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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

SINCLAIR LEWIS, NOVELIST AND SPEAKER: A COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND RHETORICAL METHODS USED IN THREE OF HIS PUBLIC ADDRESSES TO THE THEMES AND METHODS USED IN SIX OF HIS NOVELS

A DISSERTATION

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BENNE BERNICE DANIEL

Norman, Oklahoma

1962

SINCLAIR LEWIS, NOVELIST AND SPEAKER: A COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND RHETORICAL METHODS USED IN THREE OF HIS PUBLIC ADDRESSES TO THE THEMES AND METHODS USED IN SIX OF HIS NOVELS

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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SINCLAIR LEWIS, NOVELIST AND SPEAKER: A COMPARISON OF THE THEMES AND RHETORICAL METHODS USED IN THREE OF HIS PUBLIC ADDRESSES TO THE THEMES AND METHODS USED IN SIX OF HIS NOVELS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Subject: Sinclair Lewis

The literary historian, Vernon L. Parrington, remembered the day he finished Taine's Histoire de la littérature anglaise as the day he discovered "a method that envisaged the literature of a people as the inevitable outgrowth of their racial peculiarities, environment, and epoch."[1] Not only American literature but American public address is recognized as an embodiment of American thought; the scholar

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[1]E. H. Eby (intro.), Main Currents in American Thought by Vernon Parrington, Vol. III: The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930), p. vii.

turns to them to discover the intellectual currents of American culture. More than any other American writer of his time, Sinclair Lewis not only helped the world understand America but also affected the way Americans thought of themselves.

The entry of the United States into World War I heralded sharp changes in American literature: the social criticism so strong in books like Upton Sinclair's The Jungle or Frank Norris's The Pit vanished while romantic novels like Gene Stratton-Porter's A Girl of the Limberlost, Booth Tarkington's Penrod, or Kate Douglas Wiggin's Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm held little charm for the disillusioned doughboy. The end of the war to end all wars began a new literary trend, a sharper trend toward realism and revolt.

Critics and young writers in revolt in particular against the standards of the American village turned to realism in reaction to the Gene Stratton-Porter type of story. They regarded American provincialism and puritanism as the enemy. Lewis responded to these literary and social trends by using the technique of realism in writing his stories--a catalogue of the external things in the American culture along with a remarkable reproduction of the speech and thought patterns of the average citizen; he directed his ire

against small-town America. He was intentionally attempting to write the great American novel which critics had been calling for since the American Revolution.

"Red" Lewis became a specialist in depicting the genus Americanum. He was among the leaders of the intellectual rebels that in the early part of the twentieth century divested American literature, drama, poetry, fiction, of its old restrictions. No doubt America was in a self-critical attitude as the country moved into the twenties; writers like Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Eugene O'Neill, and Henry L. Mencken reflected this mood. In this decade--the decade of Teapot Dome, Bathtub Gin, the Tin Lizzie, Cal Coolidge, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Dick Tracy--Lewis produced five of his great social protest novels: Main Street (1920), Babbitt (1922), Arrowsmith (1925), Elmer Gantry (1927), and Dodsworth (1929), and in 1930 he became the first American writer to be honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature.[2]

Though Lewis's novels brought him European recognition, many of his countrymen were shocked and angered by his

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[2]Sinclair Lewis received the prize of approximately $4800 at the Nobel Festival in the Stockholm Concert House on December 10, 1930. His address, "The American Fear of Literature," was delivered December 12, before the members of the Swedish Academy at the Stock Exchange Hall.

satiric attacks upon the materialistic values of the age. His greatest assault upon the "Booboisie"[3] added a new word to the American language, "Babbitt."[4] Not even the darlings of the public, the medical profession or the clergy, escaped his pen. Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, for example, was the Billy Sunday of the medical profession and Elmer Gantry was a clergyman who worshiped not God but money, sex, and applause.

Whatever he wrote of America, Lewis nevertheless loved his nation;[5] because he was of it and loved it, Lewis became the complete critic of middle-class American society.[6]

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[3]The term originated with Henry L. Mencken.

[4]George Follansbee Babbitt was the personification of the middle class businessman caught in a web of conformity and success worship. The term is used to identify any one who fears to act because of what people might think.

[5]Some Americans still believe Lewis hated America. When Mark Schorer's biography was published in 1961, Elmer T. Peterson, editorial writer for the Daily Oklahoman, wrote an editorial entitled, "Sinclair Lewis Hates People." In this piece he said: "He [Lewis] had contempt for the small town based on rural life, and likewise for preachers, service clubs, businessmen and other segments of American life. This actually meant that he despised the majority of the people, and he demonstrated the fact by spending his last years in Italy." Newspaperman Peterson cannot be considered an authority on Lewis but he does reflect the common view of many citizens that because Lewis criticized American ways and sometimes lived abroad he therefore hated all America. See Elmer T. Peterson, "Sinclair Lewis Hates People," Daily Oklahoman, October 22, 1961, p. 20A.

[6]Robert E. Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 223.

He accurately recorded the trivia in the lives of the characters in his novels; he described minutely the dress, homes, speech, and customs of the men and women of Main Street, U. S. A. A century from now, according to Maule and Cane, perhaps "literate people will look to Sinclair Lewis to tell what this country was like in those amazing four decades from 1910 to 1950."[7] But Lewis did more than this; he tried to exert a change in American values. Carl Van Doren characterized his friend as a seismograph marking the fluctuations of mood and attitudes in the American public before they themselves were aware of them. He was American to the core and performed a unique critical task. As Mark Schorer wrote:

> With that America "soaked into his pores," he could document for an enormous audience the character of a people and a class, and, without repudiating either, criticize and laugh at both. Today this function has passed to popularizing sociologists, and if we have no Babbitts or Elmer Gantrys or Fran Dodsworths, we have status seekers and other-directed faces in the crowd and organizational men, all thinner and more abstract than Lewis's enduring fictional creatures.[8]

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[7]Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (eds.). The Man From Main Street (New York: Random House, 1953), p. xiv.

[8]Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1961), p. 813.

To nominate Sinclair Lewis as a modern American Diogenes[9] cannot be far wrong.

As the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Lewis looked upon the occasion as European acknowledgment of the mature position of American letters in the world. The event was important for him and for his nation, and he made careful preparation of his acceptance speech. His address, "The American Fear of Literature," delivered before the Swedish Academy of Letters in Stockholm in 1930, ranks with William Faulkner's address as one of the two most significant speeches made by American writers awarded the Prize. Lewis critically examined the standards of American literature, and concluded his remarks with a passionate statement of his belief in the greatness of his land and his hope for a literature to match this greatness.

The Nobel speech was not Lewis's first venture on the public platform. During the years 1920 to 1944, the New York Times recorded over twenty formal speeches by Lewis as well as numerous interviews and reports of his opinions upon current topics.[10] As early as his high school years in Sauk

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[9]The writer is indebted to Vernon Parrington for the allusion to Lewis as a Diogenes. See his chapter, "Our Own Diogenes," Main Currents, Vol. III.

[10]See list in Appendix II.

Centre, Minnesota, he organized a debating society;[11] in the last years of his life, though traveling in Europe and in ill health, he gave several public lectures.[12]

Many of Lewis's speaking engagements were designed to publicize his latest novel, but Harrison Smith, his friend and publisher, wrote that Lewis was a "brilliant speaker . . . always in demand for lectures and public addresses."[13] All who have written of him--from his first wife, Grace Hegger Lewis, to his biographer, Mark Schorer--praise his powers of mimicry, his fascination for conversation that often turned into a Lewis monologue. But even more significantly, said Maule and Cane, he used "this talent freely to develop an idea. In controversy he was a ruthless opponent, and he did not hesitate to use sarcasm, exaggeration, scorn, and ridicule."[14] He used all the communication media, press, radio,

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[11]Christian Gauss, "Sinclair Lewis vs His Education," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV (December 26, 1931), 21.

[12]One of Lewis's last public addresses was in October, 1949, at Leiden University. There he spoke to Professor Perry Miller's American Literature class and to an audience consisting of most of the university faculty and students. See Perry Miller, "Incorruptible Sinclair Lewis," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (April, 1959), 32.

[13]Harrison Smith and Donald Barr, "The Riddle of Sauk Centre," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIX (October 6, 1956), 48.

[14]Maule and Cane, Man From Main Street, p. xv.

podium, to attack the philistine values of the day.

Clearly, then, Sinclair Lewis is acknowledged as an important figure in American literature, one historically significant as a social critic of the nineteen-twenties and the thirties. His work like Harriet Beecher Stowe's, Charles Dickens's, or Bernard Shaw's was governed in a real sense by a rhetorical or persuasive effort. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane suggest he was partly successful in his persuasive efforts when they wrote, "Sinclair Lewis perhaps exerted a more profound influence upon the United States of America than any other writer of his time."[15] With the publication of Mark Schorer's detailed biography, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, the themes expressed in Lewis's several speeches may be examined against the background of the events of his colorful life and compared with similar ones expressed in his novels.

Sources of the Study

Though one cannot agree with the statement that Mark Schorer's biography of Lewis amounts to "the last words on Lewis,"[16] still it does chronicle with pain and authenticity

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[15]Ibid., p. xiv.

[16]"Sauk Centre Scarecrow," Review of Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, by Mark Schorer, Newsweek, LVIII (October 2, 1961), 89.

"Red" Lewis's life of "noisy desperation."[17] For ten years Schorer worked on the biography; the book provides an invaluable detailed record of the events of Lewis's life. But one is more convinced than ever that the last word has not been said about Lewis when this statement by Schorer is examined:

> Feeling poor [financially], he [Lewis] began to arrange for a lecture tour that would extend from late October to late February of the next year. It was a form both of self-indulgence and of self-punishment, for according to John Hersey [a young graduate from Yale who Lewis hired in 1939 as a private secretary], he hated lecturing. He felt only contempt for his audiences, and in a chapter on lecture tours in his later novel Gideon Planish [1943], he exactly expressed his own feelings about them.[18]

Possibly Lewis did say from time to time that he hated lecturing and that he despised anyone who came to listen, but one suspects that he may have spoken much as the actor who says he hates acting and the audiences who sometime disappoint him, but who goes right on acting year after year. What they _say_ they feel about their art and what they _do_ feel may not be the same. Gideon Planish is not the only Lewis novel that features the loud-mouthed orator. Lewis's time was filled with excellent prototypes of the braying man

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[17]Schorer, Sinclair Lewis, p. 267.

[18]Ibid., p. 633.

from Huey Long to Father Coughlin, but to generalize from his expressed contempt for the phony orator in his novels to Lewis's attitude toward all speakers and all audiences is dangerous.

Hate lecturing? Schorer records over fifty occasions at which Lewis spoke, numerous public debates, and several lengthy lecture tours across the nation. Lewis spoke in America, Sweden, England, Germany, and in other areas of the world. His audiences included his high school class in Sauk Centre, the distinguished guests at Stockholm in 1930, state legislators, university and college groups, his Yale classmates at their fifteenth reunion, members of the press in America and abroad, and gatherings of his fellow authors. Did he despise them all? The present dissertation is justified if for no other reason than to refute this weakly supported generalization about Lewis's attitude toward his own speaking and his many audiences.

Grace Hegger Lewis's book, With Love from Gracie, is considered by many critics to be an accurate account of Lewis's life during his first marriage, though much more subjective than Schorer's account of the same period. Grace Hegger gives information about Lewis's childhood, education, friendships, and early literary career until her divorce

from Lewis in 1928.[19]

Shortly after Lewis's death, Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane, executors of his estate, published The Man From Main Street, a collection of essays, addresses, and other Lewis writings.[20] A year earlier, in 1952, Harrison Smith, Lewis's friend and editor for many years, published the author's letters to Harcourt, Brace and Company.[21] These letters mention some of the speaking tours as well as offer insight into the novelist's attitude toward his reading public. In addition to these sources there are numerous articles by and about Lewis. To date, however, there has been no exhaustive study of Lewis's speaking career. In the April, 1935, issue of the Quarterly Journal of Speech, Lionel Crocker published an article, "Sinclair Lewis on Public Speaking," which provided some interesting examples of Lewis's use of oratory in his novels, but did not discuss Lewis's own speaking efforts.[22]

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[19](New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951).

[20]Maule and Cane, The Man From Main Street.

[21]From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Lewis 1910-1930 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952).

