180). In effect, his coming "home" to a place that is built on lies is indicative that "home" is, for Elmer, a state of hypocrisy and compromise.

It is here that Sharon seduces Elmer. She bids him to come with her because it is "the call," as she leads him to her suite of rooms, "a red furnace" of velvets, bizarre lamps, incense, a carved ivory bed; in an adjoining room he sees statues of saints, animal gods, Venus, and a sadomasochistic crucifixion. After Sharon's incantation to the Blessed Virgin and Mothers Hera, Frigga, Ishtar, Isis, and Astarte she falls into Elmer's arms and they embrace at the foot of the altar. About this scene Mark Schorer says that "the travesty that it makes of both the sexual and the religious experience is of course to be associated with the temper of orgiastic evangelism with which the book is full."²⁷

After this episode Gantry becomes a full-fledged member of Sharon's troupe and although his presence adds a circus-like quality to their performances, the troupe flourishes; the union of Gantry and Sharon is successful.

She dominates him with her moods: sexually passionate, keen business acumen, dedicated worker, laughing child. It is this last mood that delights Elmer; of the others he is in awe, but the little girl or "tootsey-wootsey" once again appeals to his puerile nature. Sharon is a composite of many fragments; she is born Katie Jonas, an orphan, but she becomes Sharon Falconer the saint, and in between she is a host of contradictory persons, all of whom she believes in. As a mate for Gantry she is sublime. As an Eve to his perverted Adam she is a perfect grotesque using religion and sex to satisfy her egocentrism. Sharon is an anomaly and consequently difficult to type in relation to Lewis's other fictional women; however, a point can be made about her function in the novel by comparing her with Leora Tozer Arrowsmith. She and Leora are unique in Lewis's fiction in two ways: they are perfectly suited to the

male protagonists and they both die (the only major women in Lewis's novels who do). The reason they must die is to free the hero to face conflicts which can only occur when the protagonist is married to a woman who acerbates their relationship. Sharon dies in a tabernacle fire, her saintly image intact--"standing like an ivory column against the terror," truly believing she can lead her people through the flames" (p. 220). Hundreds, including Sharon, die.

The woman Elmer Gantry marries after Sharon's death is Cleo Benham from Banjo Crossing. Cleo is a virginal young woman whose likeness appeared in thousands of oval framed, tinted chromos in living rooms throughout America in the twenties. She is dressed in white muslin with ribbons bedecking her hair and waist, or sometimes she's wearing a wide-brimmed hat, often she holds a rabbit or a flower or a parasol; she does not smile but her expression conveys a peaceful spirit. She is serene, young, yet mature, a personification of wife and mother. "Cleo Benham had spent three years in the Sparta Women's College, specializing in piano, organ, French, English literature, strictly expurgated, and the study of the Bible" (p. 259). Cleo is devout and a hard worker in the church; she has dreamed of marrying a preacher and sharing in doing good work. Elmer, after a brief bout with New Thought, has decided to go straight. He sees in Cleo the perfect bishop's wife, also he sees that her father is moderately wealthy. To ingratiate himself in Banjo Crossing with Cleo's father, Elmer "went fishing--which gained him credit among the males. He procured a dog, also a sound, manly thing to do, and though he occasionally kicked the dog in the country; he was clamorously affectionate with it in town" (p. 278). When Gantry marries Cleo he behaves toward her as he does the dog; publicly he acclaims her but

privately he abuses her. Cleo's passivity and inarticulate goodness arouse Elmer to sadistic behavior. On their wedding night he makes her cry, accusing her of sexual clumsiness "while she wept, her hair disordered round her meek face, which he hated" (p. 284).

Cleo, for whom marriage is a sacrament, cannot conceive, in her long tortuous years with Gantry, any other life, and as she is an embellishment to his career he is careful to restrain his cruelty towards her when his needs require her gracious behavior towards parishioners or clergy, so that their relationship drags on for both. Towards other women Gantry is obsequious or lustful; Lulu Bains reenters his life and he engages himself in an affair with her. Although older and married Lulu is still the "kitten": "Her eyes were ingratiatingly soft, very inviting; she still smiled with a desire to be friendly to everyone" (p. 323). Her sexual nature is like Maud Dyer's, the pharmacist's wife in Gopher Prairie. Both women are softly voluptuous and without resistance to being used. "'Oh, yes!'" she breathed, as she led him into the shabby sitting room with its thrice--painted cane rockers, its couch covered with a knitted shawl, its department-store chromos of fruit and Versailles" (p. 326). Lulu's lack of imagination, her unperceptiveness to Elmer's character, her passivity to lust, and the essential shabbiness of their affair are reflected in her tawdry rooms as well as in her somewhat blurred face. She is no match for Gantry who drops her again when a sharp-eyed woman, Hettie Dowler, makes advances towards him. Gantry with his usual adroitness not only makes her feel that their affair is endangering his sacramental office but also that she is guilty of having put him in this position. After this revelation "she crawled out after a time, a little figure in a shabby topcoat over her proud new

dress. She stood waiting for a trolley car, alone under an arc light, fingering her new beaded purse, which she loved because in his generosity He had given it to her. From time to time she wiped her eyes and blew her nose, and all the time she was quite stupidly muttering, 'Oh, my dear, my dear, to think I made trouble for you--oh, my dear, my very dear!'" (p. 401). She resembles a Charles Chaplin creation, a pathetic, tawdry little figure, a victim.

Hettie Dowler is unlike Lulu; she is a clever and skillful secretary who boldly ensconces herself in Gantry's retinue of church employees and in his private life as well. Gantry, at this time, covets the presidency of The National Association for the Purification of the Arts and Press (Napap). With his usual facility for juggling his public behavior with his private behavior, he leads attacks on magazine vendors and unorganized prostitutes while enjoying the sweetness of fornication with Hettie Dowler. Like Sharon Falconer, she is a con-woman (without Sharon's class or success) who sets up Gantry for blackmail--her husband walks in on them at a prescribed hour--and, like Sharon, she exploits the emotional needs of others. Hettie Dowler, as a type, is a version of Istra Nash of Our Mr. Wrenn. She and Sharon are both women of fanciful imagination who seem, to the hero, to have qualities suggesting romance and adventure. Elmer sees Hettie: "If a marquis of the seventeenth century could have been turned into a girl of perhaps twenty-five, completely and ardently feminine yet with the haughty head, the slim hooked nose, the imperious eyes of M. le Marquis, that would have been the woman" (p. 397). Note also Sharon's description: "Coming from some refuge behind the platform, coming slowly her beautiful arms outstretched to them She was young . . . stately, slender and tall; and in her

long slim face, her black eyes . . . was rapture or boiling passion. The sleeves of her straight white robe, with its ruby girdle, were slashed, and fell away from her arms as she drew every one to her" (pp. 156-7). Her guise is medieval and like Hettie she inspires, in the hero, mystery, adventure and romance.

Thus both women are invested with an air of outré-mer, an aura of the faraway; but for the first time (in ten novels) Lewis portrays the romantic as deformed or grotesque. Previously the romantic is associated with fanciful and playful love games or with the dreams and the imaginations of Lewis's early heros and heroines; now, in Gantry this romanticism is transformed: the heroines in samite and silver snoods are power-seeking, money-grasping women. The significance of this transference is not simple, but for the purposes of this chapter the point is that in one traditional image the woman, as romantic heroine, has fallen from her pedestal.²⁸

In effect another traditional image of woman is toppled in Elmer Gantry; it is the pious, respectable mother upholding the values of the community. Elmer's mother forces the town's values upon her son (who is incapable of living by them), thereby introducing him into a life of hypocrisy and dishonesty. If he had not been persuaded to become a part of his widow-mother's dream of his being a preacher he would, the narrator tells us, have been an honest and joyful prize fighter or fishmonger, but by forcing him to don the clerical clothing she accomplishes such a distortion of his true nature that he loses his chance for a life of happiness or honesty.

The final irony of their relationship occurs in the penultimate chapter when his mother admonishes him for neglecting Cleo and he, in

his fear of being exposed by Hettie Dowler, begins to show affection to Cleo so that she will present herself publicly as a devoted and cherished wife. Elmer's mother, completely unaware of his motives, sees only the results of what she supposes her well-timed advice to be: "'I knew you and Cleo would be happier if I just pointed out a few things to you. After all, your old mother may be stupid and Main Street, but there's nobody like a mother to understand her own boy, and I knew that if I just spoke to you, even if you are a Doctor of Divinity, you'd see things different!'" (p. 410). Elmer does not hesitate in his reply: "'Yes, and it was your training that made me a Christian and a preacher. Oh, a man does owe so much to a pious mother!' said Elmer" (p. 410).

The irony of his reply is a measure of the hostility towards the respectable mother type whom Lewis has portrayed in his previous novels: Gertie Cowles, Mrs. Golden, Myra Babbitt, Madeline Fox. Mrs. Gantry cajoles, pleads, and whines in order to instill in Elmer those forms of behavior and thought that are upheld by the church and community and into whose orders she is eager to have her son belong regardless of his desires or inclinations. Once Elmer is initiated into the society he must choose, if he wants to rise through its stations, a wife like his mother who supports its values. When he first meets Cleo "he knew that she was the sort of wife who would help him to capture a bishopric" (p. 260). And towards her he shows respect, even reverence, publicly; privately he treats her with contempt and cruelty, getting even, as it were, with his mother. (This is not to say that Elmer is aware of his motivation.) However, it remains that Gantry's relationships with women are distorted: either he dominates and manipulates them or he is dominated by them.

Thus we see that in Elmer Gantry that two prototypes, formerly benign or pleasant types, are ridiculed; they are portrayed ironically, without sympathy. The respectable mother figure and the impulsive, romantic bohemian are exaggerated to grotesques. Nelly Croubel and Mrs. Golden, the prototypes for Mrs. Gantry, do not tamper with the destinies of their husbands or children as Mrs. Gantry does. And Istra Nash, the slim, red-haired bohemian in Our Mr. Wrenn, never engulfs or devastatingly exploits the hero as Sharon and Hettie do in Elmer Gantry. The early prototypes are innocent characters compared to their transformed likenesses in Gantry.

In all three novels, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, and Elmer Gantry, such transformations have occurred. The women in Babbitt function (with "quiet desperation") as part of the machinery of Zenith's business and gadget-filled world. Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon in Arrowsmith are representative of the egocentrism which occurs in societies where women are decorative rather than a part of the working creative force. And in Elmer Gantry women are either destroyers or victims in an upside-down world which promotes the wicked and punishes the good. In these novels Lewis's characterizations of women are no longer invested with romantic possibilities and with the exception of Leora they are either passive to events or rising to dominate events; in the latter case they become grotesques.

It is interesting to speculate on the causes of these transformations. Of significance is Lewis's maturity as a novelist in which he loses some of his idealism. He stopped characterizing people in his fiction as ideals or romanticists, and he begins to shape his characters

through his experience rather than out of his innocence (or immaturity). Also, it is possible that his characterizations, in these three novels, are a reflection of his disillusionment with an America that from the optimistic years before World War I to the conforming, consuming twenties also grew up in the ways of the world, from innocence and hopefulness to experience and pragmatism. V. L. Parrington in Main Currents in American Thought speaks of the early writers of realism publishing in the first decade or so of the twentieth century: "American realism was hopeful because American life was hopeful. The novelist in this singularly favored land must reflect the temper of a people made kindly by an abundant prosperity and democratic justice, and in the sincerity of his realism he will necessarily concern himself with the 'more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American.'"²⁹ Lewis's early novels reflect the "more smiling aspects" of American life following the dictum of W. D. Howells, but his novels of the 1920s reflect what Parrington describes as the "clouds gathering upon our 'gay' horizons." Parrington notes that class economics precluded a less democratic society and also that in the world itself the optimism of the Victorians was giving way to the conception of determinism, continuity, and causality as prescribed by such thinkers as Comte and Spencer and Marx. The feeling or spirit of the times, Parrington says, was like "a vibrating mechanism shot through with energy that revealed itself in action and reaction, impersonal, amoral, dwarfing all the gods dreamed of hitherto; a universe in which the generations of men have shrunk to a pin-point in limitless space and all teleological hopes and fears become the emptiest of futilities."³⁰

Parrington's statements help to account for the differences in Lewis's characterizations in his early novels and in his novels of the twenties. His portrayal of women, as well as of men, reflect the Zeitgeist of a changing America. The fact that Lewis cast so many characterizations of women in stereotypical roles reflects the quality of their lives in a society being shaped by corporate industrialism. James Lundquist in his work Sinclair Lewis reinforces this point: "Lewis saw . . . one of the greatest dangers in American society--the tendency toward excess not only in religion but also in production, consumption, patriotism, and the proliferation of institutions."³¹ Thus the lives of the women in these novels are characterized by either an element of grotesqueness which is an aspect of excess, or by the process of stereotyping which is an aspect of the standardization imposed on a society that is dedicated to proliferation.

In Lewis's next novel, Dodsworth, he examines the lives of a man and woman trying to escape from such a society.

ENDNOTES

¹In After the Genteel Tradition: American Writers 1910-1930, ed. Malcolm Cowley (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964), p. 92.

²Theodore Adorno et al. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1950), p. 665.

³(Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 253.

⁴(New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 430.

⁵Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (1922; rpt. New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961), p. 76. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

⁶The Revolt from the Village 1915-1930 (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 169.

⁷The Case for Women in Revolt: Patriarchal Attitudes (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1971), p. 71.

⁸Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 416.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰"Self-Portrait: Berlin, 1927," in The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950, eds. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 46.

¹¹The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln: The Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 115.

¹²Schorer, p. 414.

¹³(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 257.

¹⁴Dooley, p. 115.

¹⁵The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 90-91.

¹⁶Light, p. 92.

¹⁷Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1925), p. 42. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸"How Good Is Sinclair Lewis?" 39 (Jan., 1948): 178, p. 178.

¹⁹Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Doran, 1933), p. 47.

²⁰As quoted in Patriarchal Attitudes, p. 166.

²¹trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 50-51.

²²Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, p. 477.

²³Schorer, pp. 473-74.

²⁴With Love From Gracie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 325.

²⁵Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (1927; rpt. New York: The New American Library, 1970), p. 13. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

²⁶Light, p. 103.

²⁷Schorer, p. 477.

²⁸Grace H. Lewis, Half a Loaf (New York: Liveright, 1931), p. 41. During Lewis's courtship with Grace Livingstone Hegger he fancied themselves characters from medieval times; he was the court jester or pantaloon and she was Blanche-fleur or Elaine. He sent her verses on vellum-like writing paper elaborate with illuminated initials and Grace Hegger thought that at that time he dared to show his feelings only under the mask of a medieval cloak.

²⁹Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), p. 316.

³⁰Parrington, p. 317.

³¹(New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), p. 53.

CHAPTER V

FRAN DODSWORTH: DESTRUCTIVE WIFE

Dodsworth, published in 1929, is the last of Lewis's novels of the twenties, and except for Cass Timberlane it is also the last of his really good works. Unlike the preceding five novels, which focus on aspects of society mainly outside of the home, Dodsworth is the story of a marriage, of a journey two people take to find themselves, and the discovery that their marriage is no longer possible. If Main Street is the story from the point of view of the wife, Dodsworth is the story from the point of view of the husband. Mark Schorer makes further comparison between the two novels: "Dodsworth is Main Street in reverse. Whereas in earlier novels he had satirized the stuffy Midwestern citizenry, with its smugness, materialism, and aggressive provinciality, and approved of the 'outsiders' Carol and Paul Riesling and Martin and Shallard . . . now he satirizes Fran Dodsworth, the poor specimen of critics of Babbitt that he chooses to give the reader, and approves the unstuffed Midwestern citizenry in the person of Dodsworth. . . . The terms are the same, and the pattern is the same--of the man who glimpses a dream beyond the actualities and the habits of his life, and who, now, can make it real."¹

Dodsworth, however, is more than a reversal of Main Street; it is a synthesis of two worlds that until Dodsworth remains unresolved in Lewis's fiction. The schism is set forth in his apprentice novel Free

Air by the hero, Milt Daggert: "He had been snatched from the world of beautiful words and serene dignity, of soaring mountains and companionship with Claire in the radiant morning back to the mud and dust of Schoenstrom, from the opera to "city sports" in a lunch room! He hated Bill McGolwey and his sneering assumption that Milt belonged in the filth with him. And he hated himself for not being enough of a genius to combine Bill McGolwey and Claire Boltwood."²

In Dodsworth Lewis accomplishes this "combination" of Bill McGolwey and Claire Boltwood through the maturation of the protagonist to an awareness of the qualities and values of both worlds, and also, in the characterization of Edith Cortright, who epitomizes both worlds. It is Edith who understands the "mud and dust of Schoenstrom" as well as the "beautiful words and serene dignity" of Claire's milieu. The novel concentrates, however, on the journey to Edith; it is the story of Fran and Sam Dodsworth. It is from Fran and what she represents that the hero must extricate himself in order to find harmony within himself and within the world. As Sheldon Grebstein in Sinclair Lewis points out in writing of Dodsworth's search for understanding, it "inevitably means a break with Fran, for it is she who has enslaved him, kept him from fulfillment as a man and as a husband."³

Fran is another of Lewis's "eastern" princesses who enchant the hero by her knowledge of a world he does not know; she is a character in the line of Istra Nash, Ruth Winslow, and Claire Boltwood, the playmates and heroines of Lewis's early novels. That these women are flawed the heroes know, but they quickly brush aside this knowledge because they are so captivated by their quickness of imagination and wit and their sophisticated backgrounds. Nevertheless, they are aware

of certain shortcomings in their idols: William Wrenn is disturbed by beautiful Istra Nash's ridiculing fellow-American tourists in an English inn; Carol Ericson quarrels with Ruth Winslow because she finds an old childhood friend of his a dolt; Carol also knows that Ruth disdains the uneducated, dirty people who come to the settlement house where she volunteers her help a few hours each week; and, in Free Air, Claire Boltwood, travelling across America, eating in small town hotels scorns the waitresses, the dirty linen, and the clumsy lobby decor with equal passion. In short, Lewis's earlier heroines are snobs; but the heroes most willingly subject themselves to these women because they represent a world of charm and beauty unknown to the, as yet, provincial young men. When the hero matures, as he does in Dodsworth, his choice of a heroine changes and he finds a woman who has the knowledge of the old drawing-room world and the understanding of the new briskly mechanical one. She is an aristocrat in the Jeffersonian sense, superior in education and bearing, and compassionate to all classes of fellow men.

Another difference between Dodsworth and Main Street is that whereas Carol Kennicott found no resolution but in submission to her duties as wife and mother, Sam Dodsworth, in refusing to submit to duties which diminish him, comes to a new understanding of himself and consequently he arrives at the brink of a new life.

Although most critics applauded Dodsworth, a few from the New Republic were disappointed because the novel represented, they said, Lewis's return to middle-class values and because it was not in the muckraker tradition of Babbitt and Elmer Gantry; Robert Cantwell called

it "shallow."⁴ On the other hand Ford Madox Ford in the Bookman labeled Dodsworth a "poem."⁵ Later critics find similar praise for the novel. Sheldon Grebstein, in 1962, says that "the critics who have complained that Lewis was incapable of anything but mockery, those who have asserted that Lewis's characters are flat or grotesque, those who deny Lewis any stature beyond that of historian of part of the mood of the 1920's could not have read Dodsworth."⁶ Martin Light claims that "the book is, in fact, one of Lewis's highest achievements."⁷

The portrait of Fran Dodsworth dominates the novel, but the one of Edith Cortright, although sketchy, is as important because she is Lewis's new heroine, the one to emerge after his love affair with the "princess playmate." Sinclair Lewis after fourteen years of marriage to Grace Hegger Lewis had, a few months before the publication of Dodsworth, married Dorothy Thompson. The novel appears to be an account, as D.J. Dooley notes, "of the transfer of affections from Grace to Dorothy Thompson."⁸ Thus the portrait of Edith seems drawn from Lewis's experience with Dorothy, and Fran, whom critics have noted seems modeled after Grace, is the culmination of his earlier heroines. Grace Hegger Lewis published, under the guise of fiction, her own account of their marriage in a novel called Half a Loaf, which is of interest to the study of Dodsworth because it is, as it were, the other side of the coin, and has in it perceptive comments on American women. In another publication, With Love from Gracie, which is an autobiographical account of her life with Lewis, she states that Lewis failed to depict passion between men and women, saying that "there are no truly passionate love scenes because he did not know to create the truly passionate men or women to inspire them. He had the smirking

attitude toward sex characteristic of his times. . . ."10 Lewis certainly is not smirking in Dodsworth, but Grace Lewis does have a point about his ability to depict passionate love scenes. Leslie Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel comments that "Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the center of a novel. Indeed they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full fledged, mature woman, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection of fear of sexuality."11

Fiedler's statements apply to Lewis's novels in that his portrayals of the "full fledged mature woman" are indeed rare, and when they are found, as in the case of Edith Cortright, they are but briefly sketched. It is Fran Dodsworth on whom the story is focused. Clifton Fadiman in the Modern Library preface to Dodsworth calls her "the babied adult, the well-groomed upper-middle-class female American monster, with no business on which to exercise her prehensility, a 'success'--that is to say, a sulky-eyed, sulky mouthed emotional virgin, immature in the home, the salon, the bed. You may see ten thousand Frans on Park Avenue in New York City any day of the year."12

Sam Dodsworth first sees Fran at a country club dance festooned with Japanese lanterns; "the scene was a sentimental chromo--crisping lake, lovers in canoes singing 'Nelly Was a Lady,' all very lugubrious and happy; and Sam Dodsworth enjoyed it" (p. 1). He sees Fran as "an angel of ice . . . slim, shining, ash-blond . . . a crystal candlestick of a girl. . . ." (p. 2). The scene is a direct contrast from the opening of Main Street in which Carol is seen high on a hill; the setting

is natural, the wide vistas windswept. This contrast is an indication of the transformation of the heroines; Carol's vitality and spirit have become polished sophistication in Fran, and the settings or backgrounds reinforce this point. A "sentimental chromo" in Lewis's novels is always associated with artificiality, a defect of character, an indication that the individual is stamped out, or standardized in some way or another, like a chromo. "Angel of ice" and "crystal candlestick" are images that also convey a certain glitter or brittle quality as opposed to the fluid or free quality of Carol. As the evening progresses Sam, falling in love, sees Fran as his "shining burden," an "exquisite child" (p. 3). Indeed, he will continue to see her as a child; Fadiman sees her as the "babied adult," as Hilfer sees Babbitt as the "baby businessman"; it is characteristic of flawed personages in Lewis's work to be child-like.