[22]Vol. XII, 232-37.

There are four Ph. D. dissertations which deal with some part of Lewis's career: (1) Arthur B. Coleman's "The Genesis of Social Ideas in Sinclair Lewis," New York University, 1954, (2) William Couch's "The Emergence, Rise and Decline of the Reputation of Sinclair Lewis," Chicago University, 1955, (3) Leonard Feinberg's "Sinclair Lewis as a Satirist," University of Illinois, 1946, (4) Sheldon N. Grebstein's "Sinclair Lewis: American Social Critic," Michigan State, 1954. As the titles suggest, these works were designed to cover the entire range of Lewis's literary career. For example, Grebstein's dissertation is a survey of Lewis's novels with emphasis upon their social commentary, and includes some biographical data culled from secondary sources. William Couch's dissertation is an excellent survey of the changes in the critical reactions to Lewis during his career. Mark Schorer probably borrowed from Couch's work the idea for the chapter headings of his biography--"Small Town," "College," "Climb," "Success," "Decline," and "Fall." Grebstein's work considered only the Nobel speech from among Lewis's addresses, and Couch mentioned Lewis's speaking only incidentally.

In addition to the above dissertations, an M. A. thesis, "The Evolving Social Attitudes of Sinclair Lewis as

Revealed Through His Type-Characters," by Martin Russey Ausmus was accepted in 1959 at the University of Oklahoma. As the title indicates the thesis emphasized Lewis's social attitudes revealed in his fictional characters and did not consider the speaking of the novelist at all.

Most of Sinclair Lewis's notebooks, manuscripts, and personal papers are at Yale University Library. The executors of Lewis's estate gave permission to use this material and the Yale Library provided microfilmed copies of the original manuscripts of several Lewis speeches. In many cases these included a second draft of the address with the author's corrections.[23] Also obtained from the Yale collection was a microfilmed copy of Lewis's outline of the lecture he gave at the University of Leiden in 1949, and the Library of Congress supplied a microfilmed copy of "The American Fear of Literature" manuscript with Lewis's handwritten corrections. The New York Times published a reporter's transcript of the address the day following its delivery, December 13, 1930, but the punctuation of this speech is misleading in several places and the text used in this study was the one published by Maule and Cane in The

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[23]See list in Appendix II.

Man From Main Street.[24] Theirs is the same as the one printed by Harcourt, Brace, and Company in a pamphlet authorized by Lewis in May, 1931, entitled "Why Sinclair Lewis Got the Nobel Prize," by Erik Axel Karlfeldt.[25] The Yale Library provided two drafts of the speech, "Enemies of the Book," with corrections by Lewis; the text was published May 23, 1936, in the Publishers' Weekly.[26] The original manuscripts as well as the published texts were used in the analysis because, while they are essentially the same in content and form, there are several interesting changes from the drafts to the published text. The text of "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" used in this study was the one published in The Man From Main Street,[27] but the original draft of the address provided on microfilm by the Yale Library was also examined. This speech was also published in the American Scholar in July, 1945.[28]

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[24]Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature," The Man From Main Street, pp. 4-17.

[25](New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co. [undated booklet].)

[26]CXXXIX (May 23, 1936), 2011-14.

[27]See pp. 32-36.

[28]XIV (July, 1945), 265-69.

Secondary sources included numerous critical estimates of Lewis as both a writer and a speaker. There are essays by Walter Lippman, Vernon Parrington, Harrison Smith, James Branch Cabell, Henry S. Canby, Bernard De Voto, William Rose Benet, and many others; Carl Van Doren, friend and critic of Lewis published in 1933 a biography, Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch, and there is Mark Schorer's massive work discussed previously. There are many books dealing with the context of the times, but particularly valuable was Oscar Cargill's Intellectual America, Ideas on the March and Morton G. White's Social Thought in America, the Revolt Against Formalism.

In summary, the materials of this dissertation included both the original drafts of the speeches selected as well as the published texts. The writer examined a reporter's transcript of one speech; studied all of the novels of Sinclair Lewis with great care; read all the essays, short stories, even poems available in publication, and much of the vast critical research current in Lewis's own life and continuing up to 1962. In particular the research of Mark Schorer and William Couch, broad in scope, provided a good basis for the more limited and intensive investigation of this dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: (1) to discover the major themes in the selected speeches of Sinclair Lewis and to search out the similar ones occurring in the novels; and (2) to compare and contrast his rhetorical adaptation of these themes in the speeches and in the novels.

To fulfill the purpose of this study, two factors affected the choice of speeches: (1) Was the text complete and authentic? (2) Did the text contain significant themes related to the major social criticism in Lewis's novels? Three addresses met these standards: "The American Fear of Literature," "The Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace." The limited number of speeches selected also allows an intensive examination of each one as well as a careful comparison of similar themes in the novels.

The novels selected for comparison--Main Street, Babbitt, Elmer Gantry, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, and It Can't Happen Here--were chosen on the basis of being representative, according to many critics, of the best writing of Sinclair Lewis.

Though biographical data are essential to understand the man and his motivations, the purpose of this dissertation

is not to survey the entire life of Sinclair Lewis. Nor will all the lectures and addresses be surveyed here. However, all the extant material available on Lewis's public speaking known to the writer was considered. Such material did offer insight into Lewis's style, audience adaptation, and in general contributed to a comprehension of his written and oral methodology.

The thesis of this dissertation is that much of Sinclair Lewis's writing, like his speaking, was persuasive in intention. That is, his literary and oral efforts were conscious attempts to promote action or change in the audience. Thomas R. Nilsen writes:

> The rhetorical techniques, as means of persuasion, are the speaker's response to the rhetorical needs of a particular situation, but as such they are also a reflection of the speaker's concept of man, in what he asks him to do and how; his concept of ideas, in what he presents and the manner in which he developed it; his concept of society, in what he implies about the relationship of man to man. These are the things of enduring significance about a speech which the critic must reveal if the meaning of the speech is to be made plain.[29]

This dissertation attempts to answer two questions: (1) What ideas and values basic to Lewis's philosophy appear in both his speeches and his literary works? (2) How did he

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[29]"Interpretive Function of the Critic," Western Speech, XXI (Spring, 1957), 72.

adapt his ideas to the various media and audiences in order to most effectively present a given argument? These questions cannot be adequately answered unless the answers take into account Lewis's values, his ideas of himself, and his concept of the society in which he lived.

Method of Organization

In attempting to answer the two questions posed in the preceding paragraph, this investigation proceeds as follows:

Chapter II presents a brief survey of the major events of Lewis's life, a preliminary discussion of the rhetorical function of his fiction, and a detailed account of his speaking career.

Chapter III presents analyses of three addresses: "The American Fear of Literature," the "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, Scientist and the Peace." The chapter concludes with a summary of the major themes in the speeches.

Chapter IV presents a comparison of the themes in the three selected addresses to similar themes occurring in the six selected novels.

Chapter V presents an examination of the rhetorical methods Lewis used in the three addresses and compares or

contrasts them to the ones he used in the six novels.

Chapter VI presents a summary of the findings of Chapter II through V.

The appendix presents a chronological outline of Lewis's speaking career and the texts of the three addresses examined in Chapter III.

CHAPTER II

THE WRITER AND SPEAKER AS RHETORICIAN

Introduction

Lewis wrote of his childhood: "It was a boyhood commonplace except for a love of reading not very usual in that raw new town."[1] The truth is, of course, no boyhood is commonplace, not Lewis's nor anyone else's. To be born on February 7, 1885, in a small village on the frontier is not commonplace. Also, unlike other Americans born in similar frontier villages, Sinclair Lewis was able in his mature years to make definitive comments on the nature of the life in an American small town.

When Lewis was born, Abraham Lincoln had been dead twenty years, General Grant was nearing the end of his life, the continent had been connected by the railroad only

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[1]Sinclair Lewis, "Self-Portrait (Berlin, August, 1927)," The Man from Main Street ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 49.

seventeen years, the idea of flying was considered insane, automobiles were thought to be impractical, and radio and television were mere fantasies. The United States of America was on the brink of world leadership, and her literature, with Sinclair Lewis playing an important role, was soon to gain world recognition.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background for understanding the man, his writing, and his speaking. The chapter includes, first, a brief outline of the major events in his life; second, an introductory discussion of the rhetorical function of his fiction; and, third, a rather detailed account of his speaking career.

A Sketch of Harry Sinclair Lewis

Sauk Centre, Minnesota, had a population of about three thousand souls when Harry Sinclair Lewis joined it in 1885, third son of Dr. Edwin Lewis and Emeline Johnson Lewis. His mother died when Harry was six years old, and on July 7, 1892, Dr. Lewis married Isabel Warner, daughter of the family in whose home he had roomed as a medical student.

While still a young boy, Harry Lewis was impressed by the editor of the Sauk Centre Herald and decided to become a writer himself. He wrote his first story at 14, but

he was 17 when the Herald finally printed two of his articles, "Forth into the World" and "Odds and Ends." As a young man, Lewis wrote short stories, poems, essays, and even verses for his high school pep rallies.

At Yale University he contributed numerous poems, articles, and stories to the Yale Literary Magazine and the Courant. During his junior year "Red" Lewis interrupted his studies at Yale to join the experimental colony, Helicon Hall, which Upton Sinclair had founded in New Jersey. Lewis, however, left the colony after a short time because he found that his job as janitor was not particularly conducive to writing. He returned to his studies at Yale, and graduated in 1907.

The lanky redhead from Sauk Centre held several journalistic positions after he left Yale: reporter on the New Haven Journal and Courier and the San Francisco Bulletin; assistant editor or editor of Transatlantic Tales, Volta Review, Adventure, Frederick A. Stokes Company, Publishers' Newspaper Syndicate, and George H. Doran Company.

In 1914 the young man published Our Mr. Wrenn; The Trail of the Hawk, 1915; The Job, 1917; The Innocents, 1917; Free Air, 1919--all were romantic tales of adventure with only hints of the social satire he was to develop more fully

later. His short stories began to appear frequently in the Saturday Evening Post, Woman's Home Companion, and other popular periodicals.

His literary tastes were formed by his wide reading, and his reactions to his experiences at Yale and as a journalist strengthened his dislike for sham. Many examples from Lewis's life illustrate his contempt for pretensions. For instance, when he arrived to lecture before the student body of the University of Minnesota he was asked by his host, "How would you like to be addressed here . . . as Dr. Lewis, Professor Lewis, or Mr. Lewis?"[2] The novelist suggested that the students themselves decide; after his first lecture they addressed him as "Red." An incident with more serious overtones occurred when the play, Dodsworth, was to be produced in Germany in the thirties and Herr Hans Bartsch in accordance with German law wired the author and his collaborator, Sidney Howard, for documentation of their Aryan purity. The telegraphed reply was:

> I'm afraid that with deep regret we shall be unable to give you certificates guaranteeing that we are Aryan. Who knows what ancestors we may have had in the last hundred years? We really are as ignorant of them as even Hitler of his.

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[2]Cyril Clemens, "Impressions of Sinclair Lewis, With Some Letters," Hobbies, LVI (April, 1951), 139.

> In answering please use our proper legal names: Sidney Horowitz, Sinclair Levy.[3]

Lewis was always to remain free from hypocrisy.

By 1914, Lewis was becoming independent financially, and in April he married Grace Livingstone Hegger. They had one son, Wells, who was killed in the Second World War; the marriage ended with divorce in 1928. Lewis then married the noted columnist, Dorothy Thompson, on May 14, 1928; they also had one son, Michael.

As a physical type Lewis was rather unusual. For one thing his face was increasingly marked with scars from the series of minor operations on skin cancer he had throughout his life. Peggy Bacon has sketched a lively word picture of "Red" Lewis:

> Pinkish, red-headed, hair smooth and flattened in front, neglected, disheveled and bunched in brief strands behind. Irritable brow. Long flat plane from temple to collar. Flesh like canned tomatoes with the seeds in it, changing abruptly to cream-colored forehead. Pale blue clever bulgy eyes, glaring dizzily at something in offing, possibly ant-hill. Sandy eyelashes, invisible eyebrows, lips gathered on a draw-string with puzzled purse like old lady's reticule. Nose of a grocer adding up slip. Freckled hands with an elegant shape, sensitively caressing cigarette. Face wiggles formlessly into collar, long seamy neck to rear. Gold-rimmed

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[3] V. F. Calverton, "The Cultural Barometer," Current History, XLVII (October, 1937), 83.