However, another aspect of the opening scene needs consideration. As much a part of the setting as the Japanese lanterns and the "crisp-ing lake" is Sam's new car which he is almost as much in awe of as he is of Fran and it foreshadows the fact that the manufacture of cars will be the means by which he makes his fortune. Maxwell Geismar, one of few critics who has any sympathy for Fran, speculates that Sam's occupation with manufacturing contributes to Fran's behavior. In The Last of the Provincials he questions, "isn't it Sam's own way of life--his concern with machines and with property; his own indifference to human relationships and his actual fear of emotional entanglements: isn't it all this, as Sam comes to ask himself, that has contributed to Fran's disdain for him and that leaves him so empty and powerless in the midst of economic triumphs?"¹³ The difference between Sam and Fran is that

Sam comes to question his values and Fran merely reasserts those she has always held.

Sympathy for Fran, however, can be evoked if she is considered trapped by her role playing. She is first seen by Sam as an "exquisite child" and she comes to assume this role pleases him, so she takes it on, using baby talk, indulging in excesses of emotion, and posturing as a pretty child and for many years he is pleased. She is also trapped by a society which views wives of wealthy men as adornments rather than serious minded individuals; in other words, she is caught up in her own image, which is not entirely of her own making. That she is partially aware of this she hints to Sam throughout the novel. For example, when she tries to convince him to go to Europe for a long vacation she tells him, "I can chuck all these beastly clubs and everything. They don't mean anything; they're just make-believe, to keep me busy. I'm a very active female, Sam, and I want to do something besides sitting around Zenith" (p. 13). Sam also senses that she is playing a role: "'She just tries to amuse me by playing at being a kitten. She isn't one, not by a long shot. Sometimes when I'm tired, I wish she just wanted to cuddle up and be lazy with me. She's quicksilver. And quicksilver is hard, when you try to compress it!'" (p. 13). Sam worries that she is not genuinely "a kitten," and that fact disturbs him, because what he wants is a kitten. Her baby talk "tickles" him (p. 28). He sees her as "fluffy and agreeably useless," and is pleased (p. 9). And he is guilty of encouraging Fran's behavior in other ways; her fashion sense and acquisitiveness make him feel superior to his friends. Their ornate bedroom full of heavy silk drapes, a chaise lounge, jeweled traveling clocks, vast walnut twin beds, a bathroom with purple tiles make him

wonder "if it wasn't too elaborate, but usually its floridness pleased him, not only as a sign of success but because it suited the luxurious Fran." (p. 8). He also likes the way she attracts men. On shipboard, sailing to England, "he was clumsily proud of her, of the glances which the men passengers snatched at her as they swung round the deck" (p. 36). And it is a feather in his cap that she is, he thinks, superior to other American women: "She never entered a drawing room-- she made an entrance. She paused at the door, dramatic, demanding, stately in simple black and white, where other women hesitated into a room, fussy and tawdry" (p. 224). Other women, he thinks are "machines." "They sobbed about babies and dressmakers and nothing else. They were either hard-voiced and suspicious, or gushing. Their only emotion was a hatred of their men, with whom they joyously kept up a cat and mouse feud, trying to catch them at flirtation, at poker-playing" (p. 224).

Thus, early in their marriage and for over twenty years Sam has enjoyed a certain image of Fran, an image of "exquisite child" and "shining burden" which first captivated him as a young man at the country club dance and which later translated into expensive, spoiled snob. She no doubt fosters this image of herself because it is so successful.

The story in Dodsworth, however, really begins after they have been married for over twenty years and when Sam, at fifty-one, begins a journey ostensibly to Europe but actually to maturity. Fran accompanies him on this journey, but instead of maturity she finds simply an extension of her old life, which she drags along with her. As Sam examines himself and his relationship to Fran against the background of Europe he changes, and as he does, he sees Fran, the glittering,

snobbish woman, for what she is; and, in part, his heart is broken, probably because he had, through his attraction to her "glitter," helped to create her.

Even before they leave Zenith Sam has mixed feelings about her. He realizes that she can make him ashamed of wanting her sexually and also that she can make him ashamed of his social behavior: "She had the high art of deflating him, of enfeebling him, with one quick, innocent sounding phrase. By the most careless comment on his bulky new overcoat she could make him feel like a lout in it; by crisply suggesting that he 'try for once to talk about something besides motors and stocks,' while they rode to a formidable dinner to an elocutionary senator, she could make him feel so unintelligent that he would be silent all evening" (p. 23-4). She continues to berate him in Europe, lumping him with all American husbands: "'American husbands never are thoughtful . . . You think of nothing beyond business and golf. It never occurs to you that a woman, poor idiot, is lots more pleased when you remember to send flowers, or when you 'phone her at odd hours, just to say you love her, than she would be by a new motor car'" (p. 52). In Fran's complaint is an attack on business (and golf) which Freud points out is characteristic of women who are naturally hostile to the time and interest their husbands give to, as he puts it, the matter of civilization, and not to the concerns of the family and sexual affairs which, he says, are the concerns of women.¹⁴ Much later in their journey Fran expands on this problem:

"When people talk about the American wife and the American husband . . . they always make the mistake of trying to find out which sex is 'to blame.' One person will tell you with great impressiveness that the American husband

is to blame, because he's so absorbed in his business and his men friends that he never pays any real attention to his wife. Then the next will explain that it's the wife's fault--'The trouble is that when the American husband comes home all tired out after the awful rush of our business competition, he naturally wants some attention, some love from his wife, but she expects him to hustle and change his clothes and take her out to the theater or a party, because she's been bored all day without enough to do.' And they're both wrong. There's no blame--it isn't the fault of either. I am convinced that the fault belongs to our American industrial system, with its ideal of forced selling--which isn't a big enough ideal to satisfy any really sensitive woman. . ." (p. 255).

Fran suggests that if the ideal were big enough women would be able to sacrifice their husbands' attentions to it. The ideal she has in mind has been defined by a dinner guest, Professor Braut, who says that "'the European culture is aristocratic . . . I mean we are aristocratic, as against democratic, in that we believe that the nation is proudest and noblest and most exalted which has the greatest number of really great men--like Einstein and Freud and Thomas Mann--and that ordinary, undistinguished people (who may be, mind you, counts or kings, as well as servant maids) are happier in contributing to produce such great men than in having more automobiles and bathtubs'" (p. 249). At least one critic, Sheldon Grebstein, notes the irony of Fran's being the spokesman for the truly aristocratic, "the doctrine of liberty, of finding the true self through the abandonment of routine and through travel."¹⁵ But Fran is not simply a "monster of bitchery," she is also a clever woman who has some sense of her inadequacies and yet has not the means to change them; the various shadings of her character make her one of Lewis's most interesting personages. It is characteristic of Lewis to allow his flawed people to be the spokesmen for theories or truths he feels are important. Fran is in some ways like Carol Kennicott, also

flawed, who knows just enough to realize that things could be better, but she does not know how to go about making them better. Leo and Miriam Gurko note that Carol and Fran are alike, that Fran is an older Carol but made soulless by the dullness of her social life in Zenith and that as a rebel she is even less effective than Carol.¹⁶

Fran tries to influence Sam by her opinions of European manners and customs and culture, but her motives for changing Sam are purely for self-aggrandizement. As A.J. Dooley says, "going abroad for selfish and snobbish reasons, she mingles with a frothy international set, gains the ephemeral admiration of a succession of gigolos, and destroys the relationship with Sam which is her only possible basis for happiness."¹⁷ Another essential difference in the perspectives of the Dodsworths is shown by the way in which they view a gallery: "Fran had read enough about art; she glanced over the studio magazines monthly, and she knew every gallery on Fifth Avenue. But, to her, painting, like all 'culture,' was interesting only as it adorned her socially" (p. 119). Sam, on the other hand, truly enjoys art galleries; his imagination is "electrified by blue snow and golden shoulders and dynamic triangles," and he is contented to look long at paintings of "interiors pierced with hectic sunshine hurled between the slats of Venetian blinds, or startling sunrays striking into dusky woodlands . . . as though he smelled the hot sun" (p. 119).

Lewis is depicting two essentially different people: the one, Fran, is artificial, that is her efforts to view the paintings are prompted by the impression she will be making later upon others rather than by any natural desire on her part to see the work, and consequently, she separates herself from any natural or true emotion by what she thinks

others require her to feel and to think (she gathers lists and titles of paintings and galleries to live up to some kind of amorphous standard; the other, Sam, is genuine, that is he feels what he sees, he synthesizes thought and feeling, he goes beyond responding to the surface demands of "culture," or to the artistic expression peculiar to a particular society, to his own honest individual responses. It is significant that Sam and Fran find their happiest moments together when they are outside of all social pressures; for example, walking in the Bois du Bologne, sandwiches stuffed in their pockets, Fran relaxes and becomes truly sensuous, responding only to his company and to the beauty of the woods. But the moments are rare when they can extricate themselves from the demands of others and under the influence of societal authority, Fran reverts to her role of wealthy society matron.

The fact that Fran is so disconnected or so fragmented manifests itself in ways other than in the manner in which she approaches art. Sheldon Grebstein remarks that "Lewis demonstrates how Fran's physical coldness expresses itself in her personality: her insatiable wants and desires, her need to know the right people, her social consciousness, her flirtatiousness. She can respond only to men she knows will be transient in her life, not to anyone who threatens to possess her emotionally."¹⁸ The motif of "child" is associated with her throughout the novel. In the opening chapter Sam sees her as an "exquisite child" and although they marry, have two children, and at the outset of their trip to Europe Fran is forty-one and has been a wife for over twenty years, Sam discovers that she is still a girl. This occurs to him as he muses over their first weeks in Europe, their quarrels over

Americans abroad, and Fran's nearly disastrous encounter with an Englishman with whom she flirts and who consequently tries to seduce her: "'Of course the girl--Say! That's what she still is; she's still a girl! Little older than Emily, but not so sensible. Of course she gets excited by Europe. She's done her job, hasn't she? She's run the house and brought Emily and Brent up, hasn't she? I've got to be patient'" (p. 126). But as if the idea were too slippery to hold, Sam forgets his insight into her character and they continue their journey. Fran renews her flirtations, her efforts to meet the right people, and her insistence to be seen at the right places. Finally, Fran, under the influence of Madame De Penable, an American expatriate functioning in European society as a "middle man," a person who brings people with money together with others who, in turn, can do her a favor, leaves Sam for the summer to travel with a menagerie of gigolos and dilettantes. She has an affair with one of them, Arnold Israel. Sam, returning by ship from a brief visit in Zenith, reads one of Fran's letters: "When he had finished her letter from Deauville, he had suddenly grasped something which he had never completely formulated in their twenty-three years of marriage: that she was not in the least a mature and responsible woman, mother and wife and administrator, but simply a clever child, with a child's confused self-dramatizations. The discovery had dismayed him. Then it made him the more tender. His other children, Brent and Emily, did not need him; his child Fran did need him!" (p. 206). The child image is insistent and Sam continues to see her thus clearly: "In the dawn, he sat up in bed to look at Fran, and she was so childish, even her little nose hidden under the sheets, that he could think of no slogan of deliverance from her power" (p. 265).

The image, now on the surface of his mind, enthralls him, but another part of him stands back and criticizes: "He could never root out suspicion, planted when he had read her letter about Deauville and Arnold Israel, that she was in heart and mind and soul an irresponsible child. And the minute he was pleased with the bright child quality in her, the irresponsibility annoyed him. . . . Bobbing at cherries is not so pretty a sport at forty-three" (p. 224). Sam expands on her childishness: "Now she was ecstatic--a little too demandingly ecstatic for his unwieldiness to follow her--over a moonlit sea, a tenor solo, or a masterpiece of artichoke cookery. Half an hour later she was in furious despair over a hard bed, a lukewarm bath, or a missing nail-file; and Sam was always to blame, and decidedly was to be told about it" (p. 225).

The woman as playmate palls in Dodsworth; her charm, imagination, and effusiveness give way to her tantrums, snobbishness, and capriciousness; nevertheless, the hero cannot extract himself from her attractions. For a second time in their European venture Fran has established relations with other men and now, once again, she remains with a lover, Kurt von Obersdorf, while Sam travels to Paris to greet their friends from Zenith, Tub and Matey Pearson. The Pearsons are a foil to the Dodsworths. Their homely but honest relationship points up the complicated, unhappy one of the Dodsworths. Matey's name itself suggests comradeship and a down-to-earth quality which the gold-tinselled Fran lacks. However, after a few days with the Pearsons Sam resolves to return to Fran and to make everything right between them: "he'd been stupid. Fran was a child. Why not treat her as one, a lovely and much beloved child; be more patient, not be infuriated by her passing

tantrums? A child. A lake mirroring sunny clouds and thunder squalls" (p. 303). He has no chance to patch up things, however, because upon his return Fran announces that she and von Obersdorf plan to marry.

During the period when Sam is estranged from Fran (he leaves her with her lover and continues alone on his journey), he meets an acquaintance, a woman who will help him to finally extricate himself from the child-woman, but the process for Sam is not easy; in fact, one might argue that he is never quite free from her because in the last paragraphs of the novel the image of Fran that Sam sees (after hearing one of her favorite musical compositions) is of the woeful child: "Through the darkness beyond the music, he saw her fleeing, a desolate wraith, and his heart was heavy with pity for the frightened and bewildered child who once had laughed so eagerly with him" (p. 376).

What has happened in the meantime is that the Count von Obersdorf, whom Fran sees as the epitome of every grand status symbol to which she aspires, lets her down because he cannot displease his mother by marrying an American divorcee who probably cannot give him an heir. In panic Fran writes to Sam asking him to take her back and in her letter she refers to herself as a child: "Oh forgive me, forgive me, dear Sambo darling, forgive me, your bad child Fran!" (p. 366). She signs herself, "Your shamed and wretched little Fran" (p. 367). Thus she evokes in Sam sympathy through that image of herself to which he most hardily responds. Martin Light has commented on these letters of Fran's: "So rare is it for Lewis to juxtapose emotions that it is a pleasant surprise to regard the skill with which he cuts across Sam's awakening contentment by means of Fran's shrill-voiced letters."¹⁹ Sam foregoes his contentment to rescue Fran from humiliation, but this time his

return to her is with a new awareness achieved in the time he has spent with Edith Cortright in whose company he begins to understand maturity, his own as well as others. Nevertheless, at this point, he leaves Edith to rescue Fran from loneliness and disgrace, and they embark together from Hamburg to return home to Zenith.

In Sam's first view of Fran at Hamburg he thinks how very young and lovely she looks, and he is stirred by her image, but her first words are about her clothing and how cheaply she bought her gray-squirrel mantle and how, she implies, that by doing so she is much more clever than most women; she brags childishly. From the first day on ship-board Fran resumes her old role of the charming and gracious matron to the women and the gay, flirtatious seductress to the men. She spurns Sam's sexual advances, brightly bidding him "nighty-night." Sam's transformation to maturity occurs on one of those nights: "He lay awake. In the watery light from the transom he saw the sheen of her silver toilet things on the dresser. He thought of this tremendous steamer pounding the waves . . . yet on the bridge were sailors, unautomatic, human, eternal. The ship, too, was eternal, as a vehicle of man's old voyaging. Its creaking seemed to him like the creaking of an ancient Greek trireme. But while his thoughts reached out thus for things heroic, he heard her placid breathings and he smelled not the sea gale but perfume that came from little crystal vials among her silver toilet-things that were vaster than the hull of the steamer, stronger than the storm" (p. 372-3).

By daylight her perfumes seem even stronger as she chatters to Sam about bridge and buying a new evening wrap, her new Marcel Rochas frock which will make Zenith foam, about his boring people who know

the real Italy (artists and the nobility) with talk about cars, etc. Fran's perfumes overpower the smell of the sea as her concerns with the trivial in society overpower their marriage; the artificial encroaches on the natural, her conditioned response supplants her instinctive response and finally Sam understands. He tell her, "'I can't help you. I'm just your attendant. But me--you can kill me'" (p. 376). In order to save himself from Fran's world of the artificial and the stultifying, he decides to return to Edith Cortright.

To understand Sam's awakening one must look at Edith Cortright, who is Fran's antithesis. If Fran is shaped by a mechanistic society Edith is shaped by a humanistic society. Where Fran is fragmented, childish, acquisitive (I consume, therefore I am), and incapable of relationships which do not flatter her, Edith is a mature woman, at ease with the elements as well as with the cultured, and she is compassionate. In a conversation she has with Sam about an Italian orchard (Sam finds it "higgledy-piggledy" and he is uncomfortable sitting on the rock wall in the hot sun), Edith explains: "'Well, the Italian peasant loves the heat, and he loves just the bare ridged ground--the earth. . . . He loves earth and sun and wind and rain. . . . Here we have ruins and paintings, but behind them we're so much closer to the eternal elements than you Americans. You don't love earth, you don't love wind. . . . Your farmers want to get away from their wash of acres to the city. Your businessmen drive out to the golf club in closed sedans, and they don't want just bare earth--they want the earth of the golf course all neatly concealed by lawn'" (p. 359). Edith explains her love, not only for her Venetian drawing room but also for a little walled-off garden where she can lie in the hot sun,

smelling the earth. She continues, "'That's the strength of Europe-- not its so-called culture, its galleries and neat voices and knowledge of languages, but its nearness to earth. And that's the weakness of America--not its noisiness and its cruelty and its cinema vulgarity but the way in which it erects steel-and-glass skyscrapers and miraculous cement-and-glass factories and tiled kitchens and wireless antennae and popular magazines to insulate it from the good vulgarity of earth!'" (p. 360).

Lewis uses the metaphor, "the vulgarity of earth," throughout his novels. It stands in opposition to those forces in society which standardize the spirit and diminish the individual; it is the force of eternal possibilities versus the force of restriction and fears. The shape of the metaphor is usually some form of natural beauty and the characters' aesthetic response to it is a measure of their psychological health. In Main Street Carol Kennicott seeks refuge from the village in the beauty of the vast outlying prairie. She herself, first seen against a windswept hill, is a figure associated with the elements, in "suspended freedom," and although she is defeated (at the novel's end she is in the airless bedroom of her home), she is a heroine who battles against "the village virus." In Babbitt the hero also tries to escape from the city, to retreat to the woods. With Paul, George Babbitt seeks a refuge from a life of tawdry business deals and tedious social entertainments, and although he, too, fails, Lewis depicts his futile, inarticulate hope for escape through the motifs of woods, lakes, and sky. Arrowsmith is one of Lewis's few successful heroes; that is, he is not, at the novel's end, defeated but instead, he is living in the remote New England woods with a friend and colleague and he has erected a

barrier between himself and the destructive forces of society, setting himself free to pursue his life's work. In Dodsworth the "chromo setting" of the opening chapter is an indication of the artificiality of the personages associated with the scene. Sam drives into it and subsequently into marriage with Fran, and consequently must spend the remainder of the novel extricating himself from it. The major symbol of this world Sam becomes a part of is Fran, the glittering doll-woman, mechanical in all of her responses, hollowed out by the world that shaped her.

Edith's world is different and her character is different from Fran's. When they first meet Sam notices that "in the presence of Fran and her aggressive smartness, Edith Cortright had been abrupt, hiding her heart behind dutiful courtesy. . . . But now . . . she was easy; in a subdued silvery manner, she was gay. It was as though she found everything in life amusing and liked to think about it aloud" (p. 335). Lewis invests Edith Cortright with an ability to synthesize two value systems which are loosely represented by America and Europe. Unlike his hero Milt Daggert, of Free Air, who admits he is not enough of a genius to combine the worlds of his provincial small-town pal Bill and his sophisticated eastern-educated sweetheart Claire, Lewis creates in Edith Cortright a character who has that genius. Lewis depicts her ability to combine the seemingly disparate in several ways, one of which is through the objects she chooses and combines. For example, in her stone-floored Venetian drawing room with its Sixteenth-Century walnut armoire she dares to be American and to serve iced tea. And he notes the room itself: "The formal monastic chairs which had dignified the room when Sam had seen it in the spring--as well as the over-stuffed

Americanized arm-chairs with which Mrs. Cortright had eased the rigor of Venetian stateliness--had been replaced by wicker with chintz cushions" (p. 335). And in her conversations with Sam about art she expresses this ability to assimilate: "'Please don't feel that I'm one of those idiots who regard painting superior to manufacturing--I neither regard it as inferior, as do your Chamber of Commerce who think that all artists are useless unless they're doing pictures for stocking advertisements, nor do I regard it as superior, as do all the supercilious lady yearners who suppose that a businessman with clean nails invariably prefers golf to Beethoven'" (p. 336-37). Sam notices that "he was not rebuffed by her ideas as so often he had been by Fran's pert little yearnings. (For Fran wore her knowledge as showily as she wore her furs)" (p. 348). He realizes "that all he had seen . . . had not been the place itself but Fran's hectic and demanding attitudes; her hysteria of delight over a moonlight, or her hysteria of annoyance over bad service. In Edith's quiet presence he perceived that Naples was . . . a series of connected villages extending for miles along the bay, between blue water and hills into which human beings had burrowed like gophers" (p. 353). Edith has a certain presence which is similar to Leora Arrowsmith's in that it does not demand attention; both women are diffusive in the sense of being open rather than collected and focused or egocentric. Edith is also like Leora in that she is democratic, preferring individuals over classes, i.e., she treats servants, shopkeepers, and guests in the same friendly, easy manner in contrast to Fran who is rude to those who do not serve her properly and obsequious to those whom she considers socially superior. Edith is an American acquainted with the culture of her own country as well as that

of other countries and what this means is that she has somehow been shaped by more humanistic qualities than has Fran Dodsworth. Edith is a composite of the natural (she is genuinely sensuous, responding to the elements, the hot sun, the smell of earth in the Italian orchard) and the civilized (she lives at ease in her Venetian apartment, a part of a palazzo, a part of an old culture).

Edith's values reflect a humanistic society, while Fran's reflect a society whose values are focused on wealth and acquisitiveness. The following, spoken by Professor Braut (Lewis's spokesman) helps to define both:

"We feel that the real Continental Europe is the last refuge of individuality, leisure, privacy, quiet happiness. We think that good talk between intelligent friends . . . is more pleasant and important than having septic tanks or electric dishwashing machines. . . ."

"Some of us think that perhaps we shall prevail even against Americanization--which I may venture to define as a theological belief that it is more important to have your purchases tidily rung up on a cash register than to purchase what you want. (And mind you I am not so anti-American as I seem--I quite understand that the mystic process of 'Americanization' is being carried on as much by German industrialists and French exporters and English advertising-men as it is by born Yankees!)" (pp. 249-51).

Thus what is called Americanization is a preoccupation anywhere in the world with production, sales, and capital, to the exclusion of leisure, friendships, privacy, and "quiet happiness." This, then, is the Zenith society of which the Dodsworths are a part, and which Edith has somehow escaped. After Sam has been abroad and has the leisure to speculate about how he used to live, he observes that "his prosperous friends were like surly old farmers whose interests--money, golf or

drinking [were] diversions . . . not pleasures . . . that they were ways of keeping so busy that they would not admit how bored they were, how empty their ambitions. . . . To them women were only bedmates, housekeepers, producers of heirs, and a home audience that could not escape. . . . The arts, to them, consisted only of jazz conducive to dancing with young girls, pictures which made a house look rich, and stories which were narcotics to make them forget the tedium of existence" (p. 193).

It is true that Fran chafes against such a society but what she would substitute for Zenith is in its way as dismal. Her friendships with titled Europeans, her pursuit of "smartness," her romances with men are like a page from one of the "narcotic stories" the Zenithites read to escape from "the tedium of existence."

The essential difference, however, between the two women, Fran and Edith, is in their ability to synthesize. Edith understands the relationships between the stiff-backed tapestried Venetian chair and the over-stuffed, chintz-covered American one, and she understands the value of each. Her friend the Baroness Ercole, on her knees alongside her servant, polishing tiles of her villa, is representative of Edith's world, which is a synthesis of classes as well as cultures. Fran, on the other hand, is unable to go beyond the surfaces of one world. In her journey with Sam she repeats the same errors and in the end it is she, ironically, who cries, "'Oh, my God, if you haven't learned--You haven't learned anything, not one single thing, out of all our sorrows!'" (p. 375). She says this to Sam, as on board ship they are returning to Zenith after he announces his decision to rejoin Edith Cortright in Europe. The irony of Fran's statement lies in the fact that behind Sam's

decision is the real "learning"; he finally understands himself and that Fran will destroy him--he will be reduced to being her attendant--if he remains with her. What Fran means by learning is not insight or wisdom through experience, a synthesizing of feelings and experiences, but rather, it is a personalized learning; Sam has not learned enough about her, how to please her, how to handle her so that she should be free to pursue art, men, or cuisines as she chooses. Fran's journey, representative of the subjective as well as the European experience, has remained one-dimensional like the chromo setting from whence she began her journey. Sam, unlike Fran, is now able to step out of the picture into a more humanized life.

With Dodsworth Lewis finishes his love affair with the sophisticated playmate. From her prototype in Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood, charming and imaginative companions, she has evolved into Fran Dodsworth, a type of child-woman who symbolizes the self-seeking, acquisitive impulses of our society. In Lewis's subsequent work she will appear but briefly, but always as a wretchedly selfish woman, totally destructive in all of her human relationships.

It is rare in twentieth-century fiction to have two accounts of the same story, but in the case of Dodsworth or "Sam's story," there is Half a Loaf, or "Fran's story." Sinclair and Grace Lewis were divorced in 1928; Dodsworth was published in 1929, and two years later in 1931, Half a Loaf was published. Thus both Lewises, under the mask of fiction, present accounts of their marriage. Although Dodsworth is much more than an autobiographical rendition, Half a Loaf is not; however, it is of interest to hear Fran's side of the story as Mrs. Lewis tells it, and

it is incredible that except for one amazingly poignant passage the heroine exposes herself, the reader feels, as the same type of woman that Lewis in Dodsworth portrays in the characterization of Fran.

In Half a Loaf the heroine is Susan Brooke, who becomes the wife of Timothy Hale, a famous writer. The novel, although narrated in third person, is limited to Susan's point of view, and it is extraordinary to find her so similar to Fran Dodsworth in her mannerisms and outlook as well as in her wit and charm and Susan, like Fran, can be candid. She assesses her education: "A convent education, in New York and Paris, had taught her chiefly to leap to her feet and curtsy when an older woman entered the room, and to enjoy the drama of the Roman Catholic Church . . . and an English accent which waxed and waned as the occasion demanded. She could make pleasant sounds in French and German, could answer a letter more than gracefully, and knew how to wear clothes."²⁰ Fran Dodsworth says, "I know I don't know anything! All I can do in French is to order breakfast. Six months from now, all I'll remember of Germany is the names of nineteen towns, and how the Potsdamer Platz looks when you're waiting for a droschke" (p. 4). Timothy Hale, like Sam, "falls" for the woman whom he sees as a princess on a pedestal: "In verses beautifully typed on a vellum-like paper with illuminated initials, he was always the humble jester, the pantaloon, the gallows-mate of Francoise Villon. And she was the princess of Faraway, of Outre Mer--Elaine, Blanchefleur--clad in samite and a silver snood. This humility made her uneasy, except that she sensed he was in love with love and every woman a glamorous idol" (p. 41). Susan is uneasy on her pedestal, but, aware of her position she tries to retain not only the image of herself as a "princess" but, also, she tries to create

settings for, if not a princess, at least, a bit of romance. Aware of Tim's romantic impressionability Susan plays the princess role as fulfilling a part of his image of her. She also, like Fran, assumes child-like characteristics and she indulges in baby-talk: "tee-rains," "daventuring," "'sprises," "snoozle." Unfortunately she also reverts to childish behavior, pouting when she is displeased; however, in Half a Loaf Tim Hale, although he tires of Susan, does so not because of her childish behavior, which is one of Sam Dodsworth's reasons for tiring of Fran, but because, according to Susan, he merely wants a younger, fresher version of the same type, and someone who will unequivocally adore him. She tells him, "'I've seen you often enough regarding with a sardonic eye my posturings, my silly boastings, my pretentious putterings, and I have felt despairing of my ability to grow up, but I have always been on to myself, and I have never hated you for seeing through me--as you are hating me now'" (p. 263). Susan, in an effort to be his princess, has indeed "postured and puttered" and pretended. At first the pretending was delightful because Tim shared it with her; they played games which, as Martin Light points out, is a vital part of the relationships of Lewis's early heroes and heroines. Play is a subterfuge from oppressive reality, but later Lewis changes his ideas about "play" and about women who want to play until, in Arrowsmith and Dodsworth the concept is associated with the parasitic woman, the woman who destroys rather than nurtures.²¹ Martin Arrowsmith accuses his wealthy wife Joyce, "'You want a playmate and I want to work.'"²² But from the point of view of Susan in Half a Loaf it is a sadistic act to divest the woman of play because it is what helps her to keep the marriage together.

By Tim's stepping back and viewing her objectively he has betrayed her. Susan and Tim Hale have had several serious quarrels; he drinks and they both flirt with having affairs with other people, but now that he is finishing a novel and needs Susan to keep stability and routine in his life she agrees to do so, until on Christmas Eve, Tim, with a psychiatrist, charges into her bedroom as she is dressing, demanding that she be interviewed about their marriage. She is surprised, angered, and shocked because he invades her privacy, bringing with him a total stranger. In her fury she admits that indeed she is game playing, but that the play has turned simply to pretense and that if now he wants to strip away even this flimsy charade she will comply:

"Talk about your little Spanish Inquisition! Here am I exhausted by weeks of pretending so as to get that novel finished, cluminating in this insane Christmas houseparty with more pretense before my child and my mother and three of your latest yes-men, and working all day with holly and red ribbon to decorate the grave of my life! Oh it's a grave all right! This outrageous intrusion has been the final shovelful. Tim, do you hear me? Final! And now damn you both, get out!" and she stamped into Tim's room which adjoined, and slammed the door. On his bedside table rested a miniature of her which he had had copied from a successful photograph and which he always took with him on his journeys. She picked this up and hurled it against the door she had slammed. The broken porcelain fell to the floor in tinkling pieces. There was no sound in the next room, but in a few seconds the door to the hall closed and steps were heard descending the stairs. Susan went back to her bathroom, and patted her face with cold water. Her hysteria had left her instantly--how much of it was real, how much self-dramatizing, she didn't care--but she knew she was through, that she would face the evening calmly and as many more days as Tim chose to remain in Washington, though knowing Tim she thought it likely he would leave, regardless of consequences, after dinner that night, or even before! But for Roger's sake he must be made to stay until after the presents had been given out around the tree next morning. Dear Christ Child, what a travesty on your birthday! She smiled grimly at her fancy of a grave decorated with red ribbons and holly. "I might add some mistletoe for the resurrection," and she carefully rouged her mouth" (p. 360).

Susan's great game has been that her marriage is happy; now ironically her husband accuses her of playing games, and thus she has only one alternative, which is to admit that the game, the marriage, is not working. The psychiatrist whom Tim brings into Susan's bedroom (her area of privacy) is the ultimate non-game player, the doctor to cure illusions and fantasies in order to help the patient face reality. Susan's facing reality means that she must file for divorce. From her point of view games and illusions held her marriage together; now one of them, Tim, does not want to play.

Because of such episodes and because the point of view in Half a Loaf is Susan's one is meant to sympathize with the heroine, and to an extent this is possible, but in Grace Lewis's characterization of Susan there is a side of her heroine that reveals an attitude toward life which is, in general, as selfish as Fran Dodsworth's.

When Susan first appears in the opening chapter of Half a Loaf, she is seen getting ready to leave her office; she is well-dressed, brisk, efficient, and because she is working alone after hours, conscientious. There is only one other person in the office, a scrub-woman. The narrator, after describing Susan's bright image, notes that "there was no one to say goodnight to except a gray scrub-woman crawling like a primordial something about the dirty floor" (p. 7). The tone of the narrator implies that this stylish, pretty woman is deprived of saying goodnight to someone of more stature, that the scrub woman is so beneath her that she is seen as a mass rather than a defined figure; she is a "primordial something," while the reader feels that Susan is "band-box," a figure from any woman's magazine, slick and glossy and in her attitude towards the other woman without the slightest concern.

The image of a scrub woman appears in Dodsworth as well as in Half a Loaf, and although the scenes in both novels are in no way parallel, they serve, through the characters' attitudes towards the scrub women, to define a major difference between the novels' point of view on human concerns. In Lewis's novel the scrub woman (she is Baroness Ercole) is invested with a name and dignity; in Grace Lewis's novel she is merely an object to be stepped over, as it were by the heroine.

In Grace Lewis's novel Susan Hale's concern with self is emphasized throughout even though the author may not have intended it. In a list of grievances against her errant husband, who according to her is responsible for all of her tribulations Susan evokes sympathy for herself: "What mixed talk there was took the form of "kidding," then there would be the parting of the sexes, and the men would be grouped at one end of the dinner table . . . and there was man talk and woman talk. Susan said it was unfair that she should have to sit at the dull end, not that the man talk was always so vastly superior. On evenings in Harry's Bar in Paris, at the Aldon in Berlin, at the Caffè Greco in Rome, she had sat blind with boredom for hours listening to such inebriate brilliance as: "'Tim djever try this amer picon drink with a dash of seltzer? Got a kick of a mule!'" (p. 208). But as she continues to complain throughout the novel the reader becomes impatient and notices that throughout, Susan finds no one whom she befriends or even likes except for an Italian, Andrea Venzo, who aggressively courts her and makes her feel loved at a time when Tim is philandering and when she needs to feel sexually attractive. The novel is curiously lacking in any depiction of warmth between people.

At the end, Susan is waiting in Reno for her divorce to become final. She assesses the other women who are also waiting and says that "now for the first time she was with a group of women who were concerned night and day with the care of the flesh" (p. 379). The women focus their concerns on sexual matters: former husbands, future husbands, lovers, encounters with local men, clerks, cowboys, or students. "Occasionally a handsome, well-dressed man stopped over to see one of these pretty time-servers. Never would he forget his first walk alone down Virginia Street. All female traffic stopped. Regardless of their ages, the eyes of these lonely women fairly stripped him of his clothes, so that as naked as an Earl Carroll showgirl he fled back to the shelter of the hotel and begged to know when the next train left" (p. 378). Although Susan is apart from these women she, inadvertently, displays some of their characteristics. In Reno, contemplating her marriage and her future, Susan muses: "Supposing the lawyer was right and something did happen to her friendship with Tim, there must be no regret. She had licked the cream off the milk pail, she had had the fresh half of the loaf . . . No, she had no cause to complain" (p. 385). She is convinced by her lawyer to establish a large settlement out of her divorce.

Susan, like Fran, is essentially egocentric and selfish: she has had the best of the marriage, which is the meaning of "half a loaf," the title of the novel. It could have as well been "cream off the milk pail" and both phrases suggest a certain greediness. Beneath her surface of wit and charm Susan's intrinsic character unfolds, revealing the same attitudes and concerns as Fran Dodsworth which makes the novel significant as an appendix, as it were, to Dodsworth.

ENDNOTES

¹Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), p. 515.

²(New York: Grosset Dunlap, 1919), p. 341.

³(New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), p. 111.

⁴"Sinclair Lewis," in After the Genteel Tradition, ed. Malcolm Cowley (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964), p. 100.

⁵Schorer, p. 516.

⁶Grebstein, p. 117.

⁷The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1975), p. 115.

⁸The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln, Nebr.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 158.

⁹Schorer, p. 517.

¹⁰(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 325.

¹¹2nd ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 24.

¹²Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (1929; rpt. New York: Random House, 1947), p. vii. Subsequent references to Dodsworth are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

¹³(Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1947), p. 114.

¹⁴Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 50-51.

¹⁵Grebstein, p. 111.

¹⁶Leo and Miriam Gurko, "The Two Main Streets of Sinclair Lewis," College English, 4 (Feb. 1943), 288-92.

¹⁷Dookey, p. 152.

¹⁸Grebstein, p. 111.

¹⁹Light, p. 114.

²⁰Grace Lewis, Half a Loaf (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), p. 13. Subsequent references to Half a Loaf are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

²¹Light, p. 51.

²²Arrowsmith, p. 446.

CHAPTER VI

ANN VICKERS AND BETHEL MERRIDAY: CAREER WOMEN

Ann Vickers, published in 1933, is Lewis' first novel to appear after he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. In part, the citation for the award, the first to be granted to an American writer, read: "The 1930 prize was awarded to Sinclair Lewis (b. 1885) 'for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humour, new types of people.'"¹ In his address to the Swedish Academy Lewis credit Hamlin Garland with being the first American writer who showed him that he "could write of life as living life," but he goes on to say that "I am afraid that Mr. Garland would not be pleased but acutely annoyed to know that he made it possible for me to write of America as I see it, and not as Mr. William Dean Howells so sunnily saw it. And it is his tragedy, it is a completely revelatory American tragedy, that in our land of freedom, men like Garland, who first blast the roads to freedom, become themselves the most bound."²

In writing his next novel Lewis probably wanted to show the world that, unlike Garland, he would not be bound by fame and success, and that he would continue to "blast roads to freedom." In Ann Vickers he tries to do just that by blasting the image of woman as a sweet, passive, romantic person. He depicts a pirate of a woman whose life spans over forty years of American history and whose motto might well be taken from Bernard Shaw's heroine, Ann Whitefield in Man and Superman, who says,

"But I doubt if we ever know why we do things. The only really simple thing is to go straight for what you want and grab it."³

Lewis upset readers and critics alike with the portrayal of Ann. D. J. Dooley is sarcastic: "Love is grand; it is a law unto itself; but for it really to be satisfactory it is essential that the lover be somebody else's husband or wife."⁴ Dooley also quotes another critic: "Michael Williams' review of the book in Commonweal was severe, but his basic criticism is a valid one--that as a sentimental fairy tale of love triumphant, this book belongs in 'that great school of popular fiction which goes on forever, telling its one and only story--the story of the Heroine and her Fairy Prince. . . .'"⁵ The public also responded and typical is a man from Michigan who wrote: "I have yet to read anything so rotten, as stinking and filthy as that story."⁶ The story of Ann Vickers, so upsetting to many, is the story of a woman who begins her career as a suffragist and settlement houseworker. She loves a soldier who leaves her pregnant, so she has an abortion. Later she works with prison reforms, marries a kind, but clownish fellow, falls in love with a married judge whose child she bears while living with her legal husband. She finally leaves him to live alone and to await her lover's return from prison to share her life. On the surface of things it is perhaps not remarkable that both the reader from Michigan and a reviewer writing for a Catholic periodical called America found the novel "obscene."⁷

Mark Schorer found Ann Vickers to be a fair novel with its major interest, not in its social themes, but rather in its "transmuted autobiography . . . the obvious ambiguity in the feeling of the author toward his heroine: his uneasy approval of her dedication to 'do-good'

principles; his resentment of 'liberal' and 'radical' causes that his own characterization of her commits him to approve. . . ." ⁸ Although one may not agree that Lewis does not approve fully of Ann's causes, there is ambiguity in his characterization of Ann's husband, Russell Spaulding, who is both jealous of her achievements on the one hand and yet publicly and sincerely proud of her and of being married to her. His is a predicament which Sinclair Lewis also experienced in his marriage to Dorothy Thompson, critics note, who was a model for Ann Vickers, and in her own right a very talented correspondent and newspaper columnist; she was the first to write publicly against Nazism and Hitler. The novel is dedicated to Dorothy. It is interesting, also, that as Grace Hegger Lewis suffered a transformation in Lewis's novels from the bright heroine to the acquisitive, destructive woman, Dorothy Thompson, too, suffers a similar metamorphosis, shining as the heroine in Ann Vickers and caricatured as Winifred Marduc Homeward, the Talking Woman in Lewis's later novel Gideon Planish. D. J. Dooley notes that "just as Grace was the prototype of Fran in Dodsworth, Dorothy Thompson was presumably the model for the portrait of Winifred Marduc Homeward, the Talking Woman." ⁹ At any rate, as a prototype for Ann Vickers, she is characterized as a woman of tremendous energy and courage who wants to be independent and yet to have a child and a man, with or without the sanctions of marriage and respectability.

If Lewis meant to "blast roads to freedom" in Ann Vickers by creating a shocking character, an epitome of someone who followed George Bernard Shaw's dictum in Man and Superman that "vitality and bravery are the greatest qualities a woman can have and motherhood her solemn initiation into womanhood; and the fact . . . [of her] not being legally

married matters not one scrap . . . , " he may have succeeded, but in the matter of form the novel reads more like a case history than a work integrated through themes and images.¹⁰ Lewis's approach to his subject, however, does reflect a vast amount of research. Carl Van Doren comments, in general, on this aspect of Lewis's technique: "Some more formal investigation might have studied the folkways and speech-habits of some distant primitive tribe and might have become famous as an anthropologist on a fraction of the knowledge which Mr. Lewis has gathered concerning millions of Americans."¹¹ For Ann Vickers Lewis has recorded hundreds of facts concerning the suffragist movement, work in settlement houses, and life in a prison; he has also touched upon the corruption of philanthropic organizations and the relationship of justice and the criminal world. Structurally the novel is similar to The Job. Both are examples of the Bildungsroman: the heroine leaves a small town and goes to the city to find work; she enters into an unsuccessful marriage with a man who tries to destroy her, but she finally is successful in her career and she also finds happiness with a man whom she respects. In each case the woman begins a process of learning through experience, not only about the world, but also, about herself, and the result is that she is rewarded the highest of Lewis's prizes--happiness through the love of another person. Critic Micheal Williams refers to the ending of Lewis's novel where such happiness occurs as a fairy tale plot which, of course, diminishes the work; however, for Lewis this so-called "Heroine and her Fairy Prince" represent the victory of humanistic forces over the materialistic. Romantic love is an aspect of humanistic values in a mechanistic society, a recognition of a need to establish, within the fluctuating forces of a rapidly changing society, a base for sanity and

survival. It is, it is true, a continual theme common with many writers ("Ah, love, let us be true to one another!"), but that alone is not sufficient reason to sneer. Lewis asks in Cass Timberlane: "If the world ever learns that it knows nothing yet about what keeps men and women loving each other, then will it have a chance for some brief happiness before the eternal frozen night sets in?"¹² For Lewis the means of salvation lies in human relationships.

The similarity between The Job and Ann Vickers ends with the plot; the characterization of the heroines is quite different. Ann is concerned about the world around her, Una is concerned only as to how it affects her. Una moves through her experiences bravely, but with very little self-criticism; Ann plunges into them, often quite blindly, and is constantly having to reassess her values as she learns from each encounter. The major themes in Ann Vickers are the willful working out of her career and independence and the parallel, but subliminal, willful working out of her desire to have a child. The latter is complicated by the necessity to choose the right mate. The former is complicated by anti-feminist trends in society.