> spectacles, mal-fitting collar, hunched shoulders. Looks overheated, corrugated, modest and oafish. A country-store type.[4]

Not many who ever met Lewis forgot what he looked like.

July 17, 1920, Lewis gave the completed manuscript of Main Street to his publisher, Alfred Harcourt. Both anticipated the book would sell at least 10,000 copies, but it far exceeded that in the first six months after publication--180,000 copies. John Farrar describes the event vividly:

> His friends all bought the book, then the cognoscenti, then the literati, then the literate, a paltry thousand or so. Then the sleeping beast turned over, rubbed its eyes, and woke up. Fifty thousand. It howled in an ecstasy of self-torture. One hundred thousand. . . . His publishers estimate that it has beyond doubt reached two million readers. And people are still buying it and reading it for the first time . . . .[5]

Lewis never lacked for money again, and he was well-launched "upon his life of noisy desperation."

Between 1920 and 1951, Lewis wrote: Babbitt, 1922; Arrowsmith, 1925; Mantrap, 1926; Elmer Gantry, 1927; The Man Who Knew Coolidge, 1928; Dodsworth, 1929; Ann Vickers, 1933;

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[4]"Off With Their Heads!" New Republic, LXXXI (December 12, 1934), 132.

[5]"Literary Spotlight: Sinclair Lewis," The Bookman, LVI (Sept., 1922), p. 58.

Work of Art, 1934; It Can't Happen Here, 1935; Prodigal Parents, 1938; Bethel Merriday, 1940; Gideon Planish, 1943; Cass Timberlane, 1945; Kingsblood Royal, 1947; World So Wide, 1951; Hobohemia (drama), 1919; Jayhawker (drama in collaboration with Lloyd Lewis), 1934; It Can't Happen Here (drama), 1936; Angela is Twenty-two (drama in collaboration with Fay Wray), 1938; and countless short stories and essays. Perhaps there is some truth in Robert Cantwell's guess that Lewis "planned nothing less than a catalogue of the interwoven worlds of American society."[6]

In 1926, Lewis refused the Pulitzer Prize for Arrowsmith because the committee chose novels "not according to their actual literary merit but in obedience to whatever code of Good Form may chance to be popular at the moment."[7] However, Lewis warmly accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930.

After 1930, Lewis's novels received mostly adverse criticism. Even the events in his personal life took on an increasingly somber tone: his marriage to Dorothy Thompson

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[6]"Literary Revaluations," New Republic, XXCVIII (October 21, 1936), 298.

[7]Sinclair Lewis, letter to the Pulitzer Prize Committee, The Man From Main Street, p. 19.

ended with divorce on January 2, 1942; his mistress, Marcella Powers, left him in 1947; his health became more and more uncertain partly due to his excessive drinking; he had few if any close friends left. The novelist died in a foreign land, alone, on January 10, 1951. Schorer describes Lewis's last days:

> No need to labor the irony. He died among strangers, without even Manson [his private secretary], attended by an anonymous Franciscan nun and having been attended by two physicians little known to their colleagues, in a strange clinic not in, but on the outskirts of Rome. Citta imperiale, full of ruins! All of the ancient history of the West lay around him. He had never left home either. The records of the Clinica Electra read: "Paralisi cardiaca." Paralysis of the heart.[8]

His ashes were returned to Sauk Centre; the services were held at the High School Auditorium with Dr. J. F. DuBois reading excerpts from Lewis's novels, and at the grave side his brother, Claude, recited the Lord's Prayer.

The Novelist as a Rhetorician

Social Critic

From Main Street to World So Wide Lewis attempted to isolate and define the forces that restricted the perfecti-

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[8]Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 814.

bility of American society. In many of his novels he used European society as a standard of comparison--not to praise Europe as superior to America, but to illustrate imperfections in both cultures. Lewis said of himself in the Nobel address that he was a writer "whose most anarchistic assertion has been America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures."[9] Americans who thought Lewis hated his homeland were far from the mark. What Sinclair Lewis hated were the forces preventing America from becoming a perfect society of free men. In many of his novels Lewis institutionalized the freedom-inhibiting forces: Society, Church, Sound Business, Superior White Race. Critic George Becker writes:

> Tyranny is one and the same, whether it be the mediocrity of the village, the stultifying gregariousness of the herd, the privileged exclusiveness of the institution, the snobbish imitation of the hallowed and esoteric, or a dogmatism whose means are the antithesis of its end.[10]

The free society that Lewis idealized was, according to Lloyd Morris, "The old, free, democratic, individualistic career

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[9]"The American Fear of Literature," The Man from Main Street, p. 6.

[10]"Apostle to the Philistines," American Scholar, XXI (October, 1952), 432.

of the middle class. Shorn of its excrescences, which provoke his denunciation, it is the romantic 'American dream.'"[11]

During his lifetime Lewis received bitter attacks upon both his writing and his personal life. Many of his countrymen seemed to agree with Abbé Ernest Dimnet, canon of Cathedral of Cambral, who charged "Sinclair Lewis has misrepresented America."[12] One Reverend Francis X. Talbot attacked Lewis, Faulkner, and Hemingway as authors of novels "vicious in their depths," stories of "crawling vermin."[13] Professor Rollow L. Lyman, University of Chicago, president of the National Council of Teachers of English, debated the distinguished Yale professor and literary critic, Henry Seidel Canby, in 1931, before the annual convention of the New York City Association of Teachers of English; Lyman advocated the removal of Edgar Allan Poe's works from the high school

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[11]"Sinclair Lewis, His Critics and the Public," North American, CCXLV (June, 1938), 387.

[12]New York Times, December 22, 1930, p. 3. [Abbé Ernest Dimnet, author of "The Art of Thinking," not only thought the award to Lewis of the Nobel Prize would have a bad effect abroad, but he also expressed his belief that the depression was having a good effect in America; he advocated an education of an élite instead of mass education in college for he believed this would produce "an élite from which culture would seep down to every one."]

[13]New York Times, February 23, 1933, p. 15.

syllabus because the poet's life did not set a model example for the pupils. Lewis's name was introduced into the debate when Lyman declared "we ought to teach our children to distinguish between the good and the bad"; if this were done he felt sure the youngsters would "turn up their noses" at writers like Lewis and Poe.[14] Finally, Sinclair Lewis joined the group of authors whose books were banned in Boston, and the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let him use their hall to deliver a lecture.

Comments on Lewis and his work are colorful, varied, and sometimes contradictory: an "outsider";[15] his talk was "something grand to listen to";[16] "a gift of mimicry";[17] "he has enlivened and enlightened human existence in this nation for a quarter of a century";[18] "an affectionate man";[19] sentimentalist; optimist; pessimist; he has an orderly mind;

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[14]Ibid., February 13, 1931, p. 20.

[15]Schorer, p. 3.

[16]Grace Hegger Lewis, With Love from Gracie (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1951), p. 3.

[17]Ibid., p. 81.

[18]Philip Wylie, "Sinclair Lewis," American Mercury, LXI (November, 1945), 629.

[19]William Lyon Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribners' Magazine, XCIII (April, 1933), 256.

a disorderly mind; he was not a very good writer; "a caricaturist";[20] a realist; a satirist; a romantic; a "true provincial";[21] "essentially a moralist";[22] his books more "sociology than art";[23] "Eternal Amateur of the national letters";[24] idealist; slogan maker; crusader; he "still awaits his reassessment";[25] "the whole import of Lewis's work shows that he has learned nothing, answered nothing, solved nothing";[26] "poetry was his love";[27] his book, Babbitt "formulated for an oncoming decade a standard of what not to be";[28] "insane and

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[20]Mary M. Colum, Review of Cass Timberlane, by Sinclair Lewis, Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (October 6, 1945), 8.

[21]Maxwell Geismar, "Diarist of the Middle-class Mind," Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (November 1, 1947), 44.

[22]Lloyd Morris, "Sinclair Lewis, His Critics and the Public," North American, CCXLV (June, 1938), 387.

[23]Henry Seidel Canby, "Sinclair Lewis's Art of Work," Saturday Review of Literature, X (February 10, 1934), 465.

[24]Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915-1925 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1947), p. 147.

[25]T. R. Fyvel, "Martin Arrowsmith and his Habitat," New Republic, CXXXIII (July 18, 1955), 16.

[26]Geismar, "Diarist of the Middle-class Mind," p. 44.

[27]Leonard Bacon, "Yale '09," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX (February 4, 1939), 13.

[28]Eric F. Goldman, "Books That Changed America," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVI (July 4, 1953), 9.

crapulous balderdash";[29] "a pseudo-inferno designed especially for second-rate souls";[30] "Lewis' place in art not certain."[31] Finally, Clifton Fadiman wrote of Kingsblood Royal--the words are true of most of Lewis's work--it "arouses fury, indignation, resentment, passion, and above all thought."[32] Fadiman later compared Lewis's career and personality to that of the English novelist, Charles Dickens:

> Both were restless, feverishly addicted to travel, driven by constant inner dissatisfaction. Both possessed extraordinary creative energy, marred by sentimentality, moralizing and flawed taste. Both were exhibitionists, both wanted to be actors, both were mad for stage and platform. Humor, fantastic exaggeration and burning social indignation mark the work of both. Both were fond of conviviality, both remained inward solitaries. Both came of modest backgrounds, essentially provincial, both rose to paramountcy in their fields. Both were extremely close to their audiences, both were popular artists, both were superb journalists, both almost from the inception of their careers had absolute self-confidence. When the whole story is told it will be found, I believe, that the sexual patterns of both men were similar and led them to somewhat similar experiences. Both were great

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[29]Michael Williams, "Babbittry into Vickery," Commonweal, XVII (March 22, 1933), 569.

[30]Maxwell Geismar, "Young Sinclair Lewis and Old Dos Passos," American Mercury, LVI (May, 1943), 628.

[31]"Sinclair Lewis," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (November 22, 1930), 357.

[32]"Biographical Sketch," Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (May 24, 1947), 9.

> talkers, great clowns, great enlargers of the sense of life in all who were privileged to encounter them![33]

The above is the description of two men who were far from being either dull fellows or unimaginative, but on the contrary, they were so alive and so imaginative that to characterize them is almost impossible. And for their contemporaries to be indifferent to them was equally impossible.

Was Lewis a propagandist? In book after book he assaulted provincialism, puritanism, and materialism, but he never thought of himself as a true propagandist. Interviewed by the New York Times in 1941, he said:

> Real propaganda plays, like real propaganda novels, are neither good literature nor good philosophy. They are advertisements and like all competent advertisements, often catch the attention illicitly . . . .
>
> I have never yet been altogether guilty of writing propaganda, not even in "It Can't Happen Here," which is propaganda against the propaganda of the Fascists and of the mass-meeting addressers.[34]

This statement is essentially true; Lewis had been one to rebel against something rather than to defend specific causes. Charles Poore, reviewing Kingsblood Royal, identified some of Lewis's targets.

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[33]"Party of One," Holiday, XIII (March, 1953), 9.

[34]October 19, 1941, IX, 1.

> There have been rebellions against smugness and inertia, against the standardization of life and the standardization of medicine, against quacks and fakers, against Fascists growing bold and radical youngsters growing bolder. But the most violent one of all is in "Kingsblood Royal," an angry, slapdash, warmly meant phillipic against intolerance, on the ancient and unhappy theme of man's inhumanity to man.[35]

If Lewis can be said to have propagandized for anything it was for the free, inquiring spirit of man.

Purposes of the Novels

Lewis, as stated earlier, held that the tyrannical forces striving to produce a standardized America operated on all levels of society--art, social intercourse, politics, business, and even in race relations. Lewis described the source of these forces in Main Street:

> Doubtless all small towns, in all countries, in all ages, Carol admitted, have a tendency to be not only dull but mean, bitter, infested with curiosity. In France or Tibet quite as much as in Wyoming or Indiana these timidities are inherent in isolation.
>
> But a village in a country which is taking pains to become altogether standardized and pure, which aspires to succeed Victorian England as the chief mediocrity of the world, is no longer merely provincial, no longer downy and restful in its leaf-shadowed ignorance. It is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills and sea of color, to set Dante at boosting Gopher Prairie, and to dress the high gods in Klassy Kollege Klothes. Sure

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[35]New York Times (May 25, 1947), VII, 1.

of itself, it bullies other civilizations, as a traveling salesman in a brown derby conquers the wisdom of China and tacks advertisements of cigarets over arches for centuries dedicated to the sayings of Confucius.