Ann, born in 1891, grows up in the small town of Waubesa, Illinois, living alone with her father who is kindly, distant, and well educated. Ann, playing make-believe games with other children, is a leader, demanding to play the best roles--she wants to be both Isabella and Columbus, tyrants of the play, and is sturdy enough to withstand the objections of the other children who want their share. An incipient feminist, Ann encounters, in Sunday School, the problem of Lot's wife, who is punished unfairly, Ann thinks, simply because she cares for her friends in the city, her turning a gesture of her anguish. The Sunday

School teacher frets that Ann's questioning is disobedient and her father merely laughs at Ann's concern with injustice while Ann thinks, "'Yes, it's men like Lot and the Lord and my Dad--laughing!--that make all the trouble for us women!'"¹³ Ann senses that because she is a woman she is going to have to prove herself to the world. So it is that when the Christmas tree catches fire at the church service it is Ann who rushes first to put it out, severely burning herself, but inwardly gloating that it was she who acted "while all those men stood goggling" (p. 41).

Ann goes to a women's college, Point Royal College, where, in 1908, she and her friends are concerned with their status in society: "'Why do you suppose we go to college? Women have always been the slaves to men. Now it's the women's hour! We ought to demand all the freedom and --and travel and fame and so on and so forth that men have'" (p. 47). But in spite of their bold talk Ann notices that "'women are industrious, but they rarely know what they're industrious about. They're ants. You'll find lots of girls that will work hard. They can recite everything in the book. But you won't find many that know why they're studying it, or that'll read anything about it you don't tell them to'" (p. 56). And most women, Ann notices, whether the professor was making exciting speculations or droning on some point of pedantry, "were obediently making examination passing notes in their neat little books with their neat little fountain pens. . ." (pp. 63-64). In the seclusion of their rooms they also discuss birth control and although they agree that "women should be allowed to govern their own destinies," they are too embarrassed to discuss actual methods and talk instead about "women suffrage, which was to end all crime and graft" (p. 59).

Not only Ann notices and comments on the young women's behavior, but Professor Glenn Hargis, also, young and perceptive, tells Ann that "'you're typical of all women; you're realistic enough about things that don't touch your emotions; you weigh the butter and count the change, so the poor wretched serving maid can't cheat you out of a cent. But you refuse to ask yourself what you really do believe, and whether your belief came by honest thinking or was just inherited from the family'" (p. 76). Later he continues more bitterly: "'You make me sick, all you nuns, with your books and your little committees and your innocent little songs! Emotionally ten years old! Green sick! And you'll keep yourselves from life till you're safely decanted and marry insurance men and live in bungalows with plate glass in the front doors! . . . Women who aren't afraid, who have rich, exciting, emotional experiences, they don't get stuck in the suburbs. . .'" (p. 89). But Ann, at least, does examine some of her beliefs. She finds that after having been brought up in church and Sunday School "she was unable to accept the Bible or any Christian creed as anything more than a brave, bright fable, like the cycle of King Arthur (p. 81). In the emotional-physical field she does escape being seduced by Mr. Hargis and is momentarily proud of herself, but later, to her chagrin, she finds she is awakening to sexual feelings--"her loins ached, her breasts ached, and in dismay she found tantalizing images of Glenn Hargis charging like traffic through her brain. . .'" (p. 92). Thus her years in college are a mixture of physical and intellectual growth; she discovers she is passionate about ideas as well as about feelings.

After graduation Ann joins a group of suffragists who are fighting against the rhetoric of senators who "purred that women were saviors and

life-givers of the race, the conservers of culture and good breeding, the inspirers of all that was noble in the male, but that their delicate bloom (though proof against washtubs, diapers, and minding the children) would be rubbed off in the awful sordidness of polling-booths, that certainly women ought to have the vote some time, but not quite yet" (p. 104).

Ann observes the women with whom she is working; they believe that "the vote was necessary, both that women might enter public affairs, and that they might be freed from the humiliation of being classed . . . with children, idiots, and criminals" (p. 115). The public enjoys being witty at the expense of the suffragists, especially the old-maid types like Mamie Bogardus, "a tall, scraggly spinster with ferocious eyes and a loud, shrill, ragged voice. . . . If she saw a man mistreating a child, a horse, or a fiddle, she up and told him so. . . . She wore the most astonishing garments in Ohio. With a mannish suit and flat mannish shoes, she combined canary-yellow blouses with scarlet buttons--such buttons that were not missing--turbans of golden Chinese fabrics, always raveled and awry, and at least a dozen necklaces of cheap glass beads or wooden disks" (p. 106). What she really needs is a man to straighten her out; if she had a man she wouldn't want the vote, or so the cartoons and jokesters scoffed and Ann guesses that perhaps she does indeed need a man; but, she muses, the Battleaxe had never found "a man big enough to understand her loyalty, her piercing honesty, and a passion too tempestuous to wrap itself in little pink prettiness" (p. 108). Another worker, Eleanor Crevecoeur, commenting on the adage that suffragists are supposed to be man-haters, says that "'if I'd let myself go, I'd be diving into men's beds all the time. . . . We suffragists that hate men! Sure! . . . Oh, nice young ladies don't feel passionately, like

men. No, indeed! We mustn't experience; we must fold gentle hands and wait till some male mouse comes up and flicks his whiskers at us'" (p. 113). The woman, however, who speaks articulately for the group and who has the most insight on the women's movement is a medical doctor, Dr. Malvina Wormser: "'I have a hunch that after we get the vote, we'll be less ardent feminists. We'll find that work is hard. That jobs are insecure. That we must go much deeper than woman suffrage--maybe to Socialism; anyway, to something that fundamentally represents both men and women, not just women alone. . . . We'll slump. But then we'll come back--not as shadows of men, or as noisily professional females, but, for the first time since Queen Elizabeth, as human beings!'" (pp. 123-24). It is Malvina who becomes Ann's close friend and mentor.

What makes Ann decide to leave the work in the suffragist movement is a street brawl which occurs because of an effort to the suffragists to make a public speech. Men are trying to help; she sees "men with blood dribbling in divided streams from cut foreheads down into their blinded eyes. . . . She ceased that moment to be merely a feminist and became a humanist, in the only sense of that harassed word" (p. 142). She decides to broaden her base in social work, to work for both men and women, and she does this by going to work at a settlement house in New York City.

It is here that Ann meets a soldier, Lafe Resnick, who is shortly, he says, going overseas. The city is bustling with news of battles and men dying; it is World War I, and relationships are intense, bittersweet. This is the scene for Ann's first love affair, which she enters into with all of her passion and gusto and lack of guile. At one point she brings Lafe some flowers for his birthday: "He stared; there was a tear

in his eye. 'I've never had any girl bring me flowers!' he cried" (p. 176). The gesture is typical of Ann, coming from her heart rather than from learned habit or duty. Nevertheless, Lafe is, after his departure, no more ardent than he would have been with a less unusual woman; he begins to court a young woman whose father is in the banking business, a woman who essentially has more appeal in the long run than Ann, who has no rich connections.

At the same time Ann realizes Lafe prefers the wealthy young woman, she also realizes that she is pregnant and that she must make a decision either to have the child or to have an abortion. She chooses the latter because she feels that she will be of more use to more people by being free of the burden of raising a child without a father and outside of marriage. She reasons that because the laws affecting the bearing of children have no consideration for the persons involved and that women are punished by a lifetime of contempt if they choose to have their children outside of marriage, then they have as much right to flee this contempt as a "revolutionist has to flee from the state's secret police" (p. 195). She asks Dr. Wormser for help and her friend says that she will perform the abortion even though by doing so she, as a doctor, can lose her means of welfare, because, she argues, "'as long as men--and what's worse, the female--women that let themselves be governed by men's psychology--have made our peculiar function, child-bearing, somehow indecent and exceptional, we have to fight back and be realistic about it and lie and conceal as much as they do'" (p. 210). But whatever Ann's reasons are for having the abortion, she never really gets over the trauma of it until she finally does have a child. One of the results of her experience is that it makes her feel a kinship with all people who

err, and consequently she becomes more of a humanist than a reformer: "'You're not the bright Miss Vickers. You are an erring sister. Splendid! You may become a real leader of women, not a lady reformer'" (p. 212). At this very point, after declaring her humanism, Ann is dangerously close to becoming a man-hater because of her experience with Lafe; however, an ensuing episode forces her to reconsider her attitudes. The structure of the novel is built by juxtaposing episodes that are delineations of disparate experiences that constantly keep Ann off balance, so to speak; consequently, Ann develops and expands to meet the challenges of the experience; she does not develop a standard by which to measure experience and to seek out only those experiences which fall within the realm of her measured standards. The experience that befalls her after her love affair and abortion involves her good friend from the suffragist days, Ellen Crevecoeur, and a woman called Dr. Belle Herringdean, a cold dispassionate person who enjoys manipulating women. She tells Ellen that "'no man living can make love elegantly and amusingly. Only women!'" (p. 226). As Ann watches helplessly she sees Dr. Herringdean drive Ellen to suicide. Men, Ann surmises, do not have a monopoly on sadism or cruelty. Her experience requires that she relax her judgments about men and become, in general, more rational about people of both sexes.

She now concentrates on her career that she has become disillusioned with because she finds herself involved in the hypocrisy and graft of a so-called philanthropic organization which, in actuality, is a tax dodge and publicity front for its wealthy patron. After reassessing her goals she decides to work for prison reforms because she knows she "'must go on scolding at slackness and cruelty'" (p. 265). At this point, however, she has a choice between continuing with her career or marrying Lindsey

Atwell, a successful mild-mannered lawyer who, because he is without much passion, is a good friend who does not complicate Ann's life with the emotions which a more passionate relationship demands. But he does suggest that they marry: "'You have so much reality, Ann. One doesn't have to fence with you. You're not vain and egocentric and you don't appraise every man just in ratio as he serves you'" (p. 277).

Ann realizes that she is being complimented, but her relationship with Lindsey, whom she realizes she does not excite, causes her to consider her behavior in relation to other women's: "'What were these 'women's wiles' of which she read in novels? Couldn't she master them: be complimentary, be coyly aloof, be wistful, be fluttered by a hand-clasp, rouse him to a conviction that she was a swooning mystery which he must penetrate? 'In other words, lie and play-act! No, I'm hanged if I will!' said Ann" (pp. 277-78).

Ann is as blunt as her language; she is as honest and plodding as her story, for Lewis's novel plunges ahead with events, refusing to woo the reader, to use artifice, to suggest areas beneath surfaces, and consequently, like Ann, the novel cannot "excite" except through the force of its ideas and its plot, which is a heavy burden, indeed. Writers such as Thomas Mann understood that all art is accompanied by a little falsehood, a little manipulation, that all great artists are impressarios shaping material for audiences in ways to most please them, and that in doing so, they call forth responses and emotions in the reader that bare, realistic facts can rarely ever do. Lewis, of course, does shape his work as any writer must, but his technique is to work with surfaces as much as possible. In this Lewis is a product of Howells's school of realism, the age "that felt before writers could go above or beneath,

they had to go in. Before they could attempt to tell the truth about the extraordinary, they had to tell the truth about the ordinary . . . to tell the truth, through fiction, about the ordinary world of physical experience."¹⁴ Lewis is successful with this technique when he superimposes surfaces or descriptions of objects on dialogue and by doing so makes a statement, usually satirical, about character. For example, in Ann's next venture, which is to investigate prison life, she encounters a woman who is interested in penal reforms, but primarily to appear charitable and respectable; her intentions are revealed both through setting and speech.

Mrs. Albert Windelskate arrives to meet Ann at the train station in an expensive sedan which "is equipped with a pressed-glass vase containing artificial flowers" (p. 279). She whisks her off to lunch at the opulent Indian Mound Country Club; there Mrs. Windelskate murmurs about the lack of money for prison reforms. She refers to the prisoners as "poor lost lambs," early in their conversation, but as she settles into a discussion concerning the prisoners and finances she calls them degenerate criminals. Mrs. Windelskate in one breath brags about the expensive country club and in the next the fact that the people in the state have no money to pay the prisoners labor wages beyond five cents a day. Through setting and dialogue her real intentions and her hypocritical behavior are revealed. Her husband is in the "'loan and mortgage business . . . why I don't know what a lot of farmers and store keepers would do in Pearl County if he didn't let them have money and help them out, and I'm sure he never forecloses if there's any earthly way of preventing it, . . . though Heaven knows they're so improvident--buying autos and washing-machines and so on and so forth when they pretend they

can't pay the interest'" (p. 280). She ends her monologue: "'Oh, it's a thankless task, but still I do feel, don't you, that it's the duty of our better families and our better educated class to go into politics and not leave it to a lot of ignorant, prejudiced, common politicians, don't you think so? . . . Shall we have a cocktail before lunch?" (p. 284). It is the era of prohibition.

Ann observes, in her months at the prison, that the behavior of the inmates is no different from the behavior of the guards and personnel who are in charge of them: Dr. Slenk, Captain Waldo Dringooole, Mrs. Bitlick, and Mrs. Kaggs make up the roster of employees who siphon off money for themselves, commit sadistic acts on the prisoners, and sell drugs and other contraband to the inmates. Ann identifies with the prisoners because she harbors guilt feelings about the abortion she has had, and as she learns about prison life she concludes that the major difference between criminals and other people is that they have been caught. She also reaffirms what she knows to be true of her own sex, which is that women are as capable of cruelty as men, and she includes herself as one of them: "'No,' she pondered. 'It's not true that women aren't as selfish, as cruel, and as hard as men. We have all the masculine strength! I'd like to torture Mrs. Bitlick!'" (p. 352). Because her sympathies are with the exploited prisoners and because she discovers the graft in the system Ann is blackmailed by the prison authorities and forced to resign. Exhausted from her year's work and defeated in her attempt to effect any change at Copperhead State Prison, Ann returns to New York City to discover that, ironically, she is becoming a well-known woman in social reforms and welfare; she is awarded an honorary Ph.D. At this point, at the height of fame, the narrator emphasizes Ann's

loneliness and her increasing desire for a home and children. The first emphasis is on the home.

The apartment she furnishes reflects her nature--Lewis's technique of establishing character through objects--it is roomy with comfortable chairs, reading lamps and masses of books, including a set of Dickens. (Lewis's characters who own Dickens are concerned with the human condition and are usually as multifaceted in their make-up as a character from the Dickens' world.) Now, after Ann is satiated with reform and fame, she begins, unconsciously at first, to woo Lindsey Atwell; they have re-established their easy-going friendship and consequently Ann is shocked by his announcement that he plans to marry another woman: "'Ann, I had hoped once I might venture to ask you to marry me. You are the most worth-while woman I know, and the dearest. But I'm afraid you're a little too big for me. I have a career of my own. And if I married you, I'd simply become your valet, I'm afraid, my dear'" (p. 409).

Lindsey's decision jolts Ann into facing her feelings about marriage for the first time in years: "All the layers of niceness and informed reasoning and adaptation to the respectability of concrete had been stripped off, till she was naked, nude as a goddess--a woman tribal leader in the jungle. Rarely did she think in words, but chiefly in emotions, explosive and scarlet" (p. 408). The gist of what Ann is thinking or what she is beginning to recognize in herself is that she wants a child. She has always wanted a job that has dignity and respect, power and financial security and she wants to "add a millionth of a degree to civilization," but at the same time she wants a man and a child. In the most banal terms, phrases that could have come from the pages of romantic pulp fiction, she says, "'I'd be glad if some ranchman out of an idiotic

'Western novel' came along and carried me off. I'd bear his children and cook his beans'" (p. 409). This is not the first time that the reasonable and logical Ann has reverted to terms couched in popular clichés and images. Earlier, when she spent time in jail for her participation in the suffragist movement, she acquired the habit of escaping from the horrors of her environment by daydreaming. The form her daydreams take are to be found in popular fiction: She envisions a lover whom she meets in green fields or "a worn doorway, in a city worn and old and thunderous, or an afternoon of fog and watery street-lights; they had their tea in a secret place . . . [or in a] palazzo with a lofty ceiling riotous with little loves, and a vast blue and golden bed at the distant end of a room floored with scarlet tiles and lit by a crystal chandelier" (p. 153). The narrator says that "everything from every romantic novel, every motion picture she had seen, came to her now and appeared more real, in her detached brooding, than the cockroaches on the rusty bars of her cell, the screaming prostitute five feet away, the piles of envelopes awaiting her back in Clateburn" (pp. 153-54).

Lewis uses such episodes of emotional image-making or fantasizing to precede a drastic change in Ann's life. She is plunged into a situation which challenges her very rational and skillful being; she must then direct her will to reshaping her life into some kind of order. It is as if Ann is being directed by universal forces which one finds forms for in common literature and in movies, images representative of basic desires, clichés of emotions, images expressive of unconscious urges, propelling her towards her goal which is, in this case, to have a child.

In recognizing her need to marry and fearing she won't find someone suitable, Ann talks to Dr. Malvina Wormser. She asks what kind of man

will love her, and Dr. Wormser replies that "'superior women have something (I s'pose we are superior, aren't we. I dunno) that makes the pretty real men afraid we'll overshadow 'em . . . we have to depend either on men so small that they get their pride and egotism out of being known as our associates, or on men so big they're not afraid of comparison with anyone'" (p. 412). She goes on to say that the same is true for so-called superior men who marry women who are jealous of their husbands' talents: "'A first class man marries a mean woman, and after she gets over her first awe of him as a celeb, she puts in the rest of her life, till he chucks her, in trying to convince the world that she's as good as he is. She suffers, almost to insanity, over the fact that most people see her only as the great man's wife. She tries to make him feel guilty for it'" (pp. 412-13). Malvina tells Ann that when two people do meet, if they are compatible, they should take love as it is: "'Thank Heaven, there hasn't yet been passed a constitutional amendment preventing the sacred old custom of illicit love'" (p. 413). Ann's talk with Malvina is a foreshadowing of the next period of her life. It is an antidote to her emotional thinking, but first she must suffer the results of her emotional thinking.

After her crisis of recognition and losing Lindsey Atwell, Ann rushes into a marriage with a fellow worker, Russell Spaulding, a man of brisk vitality, genuine friendliness, and a propensity for jokes. He describes himself: "'I'm a sentimentalist, a make-believer, a wind-bag, an exhibitionist'" (p. 418). Ann sees, too late, that he is "'too noisy, too proud of his athletic powers, in their greater intimacies . . . he's a child. He's vain. He's pretentious. I don't want him as the father of my children--of Pride . . . I that was once proud and free and

powerful! To get myself into a position where I have to share the bed of this clown--and what's worse, have to listen to his jokes!" (pp. 419-20).

In Ann Vickers Russell Spaulding is Lewis's characterization of the lover who "plays," but in Russell the image of lover as playmate has deteriorated from Lewis's earlier concept. From his earlier heroes and heroines to whom play was full of joy, created from fantasies and make-believe in order to escape from an oppressive reality, Lewis arrives at an antithesis of his original idea. In the character of Russell Spaulding, Lewis depicts "play" as an indication of immaturity and egocentrism; playfulness is associated with grotesqueness: "Russell Spaulding . . . talked always in his lighter amorous moments of 'playing' at things, of 'making believe,' and he engaged in these diversions so hysterically that he was as embarrassing to Ann as the spectacle of a fat man dancing at a nudist colony" (p. 467).

By responding impulsively to her emotions Ann marries such a man only to immediately regret it. Their relationship also suffers from Ann's fame and Russell's jealousy. Publicly he enjoys being the husband of the "Big Woman," but privately he wants her to transmogrify into the "Little Woman." She tries: after office hours she stops talking about problems of reform or politics and prepares his favorite dishes; she tolerates his games, playing "little pig goes to market" on her fingers, and listens to his stories of amorous adventures--one girl used to call him "Big Mans." But one evening, after entertaining another couple, Ann realizes what her role-playing amounts to. The relationship of the other couple parallels the Spauldings in that the woman is dominant in some area: the wife is a business executive of a thriving furniture

enterprise and the man is a literary humbug who has, in two years, written eight lines of a sonnet; in other words, the women are the dynamic creative forces while the men are the parasitic (emotionally, not necessarily financially) members of the marriage. Ann serves supper and afterwards she and the other wife wash the dishes. Then it suddenly occurs to her that not only do the men expect them to serve them in this manner but that they also look down upon them for doing so. She muses that "'the cards were stacked against you, Ann. No doubt they will be against your great-great-granddaughter. But since birth and life have thrust you into the game, at least be warned that the cards have been stacked'" (p. 443). Convinced that her marriage is destructive and humiliating, she takes her own apartment and sees Russell only occasionally.

Her desire to be free and independent but also to have a child and a home seem to be in conflict. It is apparent to her that Russell Spaulding will not be the father of her child. Much like the head female wolf who will not let the weak male wolves mate with her (only the fittest is allowed to impregnate her), Ann rejects Russell. Ever since she has had an abortion, she has carried with her the dream of a child, a daughter whom she has given a name--Pride. The need for this child increases even as the means, her relationship with Russell, recedes.

Now, after she leaves their apartment, circumstances change and Ann meets a man with whom she wants to have a child. He is Barney Dolphin, married, father of two daughters, and a well-known judge. The first time they meet, Ann "was after years of loneliness, curiously at home in Barney Dolphin's presence" (p. 461). Acting quickly on her instincts she goes with him to Virginia to spend a week thinking "there was a third

who was with them always--Pride her daughter. Certainly Ann was doing nothing to prevent Pride's finally coming . . . she saw Pride now as inevitably his daughter, Barney's . . . 'I will have my child, as I have my man!' she vowed. 'A working woman has a right to her child and her lover. Oh, I don't suppose she has any specific right. Probably there are no 'rights'--only the chance of having good glands and good luck. But whatever the philosophy of it may be, I'm going to have, Barney and I are going to have, our daughter'" (p. 469). This need of Ann's supersedes all considerations, and her behavior proceeds without heed to convention or proprieties even though at first she tries to adjust her circumstances to fit into accepted patterns. This means that she must scheme and lie. When she knows that she has conceived a child and that child is Barney's she proposes to Russell that they resume their conjugal state, and he agrees even though she tells him that the child she is carrying is not his. He wishes to believe it is his, however, and because there is a possibility--they have continued, although living apart, to have sexual intercourse on rare occasions--Ann, for convenience, does not flatly deny his paternity.

During her pregnancy Ann realizes that all of her rational enthusiasm for social causes and her impetus for work are sublimated to the act of gestation. The child is a boy whom Ann and Barney call Matthew and whom Russell Spaulding accepts as his own child, showing affection and sentimentally buying it stuffed floppy-eared animals. As Russell assumes the role of the father he criticizes Ann for not assuming a more conventional role as a mother. When she returns immediately to work, he tells her: "'Your self-sacrificing devotion consists in paying Miss Gretzerel to do all the dirty work!'" (p. 517). He accuses her, because

she does not display affection for him, or wish to resume sexual relations, of neglecting the baby.

She admits that by avoiding his embraces "'this much lauded business of preserving one's chastity can be much nastier and meaner than prostitution'" (p. 516). She knows she is being unfair to Russell Spaulding and to herself and all because of some notion that a child should be born in wedlock, should have a legal father. At last, however, she is driven to action, and she leaves Spaulding's apartment with her child to live alone.

At this point Lewis challenges the reader, as it seems, to safeguard his emotions against sympathy for Spaulding as, traditionally, writers influence readers' sympathies for the weak, for women, in popular fiction. On the surface Ann's husband has been heroic, taking her back after her first flight from his home, and after her admission that she has a lover; now, in a meant to be maudlin scene he cries, begging her to stay, even confessing that he has cut out from women's magazines pictures of children and hidden them in his desk, pretending that they were his own, so badly has he wanted children. He begs her not to take away "his son." It is not surprising that after such a scene Lewis's heroine inspired letters from readers like Mr. Rose from Michigan, who wrote: "Why you dirty low down smelly nasty disgusting, obscene, maggot filled manure minded, skunkassociating sap, of just what value do you think a story of that kind would be to the world or to the readers."¹⁵ Such vehemence is stimulated by the fact that the heroine of any story could trample over conventions of decency which are traditionally guarded by woman. Her image is, traditionally, the keeper of the home, defender of virtue and chastity, and the all-accepting

mother-figure, comforter of mankind. In Lewis's novel, in this case, the sexual roles are reversed; it is the woman who initiates the action, shapes a career, decides to marry, takes a lover, has a child, and leaves her home; it is Russell who is patient, conventional, and to an extent supportive (all during her pregnancy he brings Ann tea in bed and fusses over her as a mother would). One recalls, however, that such a person, keeper of the status quo, the representative of societal mores against the actions of the individual, is, for Lewis, an anathema.

Russell Spaulding is cast in the mold of those "Restrainers," Mrs. Golden, Myra Babbitt, Elmer Gantry's mother, and the "Improvers," Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon. As spokesman for the conventional, restraining influences in society, Lewis intends that Russell Spaulding should function as a foil to the heroine.

The immediate result of Ann's leaving Russell is to cause her despair. She lives in a neighborhood which is not quite a slum; "it was distinguished from slumshood mostly by the fact that it was less cheerful" (p. 554). It is 1932, and Ann, in spite of her established career, worries about her job. "The precariousness of jobs was terrifying hundreds of thousands of independent feminists who had been able to say airily, 'Oh, to thunder with my husband and my father, yes, and the boss, too. After all, you know, I can always wait on table!'" They could not wait on table now. They could not be airy. It was a beautiful time for male bosses--except that they were likely to lose their own jobs" (pp. 554-55). Ann's lover, Barney, has been sent to jail, convicted for associating with known criminals; he is guilty of incorrect appearance.

Lewis makes a point that both Barney and Ann are lawbreakers: Ann has had an abortion and Barney, although a scrupulous judge, has benefited

from his so-called criminal associations. Ann's loneliness for Barney when he is in jail is genuine, but the narrator's statement on her despair for living is not. The narrator claims that Ann thinks about suicide, that only the thought of Mat, her son, keeps her from committing such an act; however, there is nothing in her make-up to indicate that she is suicidal. Her character is infused with buoyancy, bluntness, and a sort of courage that belies the narrator's statement that she thought of killing herself. Fortunately for credibility, Lewis does not dwell on her despair; after two years of waiting for Barney, which are covered in a few pages, Ann finds him unexpectedly on her doorstep.

She whisks him out to a home she has bought just outside of New York City, a little house called Pirate's Head Cottage, and it is here they discuss their future. They decide that even though both are still married to others they will remain together; Barney's wife, who is Catholic, will probably never give him a divorce. He asks Ann what the effect of their living together openly will have upon her job, and she replies that there is a possibility that "'I'll be fired, but I'll have such a happy time showing up all the politicians, including a state senator that offered me ten thousand dollars to let a girl escape!'" (p. 559). They also discuss the effect of the scandal on their son, and Ann says, "'Listen! This is a new age. By the time Mat is sixteen he'll have to look in a dictionary to find out what the word 'scandal' means. No! My motto comes from that good old pirate, the Duke of Wellington: 'Publish and be damned!'" (p. 561).

It is no coincidence that both Ann's home and her favorite motto are associated with the word pirate; a pirate by definition is someone who plunders or takes without permission from a sovereignty or state, and

Ann, in a sense, is a pirate. She is relentless in pursuing her man, taking him in spite of society's "permission." Lewis, a long time admirer of Bernard Shaw, reflects, in his portrayal of Ann, a Shavian idea. In Shaw's dedication to Man and Superman he speaks of woman's defiance of conventions to achieve her ends, which he associates with nature's ends, selective breeding to insure the survival of the race: "The woman's need of him to enable her to carry on Nature's most urgent work, . . . gathers her energy to a climax at which she dares to throw away her customary exploitations of the conventional affectionate and dutiful poses and claim him by natural right for a purpose that far transcends their mortal personal purposes."¹⁶ But for doing this, Shaw continues, woman is labeled "unscrupulous": "It does not occur to them [the public] that if women were as fastidious as men, morally or physically, there would be an end of the race."¹⁷ Sinclair Lewis's Ann parallels Shaw's Ann of Man and Superman in that both pursue, relentlessly, the men of their choice, ignoring or overstepping any person or obstacle that gets in their way. Such women are, according to society, outside law. They are pirates and Lewis is saying in his novel that society needs to be "plundered" for its own good. A woman of Ann's stature and vitality needs to be free to function according to her best instincts.

The novel ends at Pirate's Head Cottage, Ann's home, named years before by someone quite forgotten, but functioning as an objectification of values that recur in Lewis's work: the beneficence of nature's aesthetic appeal, the freedom from excess or from the encumbrance of possessions, and the spirit of iconoclasm. The view from the house extends across a valley of dogwoods; the house is small but sound; built in 1860 for a farmer, it stands apart from its neighboring, pretentious

tudors and pseudo Spanish-Italian villas. In Lewis's novels there is a direct association between the aesthetic quality of one's home and one's mentalité or the way one regards the universe, himself, or others, and the values according to which he models his behavior toward others.

Lewis's heroes and heroines closest to his heart live in homes reflecting a humanistic mentalité. For example, in Dodsworth, one of Edith Cortright's homes is a small rented Italian villa with gleaming tiled floors, sparsely furnished but enclosed by a narrow garden with ancient olive trees and a crumbling wall; it is full of sunshine. In Arrowsmith Martin triumphs over Joyce Lanyon's ornately furnished gilded drawing rooms by retreating to a pine cabin in the New England woods, and in Main Street, even though Carol cannot impose her sense of beauty on the town or even on her own house, which significantly resists change, she can manage a room of her own, simple in its essentials of a cot, bureau, and bookcase--a part of her survives.

Ann Vickers, too, has a sense of place, and it is here, at Pirate's Head Cottage, that she accomplishes a unity through her relationships with her son and Barney and also with herself: "the Captive Woman, the Free Woman, the Great Woman, the Feminist Woman, the Domestic Woman, the Passionate Woman, the Cosmopolitan Woman, the Village Woman--the Woman" (p. 562). She tells Barney that it is he and their son who have brought her out of the prison of herself: "'the prison of ambition, the prison of desire for praise, the prison of myself'" (p. 562). She has achieved her goals, a desire for independence in a man's world, and also for living with the man of her choice and for having their child. She tells Barney: "'I'll always have jobs--you may as well get used to it--it

makes me only the more stubborn a feminist, to be in love!" (p. 559). Thus, although bluntly expressed, Ann claims her victory.

In portraying Ann Vickers, Lewis did not arouse the fury of as many people as he did in portraying Elmer Gantry because Gantry, the clown in the temple, is an attack on the credibility of institutions erected to safeguard and to foster the sanctity of cherished illusions; nevertheless, it seems that in wishing to demonstrate that he had not been "tamed" by success and the Nobel Prize, Lewis created a woman who is an iconoclast, who smashes such myths about women as their sexual fastidiousness and their inferiority in the market place. She falls outside the stereotypical good woman: mother, wife, sweetheart; or bad woman: meddler, whore, seductress, of fiction; she is a combination of the intellectual energy and courage of the male with the biological will to create of the female. Assigning categorical attributes to the male and female is arbitrary, no matter how it is done in fiction; the point is that Ann, fashioned from a combination of these drives, is unique in Lewis's fiction.

Most popular fiction evolves from man's need to believe in the dream of romance which is defined, according to many writers such as James Branch Cabell, as nature's means of trapping people into procreating. Lewis greatly admired Cabell's work; he dedicated Main Street to him and to Joseph Hergesheimer, and he visited Cabell on several occasions. Cabell's fiction is often fashioned from the premise that out of man's dream of romance man creates his religion, his art, and his philosophy of idealism. The burden of Cabell's work is the knowledge that art is adornment and an illusion which is fragile and apt to dissolve in the light of realities, and that what is ultimately left to

man is the biological sex urge; all the rest is fantasy and romance, the need for man to adorn his cage.¹⁸ Cabell and Shaw (V. L. Parrington links their names; see note 18) both wrote fiction based on this philosophy and, in Ann Vickers, Lewis also wrote a novel in which the heroine is shown to be a captive of the sex urge, and in which the only trappings of romance and illusion are seen as just that--paltry traps: Ann is seduced by images and ideas of romance from popular novels and movies into romantic reveries which precede a liaison with a man, but the liaison is irrational (as concerns the biological drives) in that procreation is foiled; Ann finds she cannot mate or have a child with the man after all. Irrationality, in terms of individual behavior and the sex urge--in Lewis's terms--is that Ann is swept into relationships but is unable to procreate because either she is not satisfied with her choice, as with Spaulding, or else the man, as with Lafe Resnick, does not wish to continue the relationship and Ann's considerations for social conventions interrupt the procreating process; on the other hand, the rationality of individual behavior within the sexual will or urge is the imposition of the individual's choice on this force, mating, not with just anyone, but with someone with whom the individual truly wants or can live with after the process of having a child is accomplished. That Lewis's paradigm of the rational and the irrational is also an illusion, or arbitrary, one may argue, but the very fact that he writes fiction, and people read, is also an act of the willing suspension of disbelief or willingness to make-believe. But whether one feels that Ann's being able to choose Barney Dolphin is a deliberate act of the will or just plain luck, it remains that the major conflict in the novel is with her individual will and the impersonal force of the sex urge; the novel's subsidiary concerns

are with her experiences in the feminist movement, settlement houses, philanthropic organizations, and penalology.

Lewis wrote another novel that like Ann Vickers has, as its title, the name of its heroine; the novel is Bethel Merriday, and it is of interest in this chapter because it reintroduces the heroine who is involved in play, reviving, to a degree, the woman who enjoys make-believe and play, and reinvesting the concept of play with the positive values that are associated with the earlier heroines, Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood. It is as if Lewis, after writing Ann Vickers and debunking "play," portraying a woman devoid of interest in games and devoted only to serious purpose, had to reinstate his original concept of "play" and heroines by writing about a woman who is an actress, dedicated to illusion and to make-believe.

In resurrecting the heroine of "play" and "make-believe" Lewis has very little new to say and consequently the novel falls below the quality of Ann Vickers. In fact Lewis's best novels were behind him although he wrote nine more. According to Charles Breasted, Lewis, in 1927, predicted his work would fall off. On a camping trip Lewis told him: "'I've already done my best work. . . . Oh, in the future a book of mine will probably always be good for a sale of fifth thousand--but neither the critics nor the author will be fooled. The best of what I'll ever have produced will bear the same relation to true literary achievement that a jacket blurb does to the text of a really great book.'" ¹⁹ And while it is true that until Lewis wrote Cass Timberlane his novels are indeed third-rate, he had transferred the blame for the quality of his novels from himself to his relationship with Dorothy

Thompson whom, in 1927 at the time of his frank conversation with Breasted, he did not know. In 1942 he wrote to her that "you say that your highest desire was that 'our marriage should be productive--creative.' Well, to my powers of creation, it has been disastrous. That is why I want it broken, before it is too tragically late."²⁰ By 1946 Lewis includes all women as killers of talent; he told someone who said he exaggerated about American women in Cass Timberlane that "'of course it's not exaggerated. American women are like that. Killers of talent. Unless it's talent that helps them obtain power. But the minute it's talent they can't control or understand, why stab, stab, stab, they've got to prick the balloon.'"²¹ How Lewis really felt cannot be assessed from a few quotations taken out of context, but the fact does remain that, indeed, the novels he wrote after 1930, with one exception, were vastly inferior to his novels of the 1920s.

In January of 1942, Dorothy Thompson obtained a divorce from Sinclair Lewis and once again he was free to live as he chose. By this time he had met a young woman, Marcella Powers, who was an actress and with whom he had established a relationship which was to span about five years. He met Marcella during a summer when he was acting in Ah! Wilderness and researching material for a novel he was writing. In an interview given to this writer by Marcella Powers in August, 1976, she says that Lewis "had a love affair with the theater. He liked actresses because they combine a type of feminine pliancy, which all men like, with an ability to communicate, 'cause they'll communicate even if they don't know what they're talking about."²² Power says that she is not the model for Bethel. Lewis had nearly finished all of the research for the novel before they knew one another; however, she says that "in Bethel Merriday

the one thing that I contributed was that I went through that manuscript, after he and I became friends, and I used backstage slang or I used the words that they use for things backstage or that actors use, which he wasn't necessarily able to know because he wasn't into it that much. . . . He wanted everything to be as real as possible."²³

The novel, published in 1940, reads like a handbook on what it is like to be a part of a theatrical group. A pale romance involving the heroine is imposed on a factual and rather tedious account of a troupe on tour performing Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in modern dress; however, in portraying a woman who is an actress and whose interests are so different from his heroine Ann Vickers, Lewis comes full circle in his feelings or attitudes about imaginative play and work. From having divested his heroes and heroines from any concerns with play because it is destructive to their life's work, he reinvests his characters with inclinations for play which, as with his early protagonists, is once again benevolent.

Bethel and her friends, in 1931, like Ann's friends in 1910, all want to be something, but that something for Bethel's generation is usually a stopgap between childhood and marriage. Bethel, like Ann, goes to Point Royal College for girls, a detail Lewis uses to establish a relationship between the women, although Ann is never mentioned. The reader draws his own conclusions. Ann is vitally interested in history, economics, reform, and political concerns; Bethel, on the contrary, is not: "She felt, and quite guiltily, that she ought to be devoting herself to worrying about the dispossessed Jews in Germany and Poland, the share croppers in Oklahoma. . . . But she had to admit that what she wanted was much simpler: she just wanted to act."²⁴ The man

Bethel marries is also a spokesman for the artist rather than for those persons concerned with world affairs. Ted Wintergeist is asked if he plans to get involved in the European war, to which he replies: "'That's like asking somebody if he'll go into an earthquake if it comes along, or just ignore it. My only propaganda is against these apologetic actors who say that their work seems insignificant compared with the big events abroad. Now's just the time when every artist has got to take even his tiniest job more seriously than ever, so that civilization may have a chance to go on. . . .'"²⁵

Lewis retreats to the sanctuary of art, to make-believe or play in Bethel Merriday; art is a more effective way of coping with life than are the reforms of Ann Vickers. The narrator comments that "like all artists--all painters, all musicians, all poets, even some of those plodding recorders, the novelists--actors are glorious children, with a child's unwearied delight in the same story over again, and the child's ability to make dragons grow in a suburban garden, but with an adult magic of crystallizing daydreams into an enduring life."²⁶

In portraying the actress Lewis had found a vehicle for the child-in-the-adult that until now he had depicted within a spectrum that ranged from the delightful playmate Ruth Winslow to the baby businessman Babbitt to the destructive Fran Dodsworth and to the clumsy Russell Spaulding.

Ann Vickers and Bethel Merriday, however, have points in common; their prototype is the hard-working and determined Una Golden. Even Bethel says, "'I'm not going to be an amateur. I'm not going to play at playing. No! It isn't good enough!"²⁷ Both women are dedicated to their careers although both find happiness in their relationships with

men and both are straightforward women without wiles and grasping instincts where men are concerned. Their speech is unmetaphorical, and Bethel's is punctuated with slang phrases such as "Hot dog!" or "That's dandy." They are similar to Leora Arrowsmith in their devotion to an ideal and in their honest natures. But Lewis has departed from the characterization of the woman of affairs as he once departed from the sophisticated playmate; he will portray one other type of woman, and she is Jinny Marshland in Cass Timberlane, a young woman of talent and curiosity who as a wife will be as imperfect and yet as interesting as any personage except, one may argue, Carol Kennicott, in Lewis's fiction. Bethel Merriday in her youth and in her dedication to play foreshadows Jinny.

ENDNOTES

¹Sinclair Lewis, The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950, eds. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 3.

²The Man from Main Street, p. 16.

³Bernard Shaw, Seven Plays (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1951), p. 672.

⁴D. J. Dooley, The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 184.

⁵Dooley, p. 185.

⁶Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), p. 578.

⁷Schorer, p. 581.

⁸Schorer, p. 582.

⁹Dooley, p. 210.

¹⁰Shaw, p. 558.

¹¹Carl Van Doren, Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1933), p. 37.

¹²Sinclair Lewis, Cass Timberlane: A Novel of Husbands and Wives (New York: The Modern Library, 1945), p. 373.

¹³Sinclair Lewis, Ann Vickers (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1933), p. 18. Subsequent references to Ann Vickers are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴Everett Carter, "Realism to Naturalism: Towards a Philosophy of Literary Realism," in Theories of American Literature, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer and Malcolm A. Griffith (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 386.

¹⁵Schorer, p. 578.

¹⁶Shaw, p. 497.

¹⁷Shaw, p. 497.

¹⁸Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920, in Vol. 3, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), pp. 342-43.

¹⁹Schorer, p. 462.

²⁰Schorer, p. 677.

²¹Schorer, p. 744.

²²Interview with Marcella Powers, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 5 August 1976.

²³Powers, 5 August 1976.

²⁴Sinclair Lewis, Bethel Merriday (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940), p. 47. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be referred to as Merriday.

²⁵Merriday, p. 389.

²⁶Merriday, p. 320.

²⁷Merriday, p. 27.

CHAPTER VII

JINNY TIMBERLANE AND PEONY PLANISH:

PARASITIC CHARMERS

Bethel Merriday is the last of Lewis's novels in which a woman figures as a central character, but he will yet introduce in his fiction a new type of woman, the sensualist. Both Peony Planish and Jinny Marshland are sybarites, the former without scruples, the latter somewhat against her wishes. Peony, although not the protagonist of Gideon Planish, dominates the novel as a heady perfume pervades a room; she is Lewis's first major portrayal of a sensuous, amoral, acquisitive woman, a woman without a trace of conscience, a woman who delights in the pleasures of sex and who, through guile and charm, totally enslaves her husband. Although she is a new type, she resembles Istra Nash of Our Mr. Wrenn, about whom there is a suggestion of the voluptuary. Peony is also preceded by Fran Dodsworth, as a type who is acquisitive, and by Effie May Lambkin, who is affable in her sensuousness; but as a combination of these characters she looms as grotesque as any of Lewis's characters. Jinny Marshland, the young wife in Lewis's novel Cass Timberlane, is also not without a few traces of characterizations of his earliest heroines, the bright and clever playmates, Ruth Winslow and Claire Boltwood. She is new mainly in that she is seen from the point of view of an older man, and because point of view shapes character, Jinny is the portrait of a woman who is youth seen from the perspective of the older man.

Maxwell Geismar, in The Last of the Provincials, finds Peony Planish one of Lewis's most engaging heroines: "What Peony wants out of life may not be very interesting, but the way she gets it is. As her wiles first entice and then trap poor, pompous Professor Planish, you may realize for the first time in Lewis's work, the charms as well as the ironical tortures of the flesh."¹ Sheldon Grebstein, however, finds no charm in Peony: "First, Lewis demonstrates in the character of Peony and Winifred that the female . . . is deadlier than the male; she is smarter, tougher, and more efficient at getting her way. Especially terrifying is her ability to use the male's strength for her own ends and, if necessary, against him."²

The novel, in a sense, can be read as an allegory in which Lady Materialism enslaves Pale Knight Idealism or the marketplace conquers intellectualism; it is an account of the Planish's marriage and of Gideon's rise in the business of philanthropy as, in ratio, he loses his ethics and values. Lewis wrote of Gideon Planish, "My most serious book--therefore, naturally, not taken too seriously."³ But it is serious in several ways, not the least being that the woman is portrayed as a symbol of decadence and enslavement; she is representative of the worst in human nature. In addition to the character of Peony is the minor figure of Dr. Edith Minton, English professor, who represents sane values in an otherwise absurd world; she is a realist who warns Gideon Planish against women like Peony, but she is so minor as to be merely a shadow, hardly noticeable on a stage of full-blown flesh-colored grotesques.