Such a society functions admirably in the large production of cheap automobiles, dollar watches, and safety razors. But it is not satisfied until the entire world also admits that the end and joyous purpose of living is to ride in flivvers, to make advertising-pictures of dollar watches, and in the twilight to sit talking not of love and courage, but of the convenience of safety razors.

And such a society, such a nation, is determined by the Gopher Prairies. The greatest manufacturer is but a busier Sam Clark, and all the rotund senators and presidents are village lawyers and bankers grown nine feet tall.

Though a Gopher Prairie regards itself as a part of the Great World, compares itself to Rome and Vienna, it will not acquire the scientific spirit, the international mind, which would make it great. It picks at information which will visibly procure money or social distinction. Its conception of a community ideal is not the grand manner, the noble aspiration, the fine aristocratic pride, but cheap labor for the kitchen and rapid increase in the price of land. It plays at cards on greasy oilcloth in a shanty, and does not know that prophets are walking and talking on the terrace.

If all the provincials were as kindly as Champ Perry and Sam Clark there would be no reason for desiring the town to seek great traditions. It is the Harry Haydocks, the Dave Dyers, the Jackson Elders [note the names], small busy men crushingly powerful in their common purpose, viewing themselves as men of the world but keeping themselves as men of the cash-register and the comic film, who makes the town a sterile oligarchy.[36]

Babbitt emphasized Lewis's charge that the forces of

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[36](New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1920), p. 267.

standardization were becoming even more powerful in the modern cities of the nation where the secure role, the accepted social role, and the materially rewarding role were the same. The members of Zenith's "Good Citizens' League" agreed.

> . . . that the working classes must be kept in their place; and all of them perceived that American Democracy did not imply any equality of wealth, but did demand a wholesome sameness of thought, dress, painting, morals, and vocabulary.[37]

Sinclair Lewis feared that Mencken's Boobus Americanus threatened to stamp his mark indelibly upon the national character.

As a novelist and a rhetorician Lewis was interested in two types of individuals, the one who rebelled against the forces of tyranny and the one who yielded to them. The latter includes Elmer Gantry, Babbitt, and Gideon Planish, and the former includes Carol Kennicott, Martin Arrowsmith, Samuel Dodsworth, Ann Vickers, Neil Kingsblood, and Doremus Jessup.

His novels also fall into two classes: (1) those in which the primary purpose is to tell a story as in the early adventure stories like Hike and the Aeroplane, and as in

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[37]Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 391.

some of his later works like Mantrap or Bethel Merriday; and (2) those in which the primary purpose is to persuade as in the five great books of the twenties like Main Street and Babbitt, and as in some of his lesser works like Kingsblood Royal and It Can't Happen Here. Some fifteen of Lewis's twenty-three novels may be classed as predominantly polemics. In Chapter IV, six of these--Main Street, Babbitt, Elmer Gantry, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, and It Can't Happen Here--will be examined in detail. These novels were selected because they represent the best writing of Lewis, and they also clearly demonstrate the rhetorical nature of his work. Chapter IV will continue to support the thesis that in the majority of his novels Lewis's art was more the art of the rhetorician than that of the fictionist.

Lewis's Career as a Speaker

"That was a good lecture"; with these words Lewis began a very interesting article in 1938. Currently on a lecture tour, the author wrote that he "couldn't understand why auditors go to lectures," though he did know why the speaker went:

> In every town, every college, he meets some dozen people--lyceum manager, reporters, doctors, teachers--who will delight him and teach him anew how

> diverting and gay and hopeful are these states in a world otherwise gone gray in the shadows of dictators and tired young kings.[38]

If he did not know why he packed them in, in Chicago or Albuquerque or Los Angeles, he did know that he had a message--"there existed an art called Reading,"[39] and a "desperate need for the preservation of the lone and proudly individualistic human mind."[40] Lewis's public speaking career continued throughout his lifetime and he ranged over many topics, but his message was always essentially the same: the writer is important because he is a part of the battle to preserve the individual human spirit.

High School

Young Lewis recorded in his diary some of his favorite childhood pastimes: "I used to be a doctor with rows of bottles, or a minister, delivering wordy sermons."[41] As a teenager he went to the lyceum lectures that came to Sauk Centre and heard "Leotta Swanton, the noted elocutionist,

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[38]"That was a Good Lecture," Newsweek, XI (March 28, 1938), 30.

[39]Ibid.

[40]"Lecturer's Message," Newsweek, XI (February 14, 1938), 32.

[41]Cited by Mark Schorer in Sinclair Lewis, pp. 8-9.

and Miss Maude Gilkey, the dramatic reader."[42]

Dr. Lewis was not a warm companion to his sons, but he did provide them with some books: sets of Scott, Goethe, Dickens, some of Milton's poems--on the flyleaf Dr. Lewis wrote: "Read and profit thereby."[43] The man was cold, but the books did influence Lewis's literary taste.

In high school, Harry Lewis developed an interest in debating, but he was not always a winner in debate or in his relations with his father--as this entry in the diary testifies:

> March 15, 1910. We lost the debate this evening. . . . When I left the house Pa told me to get home earlier than I did last night. But I did not get home till 11. The door was locked when I got home and I had to ring the door bell. Pa came down and opened the door, and when I was in said, "Before we go any farther, young man, we're going to have a settlement. Are you going to run this house or am I?" He grabbed me by the collar, punched me in the face with his fist, threw me on the floor, bumped my head, and raised hell generally. If Ma hadn't come down there is no telling what he would have done. As it was he did not hurt me a lot. I have a most (secret) belief that if I am not too afraid, I will disappear tomorrow. Make my way to Europe and travel a few years.[44]

But young Harry did not run away. The incident serves,

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[42]Schorer, pp. 9-10.

[43]Ibid., p. 15.

[44]Cited by Schorer, p. 28.

however, to point up the oppressive effect his home life had upon him and offers insight into why he had such a strong belief in freedom and self-expression.

Lewis was not a popular boy. He did achieve some recognition through his speaking ability: he was elected president of the Delphian Society (a literary society for freshmen and juniors) in 1900. He worked hard on the debates and "contended on the propositions: that Lincoln faced greater difficulties than Washington (Harry led the affirmative, which lost); and that Indians should have more liberty (Harry led the negative, which won)." He spoke on the topic "Some Things We Need to Encourage in Athletics," and gave a Thanksgiving oration on "The Puritans Criticized." As an actor he played the lead in the senior play, Class Day, and his speech for the Junior Oratorical Contest was "Traditional Customs in School."[45] Lewis's biographer, Mark Schorer, writes, "One has the impression that he stopped talking only when he was alone," but he also notes that Lewis developed a large vocabulary, "presumably from his reading."[46]

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[45]Schorer, p. 29.

[46]Ibid., p. 40.

The University

In 1903 Harry Lewis entered Oberlin College to prepare for Yale University; his interest in religion quickened and he became associated with the Y. M. C. A.--he even thought of becoming a missionary. To reach his Sunday school class in nearby Nickle Plate, Lewis pumped a handcar much as Elmer Gantry was to do later in the novel. By the end of his term at Oberlin, however, the young man wrote in his diary: "There are many things about the Christian religion which make it almost impossible to believe it."[47]

"Red" Lewis continued his debate activities at Yale by joining a debating society, the Freshman Union; in October he argued the negative of the proposition "that convict labor should not be let out by contract" (he lost); but his record improved in December when "he acted as prosecuting attorney in a mock trial. 'My argument received a storm of applause. The jury . . . found prisoner guilty.'"[48] The Sauk Centre Herald was pleased he had won this case.

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[47]Cited by Schorer, p. 64. [Lewis kept his interest in religion all his life; he was probably an agnostic most of his adult years. Dorothy Thompson said, "He was formidably upright. . . . He was too stiff-necked to kneel--a fault, I think of the Protestant spirit." See "Sinclair Lewis: A Postscript," Atlantic, CLXXXVII (June, 1951), 74.]

[48]Lewis's diary cited by Schorer, p. 73.

As "Red" spent more time on his writing he took less part in the speech activities, but he did attend a lecture by the politician, William Jennings Bryan, as well as one by the poet, William Butler Yeats.

During the second term at Yale he headed a page in his diary, "My Religion," and wrote out a youthful philosophy:

> Appreciation of the arts (drama, music, poetry . . .); kindness, minding ones business and broadness enough to let live; sympathy--for "what so ever pertains to men & [sic] their minds is of vital interest to me." "Plain living & high thinking." Pure & noble thoughts. This & nothing more. No cant about Sabbath, & priesthoods & gods, & saints, & blasphemy, & such self indulgences as smoking, etc. If there be saints--they are Voltaire--as well as Christ; Shelley as well as St. Paul.[49]

On Easter Sunday Lewis avoided church; he began to take an interest in Socialism; he objected to compulsory chapel; he debated before the Union "against the proposal that an eighteen-dollar 'athletic tax' be levied on all students."[50] When he was complimented on his speech by a member of the faculty, who suggested he cultivate his oratorical talent, Lewis wrote in his diary, "A fat lot I care!"[51] Applause was not his purpose.

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[49] Ibid., p. 89.

[50] Schorer, pp. 103-04.

[51] Cited by Schorer, p. 102.

His contributions to the Yale Literary Magazine changed from emphasis upon poetry and short stories to a greater number of critical essays--one, called "Unknown Undergraduates," attacked the provincialism of Yale. The essay was written out of his own experience and contained a statement expressing his admiration for the heretic:

> The heretic is more likely to be unknown to you personally, than by fame. You may call him a "cheese with a grouch" and dislike him because he does not think and act as the "typical Yale man," which more or less unconsciously, you have been trying to become. Remember that he may have too big and too important a personality to permit it to be crushed in the mold you worship. Incidentally, the heretics of each age, the men with outlandish ideas and customs, have often become the heroes of the next.[52]

Although Harry Lewis may not have had a big and important personality during the Yale years, his personality was unique, colorful, and in many ways unforgettable. Benjamin De Casseres wrote an account in The Bookman of a brief meeting with Lewis in 1912. "This was the only time I ever met Sinclair Lewis, but after eighteen years he remains imbedded in my memory."[53]

He was lonely at Yale; Lewis perhaps felt his fellow students rejected him, but he had his revenge upon his

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[52]Reprinted in Man from Main Street, p. 122.

[53]"Portraits en Brochette," The Bookman, LXXIII July, 1931), p. 488.

classmates when he returned to New Haven, in 1922, for the fifteenth reunion of his class. He was asked to speak: "When I was in college, you fellows didn't give a damn about me, and I'm here to say that now I don't give a damn about you."[54] He named names, reminded them of their snubs, and they were entertained.

The Author on the Platform

After his graduation he moved about the country from one journalistic position to another, writing short stories, romantic novels, and participating in various social movements. Lewis joined the Socialist party--Number 12157, Branch One, New York local. He was a dues-paying member from January 16, 1911, to April 1912, but his marriage to Grace Hegger seems to have ended this interest. If he had lost his interest in socialism, he found a new one: woman's suffrage. Lewis addressed a street meeting or two and even marched in one of the Fifth Avenue suffrage parades. When the first World War arrived, Lewis was a pacifist.

He wrote a short story, "He Loved His Country," which described the thoughtless and often cruel treatment the German-Americans received from their countrymen during

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[54]Schorer, p. 334.

this period.

By 1917 he had written two moderately successful novels, and his short stories were selling well.

Sauk Centre's Commercial Club and Citizens' Club heard him lecture with energy and force on how the modern literature of today is made--all for the benefit of the Bryant Library.[55] The young literary couple took a long auto trip to the west coast; in Seattle, both lectured to the journalism students at the University of Washington.[56]

"Red" Lewis made an unforgettable picture when he appeared upon the lecture platform; combined with his eccentric physical appearance, previously described, his voice was high pitched and his gestures, spasmodic. There was a poignant charm about the man.

Grace Hegger Lewis went with "Hal" to several of his lectures:

> As a lecturer Hal was a success from the start. He was a nervous speaker in the sense that he moved about the stage, buttoning and unbuttoning his coat, picking up and laying down his Ingersol dollar watch (it was several years before it occurred to him to buy an expensive Swiss watch), thrusting his hands into his pockets, blowing his nose, only occasionally looking at his notes, but he had so much to say and

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[55] Ibid., p. 234.