Gideon, a young, rather pompous but sweet-natured professor at Kinnickinick College, spies Peony Jackson in the front row of his English class, and he is excited by her plump shoulders, sleek legs, wise and

lively eyes, walnut brown long hair, and "friendly lips, not tight nor thin, . . . moving with excitement."⁴ The unsuspecting professor, by revealing the slightest interest in the predatory young woman, is pursued by her until he finds himself in a white cottage with Peony, a child, and a long list of debts. Peony Jackson Planish's delights and pleasures are similar to those of Effie May Lambkin's, the wife of the hero Ora Weagle in Work of Art, published in 1934. Effie May or "Effums," as she calls herself, has a propensity for strawberries and cream and for covering household objects such as telephones with wide-skirted dolls festooned in gold lace and glass jewels. "Effum's" favorite word is "won'erful," which she uses to describe sex with her husband or the taste of a cherry in a cocktail. Men like her because she "'was not one of your doggone, modern, intellectual women that bothered you with deep questions.'"⁵

Peony, too, knows enough not to bother people about being intellectual. She has other tastes, namely a Chippendale cabinet, "a splendor of gold and scarlet and carved mandarins which they had bought in Chicago on their honeymoon, and which had cost approximately ten times what they could afford" (p. 123). This cabinet goes with them to each of their homes like an omnivorous household god presiding over Peony's insatiability. Peony's technique for getting Gideon to buy her things involves sex and an appeal to Gideon's ambition. An example of her stratagem occurs over the buying of a Chinese rug. Peony greets Gideon joyfully at the door when he comes home from work in the afternoon; she is very enthusiastic about his being home: "She led him to the farthest corner, as though it were a secret niche, and kissed him convulsively. There was in their young and parochial love something dark and hidden and fierce, dissolving him to water" (p. 123). Before he can recover, Peony informs

him that they are driving out for dinner and that as they will happen to pass a particular antique shop on the way she wants him to see "'the most beautiful thing you ever saw'" (p. 126). The object happens to be a "huge Chinese rug, blue as a June lake, with a border of dragons and fuzzy-headed lions, saffron and sage-green and yellow" (p. 126). Peony tells Gideon that it will be marvelous to have when he becomes senator. This is her routine; she ties joy or friendliness, sex, and ambitions into a package which Gideon can never resist. Sometimes she flavors her technique by arousing his jealousy. In one episode, after she returns from shopping with a friend of theirs, George Riot, she breaks the news that she has bought herself an expensive ring. First she graphically describes a scene with a saleswoman and George as they are buying pajamas for George's wife, insinuating an intimacy between herself and George; the saleswoman, she says, mistakes them for husband and wife as Peony holds up the pajamas for size. Peony then describes their tour of the store and of all the wonderful things for sale which she resists until she sees the ring, which she is really forced to buy because if she had not done so George was going to buy it for her, and she knew Gideon would not have wanted that! By the end of her monologue Gideon is so relieved, after being so masterfully aggravated by Peony's account, that he is honestly happy that she has bought the ring.

The motif of crass acquisition, represented by the Chinese Chippendale, increases as Gideon compromises his values and lends himself to the fraud of the organizations he helps to perpetuate: "Peony looked at the lilac-colored couch with silver brocade pillows, in front of it a carved teak coffee table covered with glass, at one end of it a super-hetero-dyne radio in a Sheraton cabinet, and at the other a Russian brass

table holding a Swiss smoking set made in Japan, while behind it stood a Japanese screen made in Switzerland--she looked at all this richness, and sighed, 'This is what I like!'" (p. 188). And further: "They dined at a cafeteria, and Peony, in a crimson velvet evening cape and red roses in her hair, carried a tray with scrambled eggs, coffee, a chocolate eclair, a mocha layer cake and caramel ice cream" (p. 365). Even her language is a sort of ice-cream parlor dialect: she is continually "tickled to death"; everything, if she is pleased, is "just dandy"; and she calls Gideon "Gidjums," "honey-bun," "faun," or "little bigs."

Parallel to Peony's increasing needs is the progressively demeaning and circus aspect of Gideon's work. For example, from being a college professor, professional lecturer, and fund raiser, Gideon finds himself peddling his rhetorical skills to The Association to Promote Eskimo Culture, Inc., an organization established as a tax dodge for a wealthy family. The absurdity of the work at the foundation is epitomized by John Littlefish, who is displayed on platforms during fund-raising drives as an example of their charitable efforts; he gives an eighty-five word speech about the glories of malted milk shakes and democracy; "'the rest of the time, he plays professional billiards in a joint on Avenue A'" (p. 256). Gideon lends himself to such clownish activities because it is his means of supplying Peony with the money she needs. At the end of the novel Gideon is offered an escape, the presidency of Kinnickinick College in the tree-shaded town where he can live with a modicum of dignity, quietly pursuing a talent he has for working with people, but it is not to be. Peony will not allow him to return to a life which for her is unexciting and dull. Her last words are "'Do you know what? Someday we're going to have a penthouse on East End Avenue!'" (p. 438). Gideon

realizes that they will have just that, or whatever else Peony wants, because "he loved nobody at all save Peony . . . and . . . Providence had used his loyalty to her--the one lone virtue he had ever had--to destroy him" (p. 422).

Along with the portrait of the plump, avaricious housewife, another portrait stands out in the novel: the careerist or "talking woman," Winifred Marduc Homeward. She is the daughter of Colonel Charles B. Marduc, intimidating philanthropist, owner of a magazine empire and advertising dynasty. Winifred is on the board of twenty-seven welfare organizations; she lectures for sundry causes, and edits a feminist, liberal weekly called Attention, and besides being a talker, she is about her father's business, which is power and wealth. She offers her opinion on men: "'These men--even the talented ones, like my father . . . they do mean so well, but they have no sense of orderliness and human values, like us. I suppose we get it from housekeeping and from mothering them'" (p. 409). Winifred is the type of woman Dr. Malvina Wormser, in Ann Vickers, warns Ann against--the "noisy professionals." Lewis's son, Wells, writing to his father from North Africa, said he had enjoyed Gideon Planish immensely but that "the attack on Dorothy was unfair, one-sided & pretty damned unkind, even worse than Fran Dodsworth."⁶ Whether Lewis had any satisfaction from debunking the "woman of affairs" in his novels is not known, but the portrayal functions well within the structure of the work. She is an appendage to her father's business and as such represents its meretricious aspects; it is fitting therefore that she appear grotesque.

In a gallery of grotesques there are but a few normal portraits hung, as it were, in the corners, obscured by poor lighting, but by their

very position in the gallery to suggest their overlooked value in a society which promotes and spotlights the grotesque. One woman's portrait suggests beauty, or a sense of proportion, in an otherwise chaotic world.

Dr. Edith Minton, an English professor at Kinnickinick College, is a friend of Gideon's. He thinks of her as "quartz crystal, as a doe with large eyes and tiny elegant hoofs" (p. 51). Gideon is half afraid of her honesty and forthrightness; she is feminine without wiles, friendly without being gushy, and, as it transpires, prescient in her assessment of women like Peony. As proctor of Peony's dormitory house she has a chance to observe the young women's behavior, and she discovers that their values are based mostly upon mercenary considerations, tied up with post-war developments and prohibition. She warns Gideon, "'Don't let them waste your time'" (p. 97). But the warning is unheeded, and it is Gideon's fate that one of those young women will waste his life as well as his "time." Years later Gideon returns to Kinnickinick College and remembers to ask about Edith: "He learned that she had been dead for seven years. Somewhere near by she lay in earth, alone" (p. 417). Schorer, as well as other critics, has noted the beauty of that sentence.⁷ Its meaning extends to Lewis's major theme, the "vulgarity of the earth," his symbol for man's salvation in a world otherwise out of touch with humanizing forces. That Edith Minton is alone symbolizes the losing battle of the humanists in a world where the Colonel Marducs and Peony Planishes reign. Shoddy business, power structures developed on human greed, overwhelm the Edith Mintons, who, like unicorns, have long ceased to exist even in the imagination.

Two years after Gideon Planish was published in 1943, Lewis's next novel, Cass Timberlane, appeared. It is a work about love and marriage, husbands and wives, an examination of relationships which Lewis felt were the foundation for sanity in an otherwise insane world. Not heeding Edith Minton's warning, "Don't waste your time on them," Lewis decides that one of his characters must nevertheless give time to those young women because they, the young women of the post-war development era, are all that are left, they are us, he says; and, somehow men and women must make it work, must educate themselves to live together in harmony if not in love and if they can do that they will have taken a step to solve some of the problems of civilization. The protagonist of the novel, Judge Timberlane, summarizes: "'You cannot heal the problems of any one marriage until you heal the problems of an entire civilization founded upon suspicion and superstition; and you cannot heal the problems of a civilization thus founded until it realizes its own barbaric nature, and realizes that what it thought was brave was only cruel, what it thought was holy was only meanness, and what it thought Success was merely the paper helmet of a clown more nimble than his fellows, scrambling for a peanut in the dust of an ignoble circus.'"⁸

The plot of the novel is based on the story of the May-December marriage of the Timberlanes, but within the story are fifteen interchapters, vignettes of other marriages, in the Timberlane's community. The effect of this structure is to expand the one marriage into a collective or universal marriage; it is the microcosm in the macrocosm. Indeed, the structure is also indicative of Lewis's pattern of thinking, as he was always quick to adjust one point of view to another, with the effect of democratizing his subject or putting it within a multivalent

perspective. An example of the way Lewis's mind worked is illustrated by the time when he was told of his son Wells's death, and how he spoke quietly and solemnly of the hearts of German and English and Japanese fathers that must also, daily, be broken by similar news. Thus Lewis was able to place his grief as a part of all fathers' grief.

According to Mark Schorer, critics varied in their praise of the novel when it first appeared in 1945: "The novel understandably irritated certain ladies. Mary Colum announced that she now understood 'why the position of women in America is really the worst in any Western country, and . . . why there is practically no love poetry in American literature.'"⁹ D. J. Dooley reports that "a number of viewers, notably Marjorie Faber in the New Republic, dismissed the novel as a run-of-the-mill woman's magazine serial. Diana Trilling, in The Nation, complained that, . . . he was restating familiar American sentimentalities and cynicisms--dealing in observations that had been part of American cliché-thinking about love and marriage for many a year."¹⁰ Further, Dooley said: "Diana Trilling said that Lewis had depicted marriage as only the sum of its most sensational personal frustrations or satisfactions; he seemed to have no conception of the day-by-day interactions of two complicated human beings, no sense of a shared moral, social, and economic responsibility."¹¹ And James Lundquist agrees that "female reviewers generally deplored it because of the blame Lewis put on women for the horror he saw in most American marriages . . . Lewis's attack on marriage, and women in particular, was extremely pertinent at the time. Only three years before Philip Wylie had published his notorious Generation of Vipers, in which he had put forth the term 'momism' by way of objection to matriarchal domination in American homes."¹²

Male reviewers were generally more generous. Typical of them is Edmund Wilson, who according to D. J. Dooley, "credits Lewis with an alert perception of social phenomena; he was moved to declare that Lewis at his best was one of the national poets. [Ford Madox Ford had also called Lewis a poet.] . . . He saw that Lewis was trying to deal with a typical bright young woman of the forties, a very different phenomenon from the emancipated woman of the earlier decades of the century."¹³

Sheldon Grebstein, however, notes that "there is a more sinister proposal in Cass Timberlane, one which works against the grain of a cherished American tradition, and that is the novel's suggestion that men are better than women, that they love more tenderly, do not hurt their mates so deeply or frequently, and that they are the strength and redemption of most marriages. . . . He [Lewis] continues to display considerable sympathy for women and an understanding of their problems; however, intentionally or not, he has also left the reader with the conclusion that women are inferior to men as human beings."¹⁴

Richard O'Conner compares Jinny with Carol Kennicott:

But unlike Carol Kennicott's return to Gopher Prairie, Ginny's [sic] to Grand Republic represents a triumph for the female will, because she comes back on her own terms. Thus Lewis symbolized the American woman's ascendancy over the man, which Lewis himself believed he had experienced both with Grace Hegger and Dorothy Thompson. The theme of female dominance, of an almost ruthless subjugation of the American male, is sounded repeatedly in a series of "interchapters" which Lewis titled "An Assemblage of Husbands and Wives." While he treated the love and marriage of the Timberlanes with some tenderness, he examined other Grand Republic marriages, those of Timberlane's friends and acquaintances, with a sharp and sometimes corrosive objectivity. Only five of the twenty marriages he describes in the interchapters could be called happy or approximately so. And in most of the twenty marriages described, it is the wife who is cruel, unfaithful, or difficult.¹⁵

In light of this writer's reading of the novel, it is difficult to understand O'Conner's assessment and that of the other critics who state that the novel is anti-women per se. For example, by O'Conner's admission "five of the twenty marriages . . . could be called happy," and, if this is so, one-fourth of the wives would have to be called good. A further look at the marriages described in the interchapters uncovers several more "good" wives; in fact, the count is just about equal between good husbands and wives and bad husbands and wives. There must be another reason for the critics' impression that it is the wives, in the majority of the cases, who are to blame for the poor relationships. A brief examination of the interchapters will reveal this equal proportion and also an explanation for the critics' impression that the women are at fault.

The first interchapter is the account of the Zebra sisters, three women as alike as their alliterative names, Zoe, Zora, and Zita. At family gatherings, they cheerfully report on their husbands' "progressive feebleness" in bed, and their husbands just as cheerfully trek into a nearby city at every chance they get to enjoy the company of "a lady telephone-supervisor" or whoever wants a few drinks and a few dollars (p. 66).

The second account is more complicated because the husband, Dr. Roy Drover, is the mentor and purveyor of advice on sexual matters to the members of the community and as such his influence pervades the novel. Dr. Drover is a sexually potent man, attracted to many women but particularly to his pale wife Lillian: "He continued to feel physical passion for Lillian--as well as for every gum-chewing hoyden that he picked up on his trips to Chicago, and for a number of his chattier women patients.

Perhaps his continued zest came from the fact that it amused him to watch his wife shiver and reluctantly be conquered. To her, the whole business of sex had become a horror related to dark bedrooms and loud breathing. Sometimes in the afternoon when Lillian was giving coffee to quiet women . . . Roy would come rampaging in, glare at her possessively . . . and as soon as they had twittered away, he would rip down the zipper of her dress" (pp. 77-78).

The Boone Havocks are perfectly well-suited to one another. They shout and swear at each other publicly, but privately they are joyful in their lovemaking and they truly like one another. People always compare the Havocks with the Drovers, saying that the former are such a shocking example and that it is a question of time before they will divorce, and that the latter are such a devoted couple.

In the next episode the marriage of Don and Rose Pennloss is examined. Don is the type of man that "when you asked him if he didn't think it was a hot afternoon he told you" (p. 103). Rose, although a dutiful wife, is articulate about her situation, which she compares to many other middle-class women:

"I want to live in New York and get to know all the intellectuals. But what is a woman who is still good-looking at thirty-six but not beautiful enough to make a career of it, clever enough to know she wouldn't be clever on any job, aware, through reading, of all the glamor and luxuries of life but with no money for them and no rich relatives to murder, active and yet contemptuous of amateur charities and artistic trifling and exhibitionistic sports, untrained in anything worth fifteen dollars a week on the labor market and not even, after years of marriage, a competent cook or nurse, no longer in love with her husband and bored by everything he does--and he always does it! --and yet unwilling to have the thrill of being vengeful toward him or of hurting him intentionally, liking other men but not lecherous nor fond of taking risks, possessing a successful daughter and too interested in her to desert her--just what is this typical upper-middle-middle class American Wife to do?" (p. 104)

That there is a stalemate in this marriage is obvious; however more sympathy for Rose is possible because it is she only who is aware of the problem and who consequently feels it.

Gillian Brown, a thrice-divorced career woman who pays her husbands' alimony, and Violet Crenway, Mrs. Thomas Crenway, are the subjects of the next interchapter. As good and bad opposites they cancel each other. Gillian "despised two things in women: taking alimony, which she regarded as a form of looting the conquered city, and the pretense that you are going to satisfy a man without intending to go through with it" (p. 126). Violet Crenway is one of the latter who claims that men were "dear funny things" who thought that "every Girl who smiled at them expected to be kissed!" (p. 127). With her white skin, white gloves, and white gardenia pinned to her lapel, she visits men in their offices, soliciting for charitable organizations and getting what she asks for without, she smirks, giving them a thing.

Four couples who also cancel one another on the scale of good wives and husbands are the subject of the next interchapter. Two, the Ed Olesons and the Leo Jensings, have jolly relationships with their wives: "'I get a can of beer and we strip down to our undershirts and sit around and tell lies and gap about what rats our neighbors are and generally enjoy life'" (p. 156). Their wives, like many of Lewis's good wives, are buddies; they canoe with their husbands, cook goulash over a campfire; in short, they like each other. The other two couples, the Belliles and the George Hames, genuinely hate their mates. Bailiff Bellile goes home each night to an eternal "'Have you wiped your feet? I try so hard to keep things nice here, and then you come home drunk and get everything all dirty'" (p. 158). George Hame goes home to "an ugly silence" and a

"poisonous boredom." He despises his spiritless, whimpering wife, and he lusts for his eldest daughter. His wife knows this and, although she returns his hatred, she is fearful of his lust and says nothing. The four marriages are portraits in extremes.

The subject of the next vignette is a divorcee, Sabine Grossenwahn, a caricature of the parasitical, gold-digging woman who amuses herself with "adultery and gin." "She had succeeded in the new feminine career of lucratively divorcing her husband" (p. 170). Sabine is a grotesque and her distant ex-husband, "poor ol' Ferdy," is to be pitied.

Juliet and Scott Zago are happily married and they live in a mock-Tudor they call the Dolls' House. They have two children and a pool table. Juliet is a "chronic child-wife," wearing ringlets and jangling bracelets, and eliding words. Scott, on the other hand, alienates even the stout-hearted with his puns; in effect the Zagos are typical in every middle-class attribute except in their good-natured love for one another.

Benjamin Hearth and his dipsomaniac wife, Petal, begin their marriage quite happily together. Like her name, she is gentle and shy unless she is drunk, and then Petal sings, curses, and hits. Benjamin is a mortician. One day he arrives home after giving a particularly beautiful funeral to see water soaking through the dining room ceiling: "Above, in the bathtub, naked and entirely drunk, singing 'The Red Light Rag' was his Petal" (p. 205). Entirely devoted to her, Benjamin follows Petal down the path of destruction. After she burns down the house he places her in a sanitarium, but by now his business is ruined, and he moves to a cheap hall-room where he cooks his meals on a kerosene stove and gazes at Petal's wedding picture.

Nestor and Fanny Purdwin, married fifty bickering years, find their sex is good and their life together robust and full of good comradeship.

The union of the Filligans, Beecher and Pasadena, is quite the opposite. "Pas" is "derivative in everything except her make-up, in which she showed talent, care, and diligence" (p. 249). Beecher hates her "clatter," her extravagance, and her monotony in bed, so he schemes to get rid of her without having to pay alimony. He succeeds by luring one of the city's bachelors into a compromising situation, and then he merely plays the role of the enraged husband. Pas is a bore and a parasite and Beecher is coldly clever and cruel.

The affair of Virga Vay and the dentist Allan Cedar, whose spouses are impossible, ends when Allan's wife, Bertha, who has hired a private detective, discovers them just before they try to commit suicide. Bertha is fat and vicious, and Virga's husband is a Kiwanisan. He has been known to bellow at Virga, "'In these modern days, a woman can't fritter away her time daydreaming. She has to push her own weight, and not hide it under a bushel'" (p. 285). The timid lovers are parted and their respective mates are triumphant.

Perry and Bernice Claywheel's problem is that Perry is not interested in sex. He is often impotent, so Bernice, who is quite normal, goes to Dr. Drover, and after she explains her problem she says, "'I'm afraid I'll go crazy'" (p. 307). Dr. Drover replies, "'Why don't you do your job right and get him interested? You probably scare him off'" (p. 307). Bernice understands him to be suggesting gimmicks and "the arts of love" to arouse her husband, techniques that she finds unsuitable to her need for romance, "all the beauty that the movies make an effort to show" (p. 307). She asks Dr. Drover if there are not bordellos for

women, someplace she can go to satisfy her sexual needs as well as her need for the illusion, at least, of romance. Dr. Drover is horrified at her suggestion. In this episode the roles of husband and wife have been reversed, and Lewis invites the reader to make associations with the woman that are ordinarily made with the man, even though it is clear that a man would not have to ask a doctor if there were "places to go to." Once again, sympathies do not lie, in particular, with either the husband or the wife, but they are again certainly against Dr. Drover for his heavy-handed handling of the situation.

Nor is there a need for sympathy, at all, for the couples in the next interchapter; the Helixes and the Silbersees are happy people in two ways, with their respective mates and with each other in their foursome: "Yet closer than either pair of lovers were the minds of Helma and Patty when they recognized the golden conspirator in each other, and saw that their two husbands could be coaxed to be allies in the ceaseless warfare between the world and couples who are so presumptuous as to want not wealth and publicity but only love and serenity and a sandwich" (p. 341).

There is, however, a villain of the next piece. Cerise Osprey, wife of Vincent, is extraordinary for her placid selfishness and predatory greed. When her spending gets them into debt and he must remind her of it "she had found a retort that was much more dramatic and self-congratulatory; she over-apologized, and admired herself for her humility in doing it" (p. 348). Eventually she leaves Vincent and her son to take a well-paid job in a nearby city. When Vincent kills himself over her departure she returns for the funeral, deposits her son with her sister, and goes back that evening to her job and young lover.

The last interchapter concerns Norton and Isabel Trock. After Norton's mother dies, he is bereft, and he goes to Dr. Drover for advice. That bull in the Freudian china shop tells him to "'marry the first cutie that makes a grab at you when you tickle 'em'" (p. 369). Partially on Drover's advice, and partially because he needs to marry for appearance's sake, in order to secure his position at the Blue Ox Bank, "Norty" marries Isabel, a woman who most resembles his mother. But after four years of marriage Norty installs his chauffeur-companion Larry in an attic room and stops altogether the pretense of living intimately with Isabel. When she hints to Dr. Drover that something is lacking in her life, he replies, "'Don't worry. You women never understand how hard we husbands work, and it's just that Nort gets all tired out, slaving away in that big bank, and so he hasn't--he hasn't much left for you. . . . Now skip along, and don't be so impatient with the poor fellow'" (p. 371). And Isabel follows his advice; she skips along--into the shadows of life.