[56] Grace Hegger Lewis, p. 104.

> he said it with such freshness and rapidity--no hemming and hawing--that his audience was delighted even when it did not understand, when it was a few minutes or a few years behind him. So he learned to speak more slowly with pauses which gave his listeners time to catch up.[57]

As his wife indicates, Lewis usually spoke from a few notes; he began by preparing a brief topical outline, and then he sketched a few notes from this. When he thought the occasion important enough he prepared a manuscript of the entire address and read it to his audience. The three addresses analyzed in Chapter III, "The American Fear of Literature," the "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" were written out completely and then read by the author.

In 1921 he went on the first of his lecture tours to publicize his books. The tour took him to Town Hall, New York City; Princeton University; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Chicago; Cincinnati; Omaha; and even to Hamilton, Canada. Grace Hegger Lewis writes of the tour:

> I heard him in Town Hall and I was the one who had stage fright. The enormous stage doubly empty with only the reading stand and half visible in the wings a grand piano. Then there he was, so small a figure, lunging across the stage and jerking himself to a stop at the lectern. But there was no need to fear.[58]

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[57] Ibid., p. 160.

[58] Ibid.

She accompanied him twice to out-of-town engagements, one at Princeton and the other to a woman's club in Harrisburg, where she recorded Lewis suffered the usual terrors of club lecturing:

> [It] was typical of such lectures with the fluttery president snatching him triumphantly to spend the night in her home and in a constant dither over schedules, interviews, the autographing in the bookshops, and the relentless entertaining.[59]

His wife concluded that the entertaining "exhausts the lecturer, not the lecture, and it is debatable as to whether the resulting publicity is worth the chicken patty . . . ." At any rate, she thought Lewis was usually a success: the announcement of his appearance "was sufficient to cause bookshops to run out of stock before the fruit cocktail had been served."[60]

On this lecture tour Lewis was not only selling Main Street, gathering notes for Babbitt, but announcing that American fiction had come of age. The theme of the lectures was that American fiction was comparable to the best fiction from England. The author criticized his audiences for not reading the American writers and for their attitude that American fiction was inferior to English. Throughout the

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[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid., pp. 160-61.

tour he emphasized his belief that Americans did not read enough. At Evanston, for example, he criticized Henry Ford for his ignorance of history. Speaking before the Sunday Afternoon Club of the First Presbyterian Church, Lewis deprecated Ford's anti-semitism:

> If the well-known Detroit manufacturer who publishes a paper of his own to issue propaganda was broadminded and had read Israel Zangwill, the great Jewish writer, he never would have had the hallucination that this nation is going to be terrorized by Jewish bankers. . . . He should have studied the history of the Jewish race and then he would have changed his views on these things. But he never took the trouble to read their history. That is a good object lesson for you business men in the audience. You should never be too busy to read books and particularly history.[61]

This excerpt is an excellent example of Lewis's straightforward style, his use of simple direct sentences, and his interjection of current topical material into his speeches.

May 17, 1921, the Lewises sailed for Europe--the first in a long line of trips to England and the continent. In a short time he was asked to join the English Speaking Union, and he found himself speaking not only at their dinners but at the Savage Club as well. Lewis liked to shock his British audience by defending American ways and attacking English mores, but he did this with wit so that while

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[61]New York Times, February 21, 1921, p. 11.

they were often aghast they were also amused and usually asked him to speak again. Surprising his audiences became a favorite "modus operandi" for Lewis's European talks. Harvard professor, Perry Miller, tells in detail how Lewis bewildered Miller's American Literature students at the University of Leiden in 1949. Miller had invited the novelist to address his class. The audience turned out to be virtually the whole university, and the speech was presented in the main auditorium. Miller reports that "most of the students were bewildered because it was not anything they expected or wanted Sinclair Lewis to say."[62] They probably expected to hear him attack America, and instead he praised the United States and criticized Europe. Miller believes that Lewis did it for two reasons: first, he "got fun out of scandalizing the European stereotype," and second, Lewis "stood intransigent and incorruptible."[63] By this, Miller meant that Lewis throughout his life "held to his intransigent sense of the dignity of the artist."[64] This belief in the value of

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[62]"The Incorruptible Sinclair Lewis," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (April, 1951), 32.

[63]Ibid., p. 33.

[64]"Portrait of Sinclair Lewis," The Nation, CLXXV (December 6, 1952), p. 532.

the artist is an important theme in Lewis's speech, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," and in the Nobel address.

Other instances demonstrate that Lewis took pleasure in shocking as well as amusing his audiences: a high point was reached in April 1926, in Kansas City, at the Linwood Boulevard Christian Church, where Lewis gave the Fundamentalist's God fifteen minutes to strike him down (unlike George Bernard Shaw who gave God only three minutes). Here is the account of the incident by the New York Times:

> His challenge to God was in the nature of an experiment, he explained to the crowd.
>
> "Here is a lovely chance for God to show what he can do," he said, as he challenged God, "if he is a Fundamentalist God," to strike him dead.
>
> "Many ministers are seeing in the death of Luther Burbank a divine sign," Lewis said. "They say he forgot Heaven and hell. I say, somewhat impertinently perhaps, that Burbank gave back to God all that God gave him. If he had to stop to take care of Heaven and hell, they must be puny institutions indeed.
>
> "Is there no joy, no greatness in living? Is it the fear of hell that makes us good? If this theory is part of the Christian religion, then damn your Christian religion.
>
> "Burbank said he was an infidel and was 'struck down.' Bryan said he was a Fundamentalist and he became a 'martyr dying in his glory.' Bryan died fifteen years younger than Burbank. Why didn't God strike Burbank down at the time of his utterances and make things clear, if, as pious people say, he died only because he was an infidel? The Fundamentalist God moves slowly and by the death bed when there are no witnesses.

> "Whenever you criticize the ministers there are two answers. One is that the criticism is in bad taste and the other is that the ministers do some good anyway. Is it bad taste to criticize God? According to their theory, He is All-Knowing and All-Supreme, then He could not possibly be injured by what we have to say."[65]

According to Lewis's wife, Grace Hegger, there was "nothing defiant or denunciatory about Lewis's speech or his dramatic gesture with the watch." When the allotted time was up Lewis simply said, "I am still alive. You remember, God didn't strike Bob Ingersoll dead either . . . . Evidently God is not the petty avenging God of this man's imagination. God may even agree with me."[66]

On March 20, 1931, the author made one of the shortest speeches of his career, and perhaps the most shocking: At a formal dinner of the Metropolitan Club honoring the Russian writer, Boris Pilnyak, before a distinguished audience of novelists, playwrights, and book critics, Lewis accused Theodore Dreiser of plagiarism. Ray Long, editor of the Cosmopolitan Magazine and host for the evening, had just expressed his welcome to the Russian guest. He turned to welcome another distinguished guest, Sinclair Lewis, when

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[65]April 20, 1926, p. 1.

[66]Grace Hegger Lewis, p. 301.

the novelist unwound his long, lank body from a chair and slowly stood to make the following speech:

> I am very happy to meet Mr. Pilnyak. But I do not care to speak in the presence of one man who has plagiarized 3,000 words from my wife's [Dorothy Thompson] book on Russia. Nor do I care to talk before two sage critics who objected to the Nobel Committee's selection of me as America's representative writer.[67]

Slowly, he sat down, continuing to smoke his cigarette. Dreiser, perhaps remembering the plagiarism charge of three years past, twisted in his chair, several "sage critics" present seemed to wonder if Lewis were referring to them, and a few stunned members applauded.

Main Street had made Lewis a celebrity and what any celebrity says makes news, but Lewis had a special faculty for becoming involved in controversy.

On his return to England in 1924, after finishing Arrowsmith, he was shown many clippings on the controversies he had been drawn into and he replied:

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[67] New York Times, March 20, 1931, p. 11. [In November of 1928, Dorothy Thompson charged Dreiser borrowed from her book, The New Russia, for his book, Dreiser Looks at Russia. Lewis's public accusation--following several cocktails--ended in the "affair celebre" when Dreiser slapped Lewis several times and their friends had to step between the two men to end the quarrel; later, Lewis expressed surprise over the publicity given the incident: "Can't two men have a private squabble without all this fuss being made over it?"]

> I'm cured. There has been so much alteration of what I may have said, that I'll never talk of any of the peculiarities of England or America again.[68]

Nevertheless, a year later, Lewis was freely commenting, "That the French make good coffee is to an American a Parisian illusion." Then, he added a final comparison, "I found English and Americans are now liked, but, gosh! how the French are hated!" Lewis had to talk of the "peculiarities" of the lands he visited, and if he tempered his remarks with a friendly generalization such as "I am very sorry to be leaving Europe for the more I get to know Europe the more I like it,"[69] the remark often went unnoticed.

The pattern was evident in 1923, after the publication of Babbitt. Lewis was living in Hartford, and when he was asked to speak at a dinner of newspapermen and locally prominent citizens he couldn't resist scolding them for bragging of community wealth while they neglected to praise their literary tradition--the Connecticut Wits, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mark Twain. The same year in Philadelphia, "Red" Lewis "walked onto the stage of the Academy of Music clutching a sheaf of newspaper advertisements," and,

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[68] New York Times, May 20, 1924, p. 20.

[69] Ibid., May 24, 1925, p. 15.

after entertainingly reading some of the more ridiculous of them, "threw them into the air and announced that ours was the 'Olympian age of bunk.'"[70]

In London the same year, 1923, at the school of Economics, he debated Major John Hay Beith (pen name, Ian Hay) at a charity affair for London hospitals. The topic was "Main Street and High Street." Major Beith believed the English cherished affection for the aristocratic literary hero while he held that Americans leaned toward the self-made hero. Lewis criticized the anti-American British press and added that he would love England if the English would get over their superciliousness. "I love England," he asserted, "I hope to be allowed to love England."[71]

George Jean Nathan, noted drama critic, recalls "Red" began to make speeches the moment he set foot on English soil in 1923. The speeches "had mainly to do, it appeared, with the shameful failure of the English critics, excepting only Hugh Walpole, to take a proper interest in American literature." According to Nathan, Lewis was at his "showman" best:

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[70]Schorer, p. 359.

[71]New York Times, May 30, 1923, p. 3.

> Our friend, despite the German, French, Italian, Cockney and Way Down East dialects in which he couched his diatribes, may have minced words but certainly not meanings. . . . [He] named names . . . dates, places and weather conditions.[72]

Lewis even hit the political trail, making a few campaign speeches for his friend and neighbor, Bertrand Russell, who was standing for office in the Labour Party at Chelsea. A columnist writing for the Daily Express acidly commented, "Personally I like a weekend guest to keep an eye on the cook and assist with advice on the running of the household generally."[73] Lewis evidently was not greatly perturbed, continuing to speak for Russell, lecturing to the American Women's Club, and appearing as guest of honor and speaker before the English-Speaking Union. Babbitt had a larger sale in England than Main Street.

During the summer of 1924, Lewis visited his father in Sauk Centre, and, then, with his brother, Claude, decided to take a fishing trip to Canada. Along the way Lewis made numerous public appearances: he spoke to four hundred at a Kiwanis luncheon in Winnipeg; addressed another Kiwanis audience in Regina, Saskatchewan, along with the Men's and

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[72]George Jean Nathan cited by Mark Schorer, pp. 370-71.

[73]Cited by Grace Hegger Lewis, p. 268.

Women's Canadian Club; in Saskatoon, he was the guest of honor and speaker at a luncheon followed by tea with the literary ladies of Saskatoon; in Prince Albert, Lewis appeared before the Rotarians at lunch and the Kiwanians at a ladies-night dinner.[74] And so it went.

In May, of 1926, after daring God in April "Red" Lewis braved the Pulitzer committee by refusing to accept the prize for the best novel of the year for Arrowsmith. He was working on Elmer Gantry in Kansas City, and beginning to hold his famous "Sunday school classes": ministers from the Lutheran, Christian, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Unitarian, and Episcopal Churches--and even a rabbi--attended the informal discussions on religion usually held in Lewis's suite at the Ambassador Hotel. Sometimes as many as twenty ministers were present. He spoke at churches throughout the city, to Rotary Clubs, to the Chamber of Commerce, and to a variety of literary and religious groups. Though the affair at the Linwood Boulevard Christian Church created a stir in the nation's press, it didn't seem to alienate his

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[74]Claude Lewis, Treaty Trip (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959). [The data on the speeches are recorded in this abridgment of Dr. Claude Lewis's journal of the expedition made by him and his brother to northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1924.]