Among all the couples examined in the interchapters three men and three women can with certainty be categorized as truly malevolent types: Sabine Grossenwahn, Bertha Cedar, Cerise Osprey, Roy Drover, George Hame, and Beecher Filligan. They have in common a joy, or at least an indifference, in their cruel behavior towards their spouses. If critics such as Richard O'Conner, who says that "in most of the twenty marriages described, it is the wife who is cruel, unfaithful, or difficult," are left with the impression that the majority of the women are the culprits in the marriages, one may assume it is because they are accustomed to standards in which it is more acceptable for the male to be "cruel, unfaithful or difficult," and it is expected that the female be kind, faithful, and understanding. Thus, when the roles are reversed, the balance also

shifts qualitatively because of one's psychological point of view. It remains that if one examines the chapters carefully the women and men are evenly matched on a quantitative scale that runs from good to neutral to bad.

Most critics, Maxwell Geismar is an example, also find the heroine of the major story in the novel unattractive: "Lewis is at last expressing something of the variety and mystery of that ordinary middle-western life which has been so largely ignored in his work. . . . [It is] difficult to understand just why the central love-story of the novel, developed as it is at the expense of every other theme in the novel, is so meretricious until one realizes that Lewis's Ginny Marsh [sic] is a postscript to his whole line of emancipated heroines: a last more unpleasant figurehead of modern youth and of 'Young Revolution' who, through her disastrous extramarital romance, is forced to receive her just deserts, and repents."¹⁶

In considering Geismar's statement one sees that Jinny is less emancipated than Lewis's early heroines, including Carol Kennicott. Jinny, it will be seen, is imprisoned in the image of herself as the clever Young Woman: adorable, lively, curious--a kitten. In fact, in her husband's view, she and the household cat Cleo are seen synonymously.

The story of Jinny and Cass is based upon Lewis's years with Marcella Powers. In 1938, when Lewis was fifty-four, he met Marcella, then eighteen, working in summer theater. She helped him with his lines in Ah! Wilderness, and from that time until she married Mike Amrine in 1947, they were friends. In an interview with this writer in 1976, Powers spoke of Cass Timberlane:

"I am Jinny although the whole book was written without ever talking to me. . . . I read it in proof, and I had very ambivalent feelings about it, because, of course, it was me, and I knew it, and whole paragraphs of dialogue were things that I must have said and even recognized saying and attitudes, and, of course, the way I looked--everything. And it was a terrible shock to be exposed in fiction like that, you know, even sympathetically, and then my whole affair with Harrison Smith was exposed. [Harrison Smith is portrayed in the novel as Bradd Criley, with whom Jinny Timberlane has an affair.] Yes, it all happened, it was all real, and, of course, this was put in a different setting, and the actual story is much more dramatic and really a much better story. They ["Red" Lewis and "Hal" Smith] were very different, and I felt I almost needed Hal as an antidote to Red because Red was so jittery and demanding and nervous and restless to live with. . . . It's very hard to mesh your life with that man's life, whereas Hal was indolent, easygoing, charming, but very unambitious. . . . He was a man who savoured life in a whole different way, and somehow I felt I needed them both."¹⁷

Powers spoke further about her relationship with Sinclair Lewis and the portrayal of Jinny Marshland:

"The one part I always wanted to play which always makes me think about Red was Hilda in The Master Builder. I understood that feeling that girl had for that great man. . . . Of course, what happens in The Master Builder is really sort of a parallel situation. He is building a thing and none of the young workers want him to go up to the roof to set the symbolic tree on the top of the roof, and the girl keeps goading him into doing it, because she knows he can do it, and he does, and he falls off, and he dies. So, you know, it's this destructive thing--that the young girl has really made this man do something beyond his powers, and, you know, perhaps there was that implicit in our relationship. I don't know. I'm very relieved to see that Cass Timberlane is so damned good because it is completely influenced by his life with me, and I know I've contributed to his writing it at all."¹⁸

In Lewis's novel Judge Timberlane is forty-one and Jinny is in her early twenties when they meet. He is smitten by her lively demeanor and appearance, "a half-tamed hawk of a girl, twenty-three or -four, not tall, smiling, lively of eye," with "fierce" black hair (p. 4). The scene is ironic: in a courtroom, a judge, trained in reason and logic,

in systems where the intellect rules the sensibilities, sits half-asleep until he sees a pretty, young woman and promptly falls in love with her. As he muses upon his feelings he thinks about "the insanity that causes even superior men (meaning judges) to run passionately after magpies with sterile hearts. This, after the revelations of female deception I've seen in divorce proceedings. I am corrupted by sentimentality" (p. 5). The judge, the protagonist of the novel, from whose perspective the reader views the events of the story, warns the reader from the beginning that his point of view is colored by emotion rather than by reason or a sense of realism. His sentimentality will shape the image of Jinny.

Cass's statement prepares the reader for the ending when Cass, "for her and his love for her . . . gave up his vested right to be tragic, gave up pride and triumph and all the luxury of submerged resentment, and smiled at her with the simplicity of a baby" (p. 390). The woman does not triumph at the end of the novel; rather, the emotional part of the man triumphs over the reasoning part, and it is he, not Jinny, who "receives his just deserts"; Jinny is doomed from the beginning to play one role.

At the same time Judge Cass Timberlane of Grand Republic, Minnesota, falls for Jinny he also picks up a black, stray cat whom he associates with Jinny throughout the novel. That Jinny also has a talisman of a crystal cat reinforces the identification that the woman is a kitten and cat. Another image associated with the cat and Jinny is the cave. Jinny visits Cass and forgets Isis, the name she calls her crystal cat: "On a bookshelf the trinket shone in firelight, now diamond flashing, now ruby, until as he stood there in his rustic coonskin coat and sealskin hat, he was hypnotized and saw a gigantic crystal cave in whose ice-glaring maw

crouched a little figure, half-naked, sobbing, terrified by night and death" (p. 119). On the surface it is Cass, paternally seeing the girl-daughter Jinny as the "little figure," and foreshadowing her illness, loneliness, and proximity to death. But the figure is also himself, growing old, terrified by "night and death," hypnotizing himself against reality, clinging to the comfort of the soft young woman; it is he, small and frightened, clinging to the security of the womb. As a point of interest, this writer asked Marcella Powers about the talisman and at first she could not remember any such figure; she did have a small figure of a cat, sent to her from Egypt by a friend (in fact, several live cats inhabited her lovely home), but Lewis never saw it. Then she remembered that Lewis had, at one time, bought her a small crystal figure, and she went out of the room to look for it. What she returned with was a minute Venus or Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. It made sense of Lewis's symbolic associations: man in the woman-cave of love and beauty, unwilling and afraid to be expelled to the fears and reality of "night and death." It substantiated the complexity of the Isis symbol Lewis described in his novel.

The woman Jinny in Cass Timberlane is herself a talisman for her husband, but as such something must happen to her; she must be lost or broken or stolen, in order for there to be conflict and interest in the story which begins when they meet in the courtroom. She is a draftsman and designer for a box and toy manufacturing company, and she has taught school. She boards at Miss Hatter's with several other young people, and it is here that the honorable judge must court her, a situation that amuses her. She consents to marry him, somewhat reluctantly, because she

loses her job, partially because she is not well-trained and is not taking it very seriously, even though it means her independence.

Their honeymoon is successful after they shuck all vestiges of civilization, a recurrent theme Lewis uses in his novels to expose the restricting forces of society: they find a shack, isolated on the Florida seacoast, "long beach-grass with the sea-wind sweet about them" (p. 143). But when they return to the cities their idyll is shattered and Jinny's discontentment emerges. World War II is declared, and Jinny complains, "'Why couldn't I have known a few weeks ago? This time they'll take women in the army. I could have seen Hawaii-France-Russia! And all the boys will be going. . . . And I'll be left home with the old women!'" (p. 144). Jinny, like many very young persons, thinks that going away to war is a great adventure, a Roman circus, an arena for personal excitement. Her lack of discernment, her unawareness for the realities of war is a measure of her immaturity. Another measure of her immaturity is the pattern of frequent quarreling and bickering followed by her repenting and crying, which Cass finds sometimes rather charming. At times, however, Jinny steps outside her role of lovely, spoiled child and admits to Cass that "'I get around you by being the 'ittle girl--the blasted little gold-digger!--but you're too accurate and dependable for me'" (p. 167). Nevertheless, it is the spoiled child that "gets around" him, so she continues to be just that.

At home, in Grand Republic, Jinny, like many wives of well-to-do men, is bored by the Junior League, Red Cross work, country club functions, and endless series of dull dinner parties. At one point she is offered a job drawing cartoons and reporting news for a newspaper, and she and Cass discuss it. Cass says he is "'all for every occupation--

especially law and medicine--open to them [women] completely. But is it any part of this theological doctrine of the economic independence of women--this rare new doctrine that only goes back to the Egyptian priestesses--that women have to have independent jobs, even if it cracks up the men they love--or at least that love them?" (p. 185). After this statement, Jinny decides not to take the job and so her life continues on the same grounds. One hope the Timberlanes have to solve Jinny's boredom is to have a child, and eventually Jinny becomes pregnant, but she develops diabetes and loses the child, so the problem remains.

Unable to work and unable to fulfill her biological role, Jinny becomes dangerously lethargic: "She had not wishes of her own. If he wanted to stay home, if he wanted to drive to the further lakes, she was willing. He who had feared that ambition and careerishness might steal her from him began now to wish that she had more to do and more longing to do it. It seemed to him dismayingly that she had not grown at all since he had first seen her on the witness-stand" (p. 274). They continue to quarrel: "'What do you mean I haven't learned a thing? I've learned plenty! I've learned that the more you talk about wanting me to be free and individual, the more you always want me to do only what you want'" (p. 282). Although she knows this about their relationship, she continues to go along with it, playing the role of the dependent daughter-wife.

Under the mask of the animist the narrator makes a significant statement, referring to the cat, about Jinny's behavior: "She was a mature and dignified young cat now, not without affairs of her own, but with Cass she would still condescend to being a kitten and a playmate. . . . She came trotting up to entertain him, as of old, by chasing

her tail. Her vaudeville repertoire was limited, but she always performed it with the most conscientious artistry" (p. 275). Cass knows that Jinny, too, is playing a role for his amusement and the only reason it bothers him is that he knows Jinny is bored with it. Jinny, however, does not have much insight into her problem; she does not fully understand why she is chafing under her role of "pet," because her irritation manifests itself in a general restlessness and in petty quarreling with Cass, and her quarreling gives him a chance to sit in judgment of her; from his lofty position of well-educated, reasoning, and logical man, he can say to her quietly and profoundly: "'Jinny, I've given you everything I have, and in return you are trying to destroy me'" (p. 284). Jinny answers in one word, "'Piffle!'". The sympathies of the reader are clearly meant to be with Cass and against the airy, spoiled child, but somehow his self-righteousness is unconvincing, like a person who brings quantities of sweets to a child and then reprimands it for overeating. Nevertheless, Cass is by now portrayed as a loving, long-suffering man, trying to get along with a difficult, spoiled woman. He muses on her inconstancy and lack of purpose: "'What did Jinny want? Security, scenery, power, the ability to recognize a quotation from Steinbeck, a ruby and diamond bracelet, a sense of self-discipline, the love of a tangible God, a red canoe and yellow cushions, an unblemished skin, venison with sauces from Cumberland, many children, a seventy-five dollar hat from New York, a request to speak on a nation-wide hookup, dawn beside Walden Pond, the certainty of her husband's affection, or an Irish Wolfhound? He did not know, and she was not quite certain. And in which of these virtuous desires could he most sympathize with her?'" (p. 292).

The arrangement of the catalog of possibilities diminishes Jinny, leaving the impression that to her a love of a tangible God or her husband's affection is on a par with a red canoe and yellow cushions. Cass, by not allowing her to work, and by adoring her child-like qualities and impulsive tendencies, encourages Jinny to behave immaturely, but when he cannot control or understand her behavior he is upset.

One of the more unsettling aspects of Jinny's behavior, to Cass, is her fondness for his friend and colleague, Bradd Criley, a lawyer and popular bachelor. He becomes an intimate member of the Timberlane household during Jinny's confinement and illness, and he continues to see Jinny after she is better, taking her out for swims or for drinks in the afternoon. Rumors finally reach Cass, and he confronts them with the rumors, asking them to consider the implications of their behavior, and as they are as yet innocent of having sexual relations with one another, Bradd is indignant and begins to fuss like a child. Again Cass has the opportunity to be the wise and sedate, although injured, party. He tells him, "'Bradd, don't be insulted, don't be a comedy villain. There's too little friendship in life.' . . . 'if we three decent people can't get along in honesty, then there's no hope for anybody anywhere'" (p. 306). Cass, although pontificating, is stating one of Lewis's most important beliefs, that the hope for happiness lies in human relationships.

Jinny and Bradd do not heed Cass's advice, although in going to live in New York City, it seems as if Bradd is doing just that, but when the Timberlanes visit the city, Jinny and Bradd begin their affair, and when they return to Grand Republic Jinny tells Cass that she is leaving him to return to Bradd. She lists her reasons:

"Very few women care a hang about the laws or social rules. What they love in a man is the feeling that he isn't merely with them, but that he is them, and feels and thinks as they do before they've finished thinking it. What people like you detest about the heels, the outlaws, is that they don't give a hoot for the idiotic rules that you've set up to protect your own awkwardness, which comes from your never really being completely one with a woman, but always remaining a little aside from her, noticing how good you are or how bad. And expecting her to do what--Bradd just laughs when I'm unpunctual, and maybe you can't trust what he says, but with me he's always truthful!" (p. 335).

What may have been a good argument peters out into nonsense, but essentially Jinny is balking at being "judged" by Cass; she is chafing at his image of her as an "erring daughter," an unpunctual, irresponsible child. The irony is that she is just that, but the cards have been stacked. Jinny is encouraged to be a plaything, a toy or kitten, to please Cass, and she has succeeded very well, indeed, capturing a judge for a husband and all that goes with it: money, social position, and opportunities to travel. What she is dissatisfied with, and so is Cass, to an extent, is her kitten-role, but it is far too late for her to change it. She tries to run away from it by running to another man who sees her as more of an equal but who, ironically, cares very little about her. That Jinny defines her life by her attachments to men is another sign that she is unemancipated, contrary to Geismar's remark. This behavior is noted by Cass's niece Valerie who tells him: "'Now I'm in the Army, I got to thinking and I thought: People keep saying there's a new world coming, and women's position will change entirely. Well, it's come and it has changed! But there's still ten million dolls like Aunt Jinny, that haven't got guts enough to hold down a job or enough patience to study, and they think that modernity for women is simply being free to skip around with any men they like, and get all the jewelry and

embroidered linens" (pp. 362-63). Cass's answer to Valerie is significant: "'Do you remember, few years ago, people said our college students were effete--never walk anywhere? Those same boys are now fighting in hell. And if Jinny ever had to, she could put on breeches and swing a rifle over her shoulder and march all night as well as any of 'em. Better! She had the courage to know what she wanted to do, and to do it, and to do it openly!'" (p. 363). His feeling is that Jinny has a potential for skills and work, but that she has not the need or the reason to find them. Cass is stating the problem for women in general, which is that as long as they are kept from responsible work, they are also kept from the maturity that goes with it. But, although Cass knows this, he is not capable of really helping Jinny, which he can only do by making her see that she must change; the truth is, and Cass has admitted that he is flawed by sentimentality, that Cass likes his sentimental image of her, an image which is based upon her being charming in an immature, helpless way. Her child-like image is what brings Cass to the East to save her life and to bring her back to Grand Republic.

After Jinny leaves Cass she lives with Bradd Criley's sister and continues her affair with Bradd, but her diabetes is aggravated by her irregular living habits; she sends Cass a telegram in which she postures herself as a child, much like Fran Dodsworth does: "'Goody this gives me chance to annoy my nurse and Avis who might stop me but out of house for dinner. Got sick of having nurse nagging me take my insulin . . . so on bat of candy in New York what a fool I was am back in bed doctor seems worried wish you were here to tuck me in . . . but honestly would you think four cream puffs equal to one wagonload arsenic love love'" (p. 375). Her letters to Cass are often signed "Your bad Jinny," and thus

she appears, as Cass wants her to appear, an erring, naughty child. As the novel nears its end, the cat that is a part of the Jinny-image is killed by a dog, and Cass takes this as an omen that Jinny, too, will die, so when the telegram arrives Cass, in a state of frenzy, rushes to Jinny's bedside. She is in a coma, but under Cass's ministrations and arrangements for her care, she survives to make the trip back to Grand Republic. Upon her return a new young kitten makes an appearance in the Timberlane household. Cass wonders, "'Is this an omen that even our Emily may return and we'll have made the greatest human journey--in a circle back to the innocence with which we began?'" (p. 388).

For Cass the journey has been a return to innocence in that he finds his love for a young woman intact, after the trials of illness, boredom, and adultery. The journey for Jinny is quite different. She has struggled, but she is not aware of why. At one point, after her affair with Bradd, she tells Cass that she is not sorry she had the affair because "'he gave me the education--such a bitter education it was, but so thorough--that you'd had before I ever saw you. . . . I told you once long ago--but you didn't listen--that I've always been jealous of your experiences with Blanche and Chris'" (p. 386). Jinny's journey has been a sensuous one; that is, it is a journey of the emotions; she feels that she can be more equal to Cass if she is educated, but ironically, education for her means having an affair rather than learning about herself and her world. And the fact that the judge is flawed will imprison Jinny; she is forever fixed in his sentimental image of her. When the new kitten appears it is an indication that Jinny, too, is again ready to perform for him her amusing tricks. Jinny's lack of genuine education and Cass's inability to help her leaves Jinny with no choice except to

play her role as young adorable wife, becoming, in her middle years, at best, a pleasant hostess, chess partner, housekeeper, and plump companion. Cass can only hope she will be good-natured and she can only hope he will continue to care for her.

Jinny Marshland Timberlane is the least of "emancipated heroines," nor is she a "Young Revolutionary," unless bandying a few flippant phrases about goods distribution and wealth before she is married is revolutionary. Jinny is further from being emancipated than Carol Kennicott, who, twenty-five years earlier, also tried to leave her home. A major difference between the two heroines is indicated by the point of view in the novels: Main Street is Carol's story, Cass Timberlane is the husband's story. Carol's conflict arises from her dissatisfaction with society and with her inability to do something about it, while Jinny's conflict arises from her idleness and boredom in a society which does not interest her. Carol focuses on the world around her while Jinny focuses on immediate satisfactions, a play, a cream-puff, a new house. Carol reads and observes what is going on around her in Gopher Prairie, and her best friends are her maid, Bea, a gentle lawyer who loves beauty, Guy Pollick, and the village carpenter, atheist, socialist, Miles Bjornstam. Jinny, on the other hand, rarely reads, and her only friend in Cass's circle of friends is Bradd Criley, "wavy-haired, impudently courtly, handsome in a track-athlete way, slim as a tennis player, master of every trick of the law court and the poker table and the boudoir. . ." (p. 178). Both women are defined through their friendships and by their interests, and consequently Jinny is seen boxed into a narrow space of self-interests and immediate pleasures, fixed, as it were, like a bright butterfly in a crystal paperweight. The events in Main Street are sifted

through Carol's consciousness, so consequently one is aware of a thinking, reasoning, autonomous human being, but in Cass Timberlane the consciousness is Cass's; therefore, Jinny is seen primarily through his eyes, a charming, energetic young woman, but nevertheless an extension of Cass's consciousness rather than a person in her own right. Thus her position in the novel is, in itself, an indication of her lack of emancipation. In Cass Timberlane, the heroine is a stereotypical child-woman, shaped by her lack of education and training but most of all by the forces that contributed to her success as a sex object, the eternally passive woman of the kittenish ways.

In the two novels Gideon Planish and Cass Timberlane the heroines are sensuous women; both are married and not interested in careers, both have extra-marital affairs, both are non-intellectual, and both are adored by their husbands. They are significant in Lewis's fiction for two reasons: Lewis had not portrayed, at length, the sensual woman, and they are a turning away from the feminist, career-minded woman that Lewis portrays in The Job and Ann Vickers, to the more traditional type of woman who is marriage-oriented, involved in self-interests and domestic relationships.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Maxwell Geismar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1947), p. 134.
- ²Sheldon Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 150.
- ³Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw, Hill, 1961), p. 699.
- ⁴Sinclair Lewis, Gideon Planish (New York: Random House, 1943), p. 66. Subsequent references to Gideon Planish are from this edition and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.
- ⁵Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1934), p. 303.
- ⁶Schorer, p. 698.
- ⁷Schorer, p. 698.
- ⁸Sinclair Lewis, Cass Timberlane (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 373.
- ⁹Schorer, p. 740.
- ¹⁰D. J. Dooley, The Art of Sinclair Lewis (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 217.
- ¹¹Dooley, p. 223.
- ¹²James Lundquist, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 118-19.
- ¹³Dooley, p. 217.
- ¹⁴Grebstein, pp. 50-51.

¹⁵Richard O'Conner, Sinclair Lewis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 126.

¹⁶Geismar, p. 143.

¹⁷Interview with Marcella Powers, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 5 August 1976.

¹⁸Powers, 5 August 1976.