Kansas friends. The story was different when the book appeared in 1927. Elmer Davis, the columnist, wrote: "In 'Elmer Gantry' he deals a blow beneath the Bible-belt."[75] Most of Lewis's Kansas friends agreed with Davis.

Lewis's shortest speech was made in Berlin, in July, 1927: he had met Dorothy Thompson two days earlier and when he was asked to speak at a party given by his Berlin publisher, Ernst Rowohlt, Lewis rose, turned to Miss Thompson and said, "Dorothy, will you marry me?"[76] That was all! On July 16, however, he spoke at more length before the Berlin-American Club denouncing the "judicial injustice" given to Sacco and Vanzetti by American courts.[77]

Lewis was drinking heavily in the late twenties. His marriage to Dorothy Thompson on May 14, 1928, seemed to slow his drinking, but only for a while.

He appeared drunk before the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference at Middlebury College shortly after the successful publication of Dodsworth in 1929. The audience greeted with silence his disjointed remarks about bastard writers, excessive public adoration of Lindbergh, and the shameful

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[75]New York Times, March 13, 1927, p. 1.

[76]Schorer, p. 488.

[77]New York Times, July 16, 1927, p. 19.

lack of attention to Willa Cather.[78]

But in September, Lewis was at his charming best as he addressed the Rotary Club of Rutland, Vermont. He praised the natural grandeur of Vermont, and cautioned the citizens to preserve it and prevent Vermont from being turned into another commercial tourist venture like Florida or Cape Cod. The novelist even wrote a friendly letter to the editor of Vermont Prose who had published the local newspaper account of his speech. He wrote of his speech:

> This is all deplorable but as it might be of some value in the study of rhetoric, as an example of how not to speak, you are welcome to publish it if you do so wish, and this letter of mine as an introduction--as my apology for not having better expressed an authentic feeling.[79]

Nevertheless, Lewis's drinking affected at times both his writing and his speaking.

The Nobel Prize Winner

The morning of November 5, 1930, Sinclair Lewis learned he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This was the high point of his literary career, and his acceptance speech before the Swedish Academy created the

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[78]Schorer, p. 521.

[79]Ibid., p. 522.

greatest public interest of any speech he ever delivered. Before his journey to Stockholm to receive the Prize, Lewis spoke before a dinner of the PEN Club in honor of his winning the Nobel Prize. The speech was reported in part by the New York Times:

> In this country it isn't important that we authors are not taken very seriously, but it is important that we do not always take our own works seriously. I shall list for you the important things in America.
>
> First there is business; the Great God Business. The manufacturer of a carburetor is manifestly more important than any manufacturer of poetry. Business first and foremost.
>
> Then comes politics. Politics is the thing they keep down in Washington. It is the thing that takes a man who has been a bad second-rate lawyer in a little Western town and brings him to Washington, where he immediately becomes an expert on taxation and an authority on Yugoslavian affairs--because he takes himself seriously.
>
> Golf is also to be taken seriously. It consists of hitting a little white ball with a collection of crooked sticks. No hero in the United States is so thorough a hero and a knight as Bobby Jones. Then comes baseball, in season, and football, where 80,000 persons gather to watch twenty-two young men chase each other across a field. Coming to town today I read an article by a man named Rockne, who seems to be some sort of a prophet in some Mid-Western college. Now, these are the serious things.
>
> But I in my rashness, a rashness born, perhaps, of the fact that I have been awarded the Nobel Prize, venture to think that the writer of fiction who tries to give expression to the spirit of a time and a place and reveal the very soul of a man is also important. I venture to think that those who create poetry and music may be almost as important as the coach of a Mid-Western football team or the

manufacturer of a carburetor.[80]

That it is important to "give expression to the spirit of a time and a place and reveal the very soul of a man" is a theme Lewis would develop more carefully in the Nobel speech which is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

After his acceptance of the Nobel Prize, Sinclair Lewis was more in demand by press and public than ever before. Speaking to a gathering of the Foreign Press Association on December 15, 1930, in Stockholm, the novelist ironically reacted to the reception his address had received in America.

> I have been sharply rebuked for my indiscreet Nobel speech. There is a depression in America. What is the sign of a depression? This, that Sinclair Lewis has got the Nobel Prize. He has misrepresented America, they say. So now I must speak so that I can be heard in America.
>
> I say the 100 per cent Americans are the highest form of human beings, the most pure and most cultured. Having thus cleared myself in the eyes of America, I may sit down calmly.[81]

Of course, Lewis did not sit down calmly, but continued to speak out freely on any and all topics that interested him regardless of the American attitude. During the European trip, after his reception of the Prize, Lewis spoke several times. He gave an address on the radio expressing his

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[80]New York Times, November 30, 1930, p. 2.

[81]Ibid., December 16, 1930, p. 21.

fondness for Swedish-Americans: "Generally Europeans do not realize to what extent Americans read about their countries and understand them."[82] Two days later, December 19, he spoke to a huge audience in Gothenburg, Sweden, saying that he thought Willa Cather should have won the Prize, that anyone who wants to know America would need to read more than just his books, and that Europeans were as foolish as Americans--"Why don't they agree about Pan-Europe instead of quarreling?"[83] He concluded with the thought that his reception in Sweden had been friendly and he hoped to come again in the summer and stay longer.

The Lewises went on to Berlin where the novelist in an interview with the press denied he was a reformer. "I'm no reformer. . . . Oh no; I'm a critic, that's what I am. If I had my way I would exile from America all reformers and everybody convicted of trying to make reforms."[84] Interviewed by a broadcaster, he was asked what attitude he would take should he write a war story. He replied:

> I think you want to ask what side I would take. As much as I love Europe and as long as I have lived here, should America enter a war, I would certainly

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[82] Ibid., December 17, 1930, p. 3.

[83] Ibid., December 20, 1930, p. 19.

[84] Ibid., December 23, 1930, p. 3.

> be in that. Intellectually I know America is no better than any other country; emotionally I know she is better than every other country.[85]

This remark may seem strange for Lewis, but it is a refrain--America's emotional superiority--he had developed in Dodsworth and one that would continue to be important to his later novels.

About this time, H. L Mencken humorously remarked:

> I hope Lewis stops making speeches and returns to writing novels. If he does not take that advice soon . . . [he] will be too late for those January association meetings just announced by the Convention Bureau of the Merchants' Association: National Notion, Pedic, Spur Tie, Marriage Brokers, Rug Cleaners, Boys Buyers, Show Tippler, Owl Club, Oriental Frill, Traveling Hat, Plumbago Crucible.[86]

Lewis did return to writing novels but he continued to make speeches, too.

Reluctant Speaker

On his way home, the author stopped in London where he gave a witty informal talk before the American correspondents at the Savoy Hotel. He said he had undergone "the worst forms of torture since he came to Europe to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in having to appear before

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[85] Ibid., December 30, 1930, p. 5.

[86] Ibid., January 4, 1931, IX, 2.

distinguished gatherings who had expected words of wisdom from him."[87] This torture was to continue up to the year of his death. The following is a representative list of the major speaking engagements of Sinclair Lewis from 1931 to his death.

1931.--Lewis spoke in Town Hall, New York, on the topic, "American Letters Become of Age";[88] he talked to the League for Political Education on "Fields for Novelists";[89] he discussed with H. G. Wells, the British novelist, "Visiting Britishers" before a luncheon meeting of the Railroad Club;[90] he introduced a new theme into his speeches, fascism, under the title, "A Conservative Menage,"[91] in an address to the Institute of Arts and Sciences.

1933.--Lewis spoke at a December dinner commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alfred Nobel.[92]

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[87] Ibid., February 21, 1931, p. 8.

[88] Ibid., March 20, 1931, p. 18. [Lewis had been barred a week earlier from making a similar address in Washington, D. C., by the D. A. R.; he gave the speech, however, at the Central High School auditorium on March 24, under the auspices of the Community Institute.]

[89] New York Times, March 29, 1931, IX, 2.

[90] Ibid., October 23, 1931, p. 28.

[91] Ibid., November 1, 1931, IX, 2.

[92] Ibid., December 19, 1933, p. 18.

1936.--Lewis spoke to the American Booksellers Association on "Enemies of the Book"[93]

1937.--Lewis began a speaking tour, his most extensive, to publicize his latest novel by addressing an audience at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on "It Has Happened Here,"[94] speaking to the League for Political Education on the same topic,[95] and discussing the "Novelist as a Prophet" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.[96]

1938.--During the tour--begun in 1937 and which ended on February 24, 1938, in Washington, D. C.--Lewis lectured on the topics "It Has Happened Here," "Main Street Revisited," and "The Novelist as a Prophet";[97] he gave a speech defending

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[93]Ibid., May 12, 1936, p. 25.

[94]Ibid., October 28, 1937, p. 27.

[95]Ibid., November 12, 1937, p. 23.

[96]Ibid., November 23, 1937, p. 21.

[97]Lewis papers at Yale University. [A schedule typed by Lewis of the dates, places, and fees of this 1937-38 lecture tour shows he received fees ranging from $150 to $1,000. For example, Columbia University paid him $150, the University of Oklahoma paid $500, and the Institute of Arts and Sciences in Brooklyn paid $1,000. The tour included lectures at the following places: Columbia Univ., N. Y. City (Oct. 13, 1937); Town Hall, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Oct. 26); Univ. of Okla., Norman, Okla. (Oct. 28); Town Hall of Tulsa, Tulsa, Okla. (Oct. 29); Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan. (Nov. 2); Wisconsin Education Assoc., Milwaukee, Wis. (Nov. 5); Temple Univ., Philadelphia, Penn. (Nov. 8); Town Hall, N. Y.

ivory tower learning before the American Booksellers Association.[98]

1939.--He addressed the January joint session of the Minnesota Legislature on the topic "Provincialism";[99] he spoke at the funeral service of Ernst Toller.[100]

1940.--Lewis supported Franklin Roosevelt's third term by speaking on the radio;[101] he briefly taught a story writing class at the University of Wisconsin.[102]

1941.--Lewis debated several times with Lewis Browne on the topics "Has the Modern Woman Made Good?" "The Country versus the City," "Machines versus No Machines," and "Can

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City (Nov. 11); Institute of Arts and Science, Brooklyn, N. Y. (Nov. 22); Columbia Univ., N. Y. City (Dec. 16); Northwestern Univ., Chicago, Ill. (Jan. 13, 1938); La Quinta Lecture Course, Alburquerque, New Mexico (Jan. 17); The Modern Forum, Inc., Los Angeles, Calif. (Jan. 20); Civic Auditorium, Pasadena, Calif. (Jan. 21); Claremont College, Claremont, Calif. (Jan. 24); San Francisco League of Women Voters, San Francisco, Calif. (Feb. 2); Oakland Forum, Oakland, Calif. (Feb. 3); Detroit Town Hall Series, Detroit, Mich. (Feb. 16); Cincinnati Univ., Cincinnati, Ohio (Feb. 17); The Crichton Club, Columbus, Ohio (Feb. 18); Oak Park Forum, Oak Park, Ill. (Feb. 12).]

[98]New York Times, March 31, 1938, p. 21.

[99]Ibid., January 18, 1939, p. 15.

[100]Ibid., May 28, 1939, III, 6.

[101]Ibid., November 3, 1940, p. 48.

[102]Schorer, p. 665.

Fascism Happen Here?";[103] he honored Ernest Hemingway in an address before the Limited Editions Club.[104]

1942.--Lewis taught another writing class, this time at the University of Minnesota;[105] he lectured to students at Hamline University, in Saint Paul, on "Environments Don't Make Writers"; at the University of Minnesota he spoke to a Ladies' literary society on "Stay West, Young Woman"; he thought his speech in Sauk Centre at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the First Congregational Church "was a great success."[106]

1943.--Lewis appeared on radio programs: once he made an appeal for war bonds, twice he appeared on Information Please, and once he participated in the discussion program, Invitation to Learning;[107] Lewis made another debate tour with Lewis Browne.[108]

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[103]Ibid., p. 683.

[104]Ibid., November 27, 1941, p. 21.

[105]Schorer, p. 684.

[106]Lewis's diary cited by Schorer, pp. 686-87.

[107]Schorer, p. 702.

[108]Ibid., p. 708. [The following paragraph from the biography indicates the rigors of the schedule: "Thus on October 4 he was off again for the now familiar debates in towns and cities all over the Far and Middle West: Salt

1944.--The novelist campaigned briefly for F. D. R. by speaking at a rally in Madison Square Garden sponsored by the Independent Voters Committee of the Arts and Sciences and by giving a short radio address;[109] he debated again with Lewis Browne;[110] he delivered an eight minute radio address, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace";[111] a quarrel with Bernard De Voto ended when Lewis made the seconding speech as De Voto's name came up for membership in the National Institute.[112]

1945.--Lewis gave the commencement address, "The Excitement of Learning," at the State Teachers College in Duluth; the author started a series of lectures on "The Craft of Writing (and the Art of Reading)";[113] while he was

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Lake, Spokane, Seattle, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis solely for a party, Eau Claire, Wisconsin--on and on, until November 26, when he was back in New York for two performances at Town Hall on December 2, another in New Rochelle on the next night, and then, from December 7 to December 10, in Endicott, New York, and Toronto, Canada, and the tour was over, and presently he was back in New York and 'the still beatitude of 300 Central Park West,' where he suffered an attack of influenza."]

[109] New York Times, September 22, 1944, p. 1.

[110] Schorer, pp. 721-22.

[111] Lewis papers at Yale University.

[112] Schorer, p. 724.

[113] Ibid., p. 734.

working on Kingsblood Royal he lectured to a large student group in Columbia, South Carolina, to Benedict College (a Negro Baptist Institution in Columbia), and to South Carolina State College for Negroes at Orangeburg.[114]

1947.--Lewis made his last speech in Sauk Centre when he spoke at a banquet of the Chamber of Commerce in October.[115]

1949.--The novelist lectured to students and faculty of the University of Leiden in the Netherlands.[116]

1950.--In April, Sinclair Lewis gave his last public lecture to the Unione Fiorentina in the Palazzio Strozzi.[117]

Conclusion

"Red" Lewis, the rebel from Sauk Centre, lived an exciting though rarely happy life; fame was his, fortune was his, but never contentment. What conclusions can be drawn from an examination of his life? Many thought him a hack writer, but others thought he justly deserved the Nobel

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[114] Ibid., p. 742.

[115] Ibid., p. 765.

[116] Lewis's papers at Yale University include the outline for this speech.

[117] See Appendix II for a more complete list of Lewis's speaking.

Prize for Literature. He was outspoken, free from hypocrisy, and had the ability to see to the heart of a public issue. As a result he remained a figure of controversy throughout his career. If some Americans thought he hated the United States, the truth is that he was an optimistic evangelist of the romantic American dream. He believed the United States should be a land of individualistic opportunity and complete freedom. His special target was tyranny in any form. He owed much to his idol Dickens, and the comparison of their careers and life is apt; perhaps the most telling comment is that they were both "great enlargers of the sense of life."

Lewis seemed to reflect in his speaking a similar desire to express "an authentic feeling." Most of his speeches dealt with some form of the theme that reading is an art which makes a significant contribution to the preservation of the individualistic human spirit. Lewis illustrated the theme with topical examples from contemporary events, and as a result stirred up additional controversy. He sometimes said he disliked public speaking, and he bitterly satirized the American orator in many of his novels; but he did speak often and, according to most press accounts, with success--if a warm audience response is a criterion for evaluating successful speaking. Chapter III will investigate

three of Lewis's public addresses in detail.

A clown, a rebel, an oaf--the personality of Sinclair Lewis defies classification, but perhaps that is the reason he continues to fascinate Americans--he is so like them.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LEWIS ADDRESSES

Introduction

On December 10, 1930, Dr. Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, introduced to the world the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature: "Yes, Sinclair Lewis is an American. He writes the new language--American--as one of the representatives of 110,000,000 souls."[1] Sinclair Lewis not only wrote as an American, of course, but from adolescence to the year of his death, he spoke as an American.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the ideas expressed in three of his most significant addresses: "The American Fear of Literature," "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace."[2]

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[1]"Sinclair Lewis and the Nobel Prize," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (January 10, 1931), 525.

[2]The text of "The American Fear of Literature" quoted in this investigation is the second edition revised by Lewis

The Nobel acceptance address evaluated American literature up to 1930, and predicted future development. In this, Lewis stressed the unique problems of the American writer, but he also implied that the European artist faced similar ones. Basically, as the title indicated, the substance of the speech was the relationship of American literature to American society.

Lewis entertainingly delivered the "Enemies of the Book" address before the American Booksellers Association at their annual dinner in New York City, May 11, 1936. Because of the specialized professional roles of the audience, the novelist's words were about particular problems facing the publishing industry in the depression years. The speech, nevertheless, was primarily concerned with the relevancy of

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and published in The Man from Main Street, ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 4-17. [From time to time this text is compared to the transcription of the address made by a reporter for the New York Times the night of the address: New York Times, December 13, 1930, p. 12. The title, "The American Fear of Literature," was given to the speech when it was edited for publication in The Man from Main Street.]

The text of "Enemies of the Book" quoted is the one that appeared in the Publishers' Weekly, CXXIX (May 23, 1936), 2011-14. [The original typed manuscript with Lewis's correction was also examined, see Lewis papers, Yale Library.]

The text of "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" quoted was published in The Man from Main Street, pp. 32-36. [The radio script of the broadcast was also studied, see Lewis papers, Yale Library.]

literature to American culture.

During the final days of the second World War, Lewis, as many other serious Americans, felt that winning a just peace was as important as winning the global war. The address, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," was broadcast December 16, 1944. This radio talk expanded his earlier concern with the relation of the writer to American society, to an interest in the relation of the artist, scientist, indeed all creative people, to world society.

"The American Fear of Literature"

The Nobel Award was presented to Sinclair Lewis by King Gustav of Sweden at the Nobel Festival in the Stockholm Concert House on December 10, 1930, but the novelist did not speak until two days later at a ceremony before the Swedish Academy of Letters held at the Stock Exchange Hall.

"Red-faced and as nervous as a schoolboy,"[3] Sinclair Lewis walked through the cheering throng in the Stockholm Concert House to receive the first Nobel Prize for Literature presented to an American. By the time King Gustaf handed him the Prize many Americans had already expressed dismay.

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[3]New York Times, December 11, 1930, p. 7.

The Artist Versus America

The New York Times reported that Henry Van Dyke, Princeton professor and noted author, called the award an "insult"[4] to America, but Dr. Van Dyke corrected them:

> I never said that the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the author of "Main Street" and "Elmer Gantry" was an "insult to America," I said it was a back-handed compliment. . . .
>
> There was nothing personal in my remarks. They were a comment on that school of literature which fouls its own nest.[5]

Edwin Markham, noted poet, thought Lewis "unworthy of so great an honor."[6]

A squib in the New York Times lampooned: "There is a depression in America. What is the sign? This, that Sinclair Lewis got the Nobel Prize."[7]

While the editor of the New York Times summarized the feeling of many Americans when he protested that the America of Sinclair Lewis was "not these United States,"[8] Dr. Karlfeldt of the Swedish Academy expressed the view of

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[4]Ibid., November 29, 1930, p. 1.

[5]Ibid., December 1, 1930, p. 44.

[6]Ibid., December 6, 1930, p. 12.

[7]Ibid., December 21, 1930, IX, 4.

[8]Ibid., December 15, 1930, p. 22.

many Europeans when he concluded his introduction of the novelist to the Academy audience with these remarks:

> He [Lewis] asks us to consider that this nation [United States] is not yet finished or melted down; that it is still in the turbulent years of adolescence.
>
> The new great American literature has started with national self-criticism. It is a sign of health. Sinclair Lewis has the blessed gift of wielding his land-clearing implement, not only with a firm hand, but with a smile on his lips and youth in his heart. He has the manners of a pioneer. He is a new builder.[9]

Regardless of Dr. Karlfeldt's kind comments or the general European acclaim, many Americans found it difficult to accept the honor being paid to Sinclair Lewis.

Lewis was well aware of the remarks of his countrymen--remarks that indicated that what he thought of as "a great honor" and for which he was "proud and grateful," several of his fellow-Americans regarded as a national insult.[10] Humorously, he had said to London reporters: "My wife thought that only distinguished people received the Nobel prizes, but when it was bestowed upon me she suddenly rejected that theory. I have no long gray beard, nor an intelligent face, nor do I command a refined vocabulary."[11]

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[9]Erik Axel Karlfeldt, "Sinclair Lewis and the Nobel Prize," p. 525.

[10]New York Times, November 30, 1930, p. 5.

[11]Ibid., December 10, 1930, p. 14.

Still, the words of Van Dyke that Lewis was part of a school of literature "which fouls its own nest" must have rankled. What a contrast they were to the words of the official citation of the Swedish Academy: "The 1930 Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to Sinclair Lewis for his powerful and vivid art of description and his ability to use wit and humor in the creation of original characters."[12]

The Speech

Whatever fears Lewis had as he paced up and down the corridor leading to the stage platform of the old Stock Exchange Hall, "pressing his chin against his stiff shirtfront, fidgeting with his tie and showing all the symptoms of acute stage fright,"[13] when he mounted the platform to speak, he found a responsive audience.

He spoke in English, with his natural Midwestern accent and usual "gymnastic with hands and eyeglasses."[14] Most of the audience understood English and they laughed freely at his barbs against Van Dyke to whom he referred not by name

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[12] Ibid., December 12, 1930, p. 14. The citation was accompanied by an engraved check for about $46,350.

[13] New York Times, December 13, 1930, p. 1.

[14] Ibid.

but, first, as a "most amiable old gentleman . . . known chiefly for pleasant essays on the joys of fishing,"[15] and, finally, as the "fishing Academician."[16] Lewis's style was easy and conversational with his usual wit, irony, exaggeration, and showmanship; he received prolonged applause at the conclusion of the address.

Introduction.--Beginning with a statement of the "honor and pleasure" he felt, he expressed his gratitude with a plain "thank you." Next, he carefully stated the purpose of the address: "I wish, in this address, to consider certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature."[17]

Aware he might be criticized at home for speaking so frankly of American weaknesses, he attempted to justify his statements by warning he would not insult his audience by "being otherwise than completely honest, however indiscreet." For this reason, he said: "It will be necessary for me to be a little impolite regarding certain institutions and persons of my own greatly beloved land."[18]

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[15]Sinclair Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature," p. 5.

[16]Ibid., p. 7.

[17]Ibid., p. 4.

[18]Ibid.

Aware, too, that even some in the Stockholm audience might think his words motivated by a personal grudge against "certain institutions and persons," he stated bluntly: "I am in no case gratifying a grudge. Fortune has dealt with me rather too well. I have known little struggle, not much poverty, many generosities." To emphasize the equanimity with which he accepted many past critical attacks, he humorously mentioned "one good pastor in California who upon reading 'Elmer Gantry' desired to lead a mob to lynch me, while another holy man in the State of Maine wondered if there was no respectable and righteous way of putting me in jail." But the criticism that hurt most was from "a certain number of old acquaintances among journalists" who since they knew him personally concluded he "must be a rather low sort of fellow and certainly no writer." Still, Lewis cheerfully acknowledged that he had "heaved a good many bricks" himself; it would be "fatuous not to expect to receive a fair number in return."[19]

Thus, Lewis established in the introductory statements that while he was aware of the opportunity to settle old grudges, he intended his speech to be not a complaint for himself, but "for American literature in general, and its

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[19] Ibid.

standing in a country where industrialism and finance and science flourish and the only arts that are vital and respected are architecture and the film."[20]

Discussion.--Having stated the purpose of his address and the motive for his candid discussion of "certain institutions and persons," he began to document his theme that the literature of the United States lacked standards and that it was neither vital nor respected in America. Lewis used Van Dyke's criticism as an example of the general attitude of Americans toward their literary artists. Satirically, he identified Van Dyke as a writer of essays on fishing, as a scholar, as a doctor of divinity, and as a doctor of letters, and, then, Lewis mockingly expressed amazement that Van Dyke, a "man so learned,"[21] should have felt the Nobel Committee and the Swedish Academy had insulted the United States by offering the Nobel Prize to a fellow American. Lewis supposed "so international a scholar"[22] would have reasoned in this way:

> "Although I personally dislike this man's book, nevertheless the Swedish Academy has in choosing him honored America by assuming the Americans are no longer

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[20] Ibid., p. 5.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 6.