CHAPTER VIII

ROXANNA ELDRITCH: IDEAL WOMAN

There are two major types of heroines in Lewis's novels. In his early novels he begins by creating the clever, beautiful, eastern (New York) woman who educates or instructs the provincial young man from the Middle West in a world of bright talk, adventure, and infinite possibilities. She is free to travel the world with him and together they create a barrier against the real world, a barrier erected from their fanciful imaginations, a barrier often fashioned against a background of beauty--a snow-covered prairie and dark, frozen lake illuminated by a pale gray sky, an Italian garden, ancient and hot in the sun, Vermont woods, cold lakes--an enchanted world removed from the dusty unpaved streets of small towns or the poverty and grime of the cities. In Lewis's later novels the heroine changes; the clever, imaginative eastern woman is replaced by a woman who does not create barriers against reality, but who, on the contrary, sees and accepts the dust and grime as well as the beauty of life. Loyal, rather than clever, blunt, rather than subtle or articulate, she remains primarily a steadfast, although adventuring, companion but without the airiness and romance of the early heroines.

The latter heroine is portrayed in World So Wide, Lewis's last novel, published posthumously in 1951. She is the Lewis character who can "correctly view" life. Martin Light elaborates on this "viewing":

"Lewis's books are attempts at correct viewing. The whole life's work is the study of illusions and realities. Lewis, having begun with a vacuous and misleading set of illusions, makes us witness, down through the years, the same ritual encounter between illusion and reality. He repeatedly brings his illusions before us and then destroys them. And he cries out both for what is lost and against the agents of betrayal."¹ The illusion in World So Wide, which the American heroine and hero must shed, is that Europe is a panacea for all American ills and that it can offer personal aggrandizement to those who come in contact with its leisured classes and its culture.

Lewis's ultimate heroine sees behind this illusion and is a realist who, after learning to "view correctly," helps the hero to view correctly also. The plot of World So Wide is focused on Hayden Chart's journey to Italy after the death of his wife in a car accident. Chart says: "'I must voyage away from everybody familiar with the shape of my nose and the contents of my checkbook, find a world where I've never seen a soul, and so find someone who knows what I'm really like--and will tell me, because I'd be interested to learn.'" 'What I want is less to voyage in any geographical land than travel in my own self. I may be shocked by what I find there.'"² Chart's journey involves a romantic liaison with Dr. Olivia Lomond, a medieval scholar living in Florence, who epitomizes the cool mystery of European culture for an American. He sees her as an ivory cameo: "There was something Latin, something royal in her, something almost holy, free from human vulgarity and all desire except for the perfection of sainthood" (p. 52). An image Fra Angelico could have painted, Dr. Lomond enchants Hayden Chart with her air of esotericism and her cloistered, scholarly life. They become friends and then they become engaged.

Meanwhile, the heroine, Roxanna Eldritch from Newlife, Colorado, and Hayden Chart's longtime friend, is on her own journey. She is sent to Europe on an assignment for a newspaper, and she encounters European life at its most leisurely, talk swirling around pools and terraces, patios overlooking seashores, small dinners, and cocktails. Roxanna is taken in by the glamour and the pointless passionate chatter and, consequently, she neglects her work and loses her job. At this point she begins to wake up, to assess her values, and to "view correctly." She starts with some self-criticism: "'Honestly! Getting bounced was an awful shock to me. I guess most American women, even some of those that have been quite a long time on a real job, still think that their sacred womanhood entitles them to do anything they want to, arrive late and loaf on the job they're paid for, and any boss that kicks is no gentleman--never was brought up at anybody's mother's knee. Shock? I'll say! It made me think, 'Rox, my man, maybe that managing editor wants to print written writings and not your charming intentions and your sorrel hair!'" (p. 207).

She admits to Hayden Chart, whom she looks up in Florence after she has lost her job, that women expect too much for the effort they put out: "'We don't know what we want but we all believe that, without doing any special work to get it, we'll be smitten with glory and suddenly find some romantic peak where we'll shine'" (p. 210). Finding Hayden under the spell of Olivia Lomond and Florence, Roxanna goes about investigating and exposing the expatriate colony to which Olivia and Chart belong.

Her coup is in debunking Sir Henry Belfont, an English effetist who finds everything American gauche and parvenue, who dominates the

expatriate colony in Florence from his post in Villa Satoris, a repository of art objects and white-gloved butlers. Roxanna, the journalist, exposes Sir Henry: "She took from an overdecorated spectacle case of Florentine leather-work, with golden scrolls on blue and sealbrown, and put on a pair of Hollywoodized tinted sun-glasses, huge and aggressive affairs with harlequin frames of pink plastic. Through these insulting portholes she stared at Sir Henry . . ." (p. 235). She tells him she knows all about his English title, which he bought, his American grandfather who made a fortune selling defective drugs and uniforms to both sides during the Civil War, and his tyrannical treatment of people who work under him. The company is aghast at Roxanna's audacious performance, but Chart thinks "'what a splendid missionary of hate she is! Mark Twain's bumptious rustic, his Innocent Abroad. Still with us!'" (p. 236).

The episode predicates the hero's recognition of his love for Roxanna and of his being able to see things "correctly." He sees Dr. Olivia Lomond for the first time, and what Chart thought was an apotheosis of Europe, a cool beauty, mysterious behind milleniums of culture, turns out to be an American expatriate. Olivia is a Middlewesterner from the State University of Winnemac, and her passion for culture is a sublimation of an unrequited love affair: at Winnemac she fell in love with her medieval history professor, who became bored with her school-girl crush and told her so which was the impetus behind her decision to forego all passion and to pursue culture. In her relationship with Chart, however, she is reawakened to passion; she falls for him as well as for a new arrival in Florence, an improbable academic Adonis named Lorenzo Lundsgard, an indication that Olivia is not very wise or

discriminate. Chart is confused by her behavior: his goddess not only has clay feet but, as Roxanna points out, "round heels" as well (p. 239). Olivia's indiscriminate passion, however, does not worry Chart as much as her rigid conception of their future life, the world, and himself:

But these dangers did not dismay him so much as the thought that he was caught for good, and that the world which Olivia would now permit him to see would not be very wide (p. 241).
 [Later he feels] . . . manacled by her lovely ivory hand . . . he ached for his solitary room and the sweet drudgery of books and, after certain years of them, to venture onward to the brazen sea of Arabia, the West Indian islands shining at dawn, the high lone whistling passes of the Himalayas. On such unscheduled wandering, Olivia would never accompany him. Her love would encompass him, but bind him (p. 245).

The novel, however, ends happily, as Hayden escapes from Olivia and marries Roxanna, a woman who is not restrictive, a woman with whom he can see the "world so wide." They marry and sail together for Smyrna and Alexandria.

To travel, in Lewis's novels, is a metaphor for examining one's life and one's relationships with a variety of people and environments, and to be able to travel with a companion or loved one is, for Lewis, the highest good.

But the final passages of the novel illustrate another of Lewis's themes, a resolution of a conflict that is recurrent with his heroes and heroines--the relationship between the realist and the sentimentalist. Chart is basically a sentimentalist; that is, his thinking is colored by his emotions and he often translates the prosaic into the romantic. After the death of his wife, Chart despairs of recapturing his essential self; he no longer knows who he really is: "I shall not look at another woman, all my life. I shall never be that romantic wanderer, that

troubadour in a ribbon-tied jeep singing through Provence, that I dreamed of. Suffering has made me prosaic . . . " (p. 20). Roxanna, on the other hand, is primarily a realist who, as has been noted, "views correctly," but Lewis loved both the sentimentalist and the realist, although he often, after his early work, despaired of the former; nevertheless, in his last novel he resolves the lifelong issue in a marriage between the two. The following is an example of their compatibility. Roxanna and Hayden are on shipboard wondering if they can have a drink before retiring, because the hour is late. Hayden voices his opinion, speculating about the feelings of the bartender: "'I think it might be possible, if the bartender is kind hearted" (p. 250). Roxanna, on the other hand, ignores the state of the bartender's heart or emotions and replies with a barrage of facts: "'The bartender is Italian . . . he speaks English, French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Polish, Croatian and some Arabic. His name is Fortunato, and he was born in Reggio Emilia, but his wife was born in Bari. . . . He likes Italian crossword-puzzles --he is such fun. He has a cousin in San Jose, California. . . . I am to send her a picture post card from Palermo. I'm sleepy. Let's have that drink and then turn in" (p. 250). Thus Roxanna's facts support or complement Hayden's speculations (his abstractions and speculations arise from feelings); their marriage is an objectification of Lewis's resolution of the conflict he had within himself between the warring factions of the realist and the sentimentalist.

In looking back at Lewis's heroines one sees that they are primarily sentimentalists or realists; a fuller and broader definition of the realistic heroine can be delineated in the portrait and characterization of Roxanna Eldritch. She "views correctly," which is an ability to see

beneath the surfaces of sham, pretense, or illusion; it is also an ability to see corresponding elements in disparate worlds and to synthesize these worlds. Lewis limns her as a woman whose outlook remains joyful in spite of adversity, and she finds art as well as life "such fun"; she is androgynous, enjoying sex but not exploiting her femininity and her relationships with men; she is a companion, willing to travel, forever extending the boundaries of experiences and understanding, rather than acting as a restrictive agent, confining herself and her husband to shapes or stereotypes convenient to society's needs. She is primarily objective in her relationship with others, allowing them a wider scope of development in the relationship than if they were viewed essentially subjectively. For example, the fact that Cass Timberlane is flawed by sentimentality means that he views Jinny emotionally and subjectively. His subjectivity stems from deep feelings and an inner need for her as a young, desirable, kittenish woman to ward off his fear of loneliness and death. Jinny is a captive of his view of her and if she tries to become or to be anything else their relationship breaks down. Roxanna Eldritch, on the other hand, has a relationship with Hayden Chart that is not based essentially on sentimentality, a fact that frees him from existing only as her lover, someone to fulfill her emotional needs, and because her view of him is not restricted to her emotions or feelings, the possibilities for experience and change within the relationship are many.

Lewis's early heroines were sentimentalists in the sense that they were resolved to protect their feelings and dreams from too much reality, keeping them intact by erecting barriers created through fancy and make-believe and the illusion that marriage was "happily ever after," but by

doing so they retreated into lives of exclusivity and narrow boundaries. At the same time these women tried to emerge from traditional stereotypes. They attempt daring gestures in order to break through their limited roles: Istra Nash in Our Mr. Wrenn seeks adventure by travelling alone to London and Paris; Ruth Winslow defies her eastern establishment background by marrying out of her class--an aviator from the Middlewest; Claire Boltwood motors across the country with only an invalid father for company; Una Golden chooses the perils of the city against the securities of the small town. Nevertheless, all, with the exception of Istra Nash, marry, and the assumption is that their marriages will free them from the drudgery or the tedium of a common life. In Main Street, however, the heroine acknowledges that marriage is not a ticket to "Never-Never Land," nor is it necessarily a means to individual development.

Carol Kennicott is defeated in finding happiness or in resolving her problems, but she remains Lewis's most complex and interesting heroine, and that she is so is, in part, due to her tendency to be both the realist and sentimentalist. As a realist she "views correctly"; she sees life in Gopher Prairie behind its sunny facade; the smug, sometimes cruel inhabitants, the ugliness of kidney-red clapboard houses and fly-specked display windows; she sees that enthusiasm and energy on Main Street are focused on the Ford garage and that the town's surrogate god is Percy Bresnahan, the millionaire president of the Velvet Motor Car Company of Boston; she sees "a savorless people, gulping tasteless food, and sitting afterward, coatless and thoughtless, in rocking-chairs prickly with inane decorations, listening to mechanical music, saying mechanical things about the excellence of Ford automobiles, and viewing

themselves as the greatest race in the world."³

But Carol is also a sentimentalist, lured, in the first place, to Gopher Prairie by the blurred photographs Kennicott shows her. She romantically projects herself into a world where she heroically brings change and beauty into other's lives. But Carol's feelings and taste concerning change are shaped by her quixotic family background and education. As a result, Carol's method, in part, to improve or change life in Gopher Prairie is to invent ways of escaping from it. An objectification of this method and her taste is the party she gives for her friends. She chooses a Chinese motif, ordering paper mandarin hats and costumes and food for the occasion. She sews herself an elaborate oriental costume which she wears as "Princess Winky Poo," presiding over the evening's festivities, feeling that she is accomplishing a plausible escape from dullness for herself as well as for her friends; she attempts to make a connection between her actual existence and the exotic outré mer of her dreams. The people of Gopher Prairie find the whole affair a little giddy, and they object to it because of what they think it costs. When Carol discovers that her ideas are met with derision and that the role she imagined for herself as "improver" does not exist, she retreats to dreams of escape for herself only. She now realizes that the life and marriage she has chosen drains her vitality, and in a gesture of desperation she flees to Washington, D. C. to find a new life.

But even her flight is accompanied by a miasma of sentimentalism: she tells her small son that "'we're going to find elephants with golden howdahs from which peep young maharanees with necklaces of rubies, and a dawn sea colored like the breast of a dove, and a white and green house filled with books and silver tea-sets.'"⁴ When Will, months later,

tries to convince Carol to return to Gopher Prairie, he uses, as in his courtship days, photographs again, and again Carol emotionally sees in them what she wants to see: "She was seeing the sun-speckled ferns among birches on the shore of Minniemashie, wind-rippled miles of wheat, the porch of their own house where Hugh had played, Main Street where she knew every window and every face."⁵ It seems as if Carol's sentimentalism defeats her because she is led by her emotions into delusions again and again, and yet, as a part of her inner life, her dreams and emotions contribute to her being so complex, a rich and vital person.

Carol returns to Gopher Prairie intent at last on becoming one of the townspeople. She wears a pair of spectacles that "correct" her vision, which means that she no longer sees very much ugliness on Main Street, nor does she see social injustices; she sees reform as working for Vida Sherwin Wutherspoon, attending the women's restroom one hour a day. And she "corrects" the life of her imagination as well as her view of reality; she chooses to see a movie at the Rosebud Theater rather than to read a new book, a sign, according to Lewis, of a cultural devitalization which occurs through art being mass produced, and passively infused. Carol not only tends to give up reading to view movies, but her violin lies untouched on the piano she never plays. Four years after Main Street was published The Nation asked Lewis to write an article about the presidential election. Lewis wrote "Main Street's Been Paved" in which he pretends to go back to Gopher Prairie to interview the folks. He recalls seeing Carol Kennicott: "When I entered, the doctor was busy in the consulting-room, and waiting for him was a woman of perhaps forty, a smallish woman with horn-rimmed spectacles, which made her little face seem childish, though it was a childishness

dubious and tired and almost timid. She must once, I noted, have been slender and pretty, but she was growing dumpy and static, and about her was an air of having lost her bloom."⁶ Lewis visits the Kennicotts that evening, but he leaves early--they are listening to barn-dance music on the radio. He goes down the street for a visit with Guy Pollack, who comments on Carol, whom, he says, has been convinced by the doctor that "'to be denunciatory or even very enthusiastic isn't quite respectable.'"⁷ Of Gopher Prairie Guy says that they are "'... people with bath-tubs and coupés and porch-furniture and speed-boats and lake-cottages, who are determined that their possession of these pretty things shall not be threatened by radicals, and that their comments on them shall not be interrupted by mere speculation on the soul of man.'"⁸

Carol's defeat lies in her being reduced to a stereotype, a small-town matron, tuned in to mechanical music and standardized ideas, to a process that atrophies the critical and imaginative faculties of the individual, those faculties, which in Carol, although they were sometimes blurred or mawkish, were her defense against defeat.

After Carol, Lewis continues with this defeated image, portraying the women in Babbitt as stereotypical, one-dimensional women whose function in the business-dominated world of Zenith is in servicing their homes and appearing as decorative status symbols of leisure and money.

In Lewis's other novels of the 1920s two types of women emerge: Leora Arrowsmith, who represents the humanistic side of society, and Fran Dodsworth, who represents the acquisitive, selfish side. Leora is primarily a realist, viewing life "correctly," seeing behind the mockery of appearance and social position and seeing through the artificial barriers erected between persons; she is an egalitarian capable of

knowing and enjoying many people and many places, from the provincial Wheatsylvania to the scientific elitist world in New York City. Her sentiments are in harmony with her view of life; her capacity for love and loyalty is as generous and democratic as the scope of her view of the world. Fran Dodsworth, on the contrary, views the world only through her feelings and emotions, which are based primarily on some romantic notions about the exclusivity and superiority of European culture and her own role as a seductive heroine destined to captivate men and thereby deserving of vast means to adorn herself. She carefully limits her experiences to people and places that enhance these notions about herself; thus the world she sees is a very small one indeed. Subsequently, the heroines in Lewis's works of the 1930s, except for Ann Vickers, are pale variations of Leora and Fran.

Ann is primarily a realist, seeing social injustice everywhere and choosing a career whereby she can work to correct some of the ills. But Ann is also, to an extent, a sentimentalist; her emotional concepts are tainted by romantic pulp fiction and the movies, and while she succumbs to such emotions only twice, each time precedes an error in judgment, an error which plunges her into a relationship that is unfeasible, if not destructive, one from which she must extricate herself before she can function well. Of all of Lewis's heroines, Ann is the most enterprising and courageous; she conceives a life of independence and responsibility for herself while at the same time she recognizes her biological role as a woman, having a child and a man whom she can love.

Subsequent to Vickers, who is in the mainstream of American life, Lewis's characterizations of women reflect the more subsidiary, traditional roles: there is less vitality in their purpose, less adventure

in their spirit, and less examination in their lives. He limns women who are dutiful housewives and mothers or if he draws a vivid portrait, as he does in Gideon Planish, it is of Peony, a woman who is interesting because she is representative of the worst in society, unscrupulous and amoral, a consuming hedonist, parasitically attached to a husband whose purpose in life, she insists, is to serve her needs. Bethel Merriday, although intended to represent a dedicated young actress, is merely a mannequin of a gesture or two. She is window dressing for a compilation of facts about a theater troupe; Bethel's great feat is to marry the right man at the end of the novel. Jinny Marshland is interesting because of her relationship to Cass Timberlane; she exemplifies the young woman whose power over the older man entraps them both. If one is searching in Lewis's novels for an evolution in the development of women through his characterizations, then the portrait of Jinny, in his last really good novel, is the most disturbing of all because, as the plot unfolds, Jinny is systematically reduced to a helpless, infantile person, unable at the end of the novel to resist being reinstated in a household where in the "master's" thoughts she and the cat are associated as comparable creatures. Lewis did not intend that readers should draw this conclusion, but the facts remain: Jinny is a lively young woman working as a draftsman when Cass first meets her; he marries her after she loses her job and although after marriage Jinny makes a half-hearted attempt to get another job Cass discourages her; later she is rendered more helpless because she develops diabetes and her role as mother is thwarted when she loses a baby; she runs away with another man but becomes dangerously ill (eating sweets) and Cass finds her lying in a coma; after seeing to her recovery he takes her home again. Lewis

intended that Cass's forgiveness and love should be the heart of the story, and on one level it is, but to his readers who have viewed his characterizations of such complicated or stalwart and courageous women as Una Golden, Carol Kennicott, Leora Arrowsmith, Edith Cortright, and Ann Vickers, Jinny Timberlane represents a return, in his representation of the role of women, to the helpless, parasitical child-woman.

One could argue that his characterization is reflective of the times, and, indeed, if one compares the roles of Jinny with women in contemporary fiction one finds many writers who do characterize women as debilitated, as passive, as subsidiary to the mainstream of life as Jinny. John Updike, in Couples, writes of housewives encapsulated in suburbs, primarily interested in having affairs with other husbands. Erica Jong's heroine in Fear of Flying is no more adventurous than to run off with a lover (and her husband's credit card tucked safely in her bag) for a few weeks before returning home to tell all. Joyce Carol Oates's Do With Me What You Will explores the syndrome of woman as model and doll, beautified or decked out for marriage to the highest bidder. And, in spite of the feminist movement of the sixties and seventies, millions of copies of paperbacks such as Marabel Morgan's Total Woman are being sold to women who want to know how to have power or control over their husband's affections so that they might enjoy the security and material rewards of such a relationship. The gist of such books is that women should make themselves into delectable sex objects. Jinny Timberlane, at least, is an unwilling sex-kitten, chafing ineffectually, even without understanding why, against the image of herself.

Jinny, however, is not Lewis's definitive portrait. The fact that his last novel, World So Wide, is weak, and that the portrayal of

Roxanna Eldritch is thin, does not diminish the outline of a heroine who is emancipated from his earlier types. This is best illustrated if one draws a parallel between Roxanna and Carol as they "put on their glasses." When Carol Kennicott put on her "spectacles" thirty-one years earlier, it was a gesture or symbol that she no longer "viewed correctly"; she saw Main Street as Gopher Prairie wanted her to see it. On the other hand, when Roxanna "puts on her glasses," absurd as they are with their plastic harlequin frames, she is able to "view correctly" and she sees the truth behind Hayden Chart's love affair with Italy and Olivia Lomond, who represents a narrow world of restrictive haute culture.

Roxanna is a realist; she is Carol Kennicott liberated from the restrictions of a sentimental education, and she will not be cowed by the proprieties and mores of a society bent on mechanization and standardization; she is from "Newlife," and because she is, both she and Hayden Chart have a good chance for happiness. When Ruth and Carl Ericson, thirty-six years earlier, sailed away on the SS Sangreal, their fate was shaped by their sentimentalism. Ruth, under the aura of romance, saw life as either enchanting, full of castles, knights, and fair ladies, or she saw it as common and sordid, full of tired, listless people. Her fragmented view is the view of Lewis's early heroines, but as he writes he moves on to portray women "who saw life steadily, and saw it whole." In the outlines of Roxanna Eldritch and also of Leora Arrowsmith, Ann Vickers, and Edith Cortright, he leaves a legacy to women and consequently to mankind.

ENDNOTES

¹Martin Light, The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1975), p. 10.

²Sinclair Lewis, World So Wide (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 28. Subsequent quotations are from this edition of World So Wide, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

³Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920; rpt. New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. 258.

⁴Main Street, p. 407.

⁵Main Street, p. 417.

⁶Sinclair Lewis, "Main Street's Been Paved," in The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950, eds. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 311-12.

⁷"Main Street's Been Paved," p. 325.

⁸"Main Street's Been Paved," pp. 325-26.

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