> a puerile backwoods clan, so inferior that they are afraid of criticism, but instead a nation come of age and able to consider calmly and maturely any dissection of their land, however scoffing."[23]

Defining the nature of his "scoffing," the novelist protested that his "most anarchistic assertion has been that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures." But, after all, the criticism of the "learned fisherman" was not important of itself, but only as it illustrated that "in America most of us--not readers alone but even writers--are still afraid of any literature which is not a glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults as well as our virtues."[24]

The question implied in Lewis's remarks was: What is the relationship of the artist, particularly the writer, to American culture? The novelist charged that the standards set for American authors are not due to literary tradition or enlightened criticism but imposed by the American's provincial concept of his own nation. True, Lewis's books were best-sellers, but the author was never "beloved" in his own land. What was the image an artist must create to be "really

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[23] Ibid., p. 5. The last phrase, "however scoffing," is missing in the text published by the New York Times.

[24] Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 6.

beloved?"

> To be not only a best-seller in America but to be really beloved, a novelist must assert that all American men are tall, handsome, rich, honest, and powerful at golf; that all country towns are filled with neighbors who do nothing from day to day save go about being kind to one another; that although American girls may be wild, they change always into perfect wives and mothers; and that, geographically, America is composed solely of New York, which is inhabited entirely by millionaires; of the West, which keeps unchanged all the boisterous heroism of 1870; and of the South, where every one lives on a plantation perpetually glossy with moonlight and scented with magnolias.[25]

In other words, this world giant still regarded herself as a simple "pastoral" land, refused to acknowledge she had passed through a great industrial and social revolution, and disregarded the changes in her social and political life. She, therefore, honored the writers who would chant:

> America of a hundred and twenty million population is still as simple, as pastoral, as it was when it had but forty million; that in an industrial plant with ten thousand employees, the relationships between the worker and the manager is still as neighborly and uncomplex as in a factory of 1840, with five employees; that the relationships between father and son, between husband and wife, are precisely the same in an apartment in a thirty-story palace today, with three motor cars awaiting the family below and five books on the library shelves and a divorce imminent in the family next week, as were those relationships in a rose-veiled five-room cottage in 1880; that, in fine, America has gone through the revolutionary change from rustic colony

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[25] Ibid.

> to world-empire without having in the least altered the bucolic and Puritanic simplicity of Uncle Sam.[26]

Thus, Lewis ironically made his point. America of the twentieth century was not the same as America of the nineteenth century and when Americans living in a new age applied the rules, theories, and habits of the past to the present they became fools and hypocrites--funny, tragic, Babbitts. Nevertheless, the writer who dared to describe them, dared to picture the split between the image and the reality, could not hope for love from his shocked countrymen.

Perhaps the average citizen could not be blamed for failing to honor a novelist who laughed at him. But what of the men and women of the literary world itself? For an example of the failure of American literary institutions to set up standards for the art, Lewis choose the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The Academy, created in 1904 and incorporated by an Act of Congress in 1916, was an exclusive organization of the nation's top fifty literary notables. Lewis accused the Academy of cutting "itself off from so much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters," and representing not the literary America of the day,

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[26] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

but "only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow."[27] The Academy was an outstanding example, according to Lewis, of "the divorce in American intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality."[28] Now, Lewis began his answer to the question, What is the relationship of the literary artist to the national culture? His answer: there was a divorce between American intellectual life and the main stream of society.

Still worried that the audience might feel he was making these charges because of the personal criticism he had received, Lewis "imagined" what might have happened if other American writers had been chosen instead of himself (this, of course, gave him an opportunity to name the literary men and women he respected, and, also, to show how any American artist of merit would bear the same rejection he did). "Suppose you [Swedish Academy] had taken Theodore Dreiser"; well, Dreiser is "usually unappreciated," indeed "often hated," though Dreiser was the pioneer in American literature, freeing the modern writer from "Victorian, Howellsian timidity and gentility" and producing a fiction of "honest boldness

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[27] Ibid., p. 11.

[28] Ibid., p. 12.

and passion of life."[29] His first novel, Sister Carrie, was the "first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman." But if the Nobel Prize were offered to Dreiser, the Academy would hear "groans from America." Why? "In Dreiser's world men and women are often sinful and tragic and despairing instead of being forever sunny and full of song and virtue, as befits authentic Americans."[30]

What if the Swedish Academy had selected the dramatist, Eugene O'Neill, who had transformed American theatre "from a false world of neat and competent trickery to a world of splendor and fear and greatness"? They would have been reminded O'Neill had done worse than scoff, he "had seen life as not to be neatly arranged in the study of a scholar but as a terrifying, magnificent and often quite horrible thing akin to the tornado, the earthquake, the devastating fire."[31]

There were others: James Branch Cabell was "too

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[29] Ibid., p. 7.

[30] Ibid., p. 8.

[31] Ibid. [The New York Times' text is similar to the published version, but there are minor changes. Notice the addition of the articles in the published text when compared to this passage from the New York Times transcript: "O'Neill had seen life as something not neatly arranged in a study, but as terrifying, magnificent and often quite horrible, a thing akin to a tornado, an earthquake or a devastating fire."]

fantastically malicious"; Willa Cather so untrue to America's patent and perpetual and possibly tedious virtuousness" as to "picture . . . an abandoned woman who remains, nevertheless, uncannily charming even to the virtuous, in a story without any moral"; Henry Mencken was "the worst of all scoffers";[32] Sherwood Anderson esteemed "sex as important a force in life as fishing"; Upton Sinclair as a socialist "sins against the perfectness of American capitalistic mass-production"; Joseph Hergesheimer dares consider "beauty of surface as of some importance in the endurance of daily life"; Ernest Hemingway was too young, and, far worse, "uses language which should be unknown to gentlemen," and also "acknowledges drunkenness as one of man's eternal ways to happiness, and asserts that a soldier may find love more significant than the hearty slaughter of men in battle."[33] Thus, the crimes of Lewis's fellow rebels: they, too, have dared to deviate from the pollyanna interpretation of American life. But, though they were wicked, Lewis spoke of them with pride "even in the Europe of Thomas Mann, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Knut Hamsun, Arnold Bennet, Feuchtwanger,

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[32]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 6.

[33]Ibid., p. 9.

Selma Lagerlof, Sigrid Undset, Werner von Heidenstam, D'Annunzio, Romain Rolland";[34] so, Lewis having called the roll of those he felt represented the best in American literature, briefly honored the notable writers of Europe.

Returning once more to the central idea of the address, he repeated his theme that in America there are "pregnant and vigorous standards in commerce and science," but for the artist there are "no standards, no healing communication, no heroes to be followed nor villains to be condemned, no certain ways to be pursued and no dangerous paths to be avoided."[35] In America, the "novelist or poet or dramatist or sculptor or painter must work alone, in confusion, unassisted save by his own integrity."[36]

Poverty did not oppress the American artist, but something worse than poverty--"the feeling that what he creates does not matter."[37] Lewis throughout his life

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[34] Ibid. [In the New York Times transcript, Lewis included George Bernard Shaw.]

[35] Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 9.

[36] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[37] Ibid., p. 10. [Professor Perry Miller of Harvard relates an incident which took place in 1951 when Lewis accompanied by his brother, Dr. Claude Lewis, came to Holland to lecture at the University of Leiden. Miller reports Lewis became quite unpleasant when he suggested Dr. Lewis

resented the implication that a writer makes no real contribution to mankind and in the Nobel speech he bitterly expressed the general American attitude toward the writer in this way: "He is expected by his readers to be only a decorator or a clown"; his scoffing is good-naturedly accepted and disregarded because his "bark probably is worse than his bite"; after all, he is a "good fellow at heart." According to Lewis, the artist was oppressed by the feeling he "does not count in a land that produces eighty-story buildings, motors by the million, and wheat by the billions of bushels."[38]

This great spiritual vacuum should be filled, at least in part, by an American literary institution like the Academy of Arts and Letters; but Lewis held it was not. To illustrate the failure of the American Academy, Lewis named the few members he thought were first-rate; then, he listed

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might not wish to attend his brother's lecture. Later, according to Miller, Lewis apologized: "It's been that way from the beginning," he said. "I wanted to write, and I've worked like hell at it, and the whole of Sauk Centre and my family and America have never understood that it is work, that I haven't just been playing around, that this is every bit as serious a proposition as Claude's hospital. When you [Miller] said that Claude did not want to hear my lecture," Lewis told me, "you set up all the resentments I have had ever since I can remember." See Perry Miller, "The Incorruptible Sinclair Lewis," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (April, 1951), p. 34.]

[38]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 10.

the many illustrious writers who were not members:

> But it [Academy of Arts and Letters] does not include Theodore Dreiser, Henry Mencken, our most vivid critic, George Jean Nathan who, though still young, is certainly the dean of our dramatic critics, Eugene O'Neill, incomparably our best dramatist, the really original and vital poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Carl Sandburg, Robinson Jeffers and Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters. . . . It does not include the novelist and short story writers, Willa Cather, Joseph Hergesheimer, Louis Bromfield, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Fanny Hurst, Mary Austin, James Branch Cabell, Edna Ferber, nor Upton Sinclair. . . .[39]

Admitting that several of these writers were responsible themselves for their non-membership and that no academy could be expected to contain all, nevertheless, Lewis charged that an academy which failed to contain any of them was surely cut off from "what is living and vigorous and original in American letters." Caustically, he concluded the case against the Academy. "It does not represent literary America of today." While it omits the giants it does have for members "three extraordinarily bad poets, two very melodramatic and insignificant playwrights, two gentlemen who are known only because they are university presidents," and, finally, "several gentlemen of whom,"--Lewis sadly confessed his ignorance--he

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[39] Ibid., p. 11. [The New York Times text does not include Ring Lardner, Edna Ferber, or Wilbur Daniel Steele.]

"had never heard."[40] What better example was there of the separation in "America of intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality"[41] than the Academy? But feeling he had been a little too hard on the Academy of Arts and Letters, Lewis remarked that he was not "attacking the American Academy," for, "it is a hospitable and generous and decidedly dignified institution."[42] Doubtless, the Academy was soothed.

Lewis had still another illustration of the breach between intellectual life and American standards of importance and reality--the universities. First, however, he bowed briefly to the few schools he thought showed an interest in contemporary creative literature: Rollins College in Florida, Middlebury College in Vermont, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago. But the others--"the universities and colleges and musical emporiums and schools for the teaching of theology and plumbing and sign painting," these that "are as thick in America as the motor traffic"--he accused of being "close to the mass of our

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[40]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 10.

[41]Ibid., p. 12.

[42]Ibid., p. 11.

citizens . . . in the matter of athletics and in one branch of learning, the sciences," but paradoxically in the arts they were "far from reality and living creation."[43]

In particular, Lewis chastised the professor of literature. The professor of literature was repulsed, said Lewis, "in the thought that literature could be created by any ordinary human being, still to be seen walking the streets." To put it simply, "our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead." Lewis even suspected some European scholars of a similar attitude. Perhaps, "in the universities of Sweden and France and Germany there exist plenty of professors who prefer dissection to understanding." How distressing that the "new and vital and experimental land of America" did not have teachers of literature who were less "monastic, more human, than those in the traditional shadows of old Europe."[44]

To charge professors of literature with more interest in the past than in the present was nothing new, but Lewis was not content with this general condemnation. He named the particular school of contemporary critics he scorned:

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[43] Ibid., p. 12.

[44] Ibid., p. 13.

the New Humanists.[45] According to Lewis the movement was an "astonishing circus" appearing out of American universities, and moreover, the word itself meant so many things that it meant nothing. What a delicate bit of justice that "this nebulous word should have been chosen to label this nebulous cult."[46] Humanism, this "newest of sects," seemed to reassert the "dualism of man's soul and God, or man's soul and evil," but wasn't it strange that "neither God nor devil may wear modern dress, but must retain Grecian vestments." Lewis held New Humanism resulted in a "doctrine of the blackest reaction introduced into a stirringly revolutionary world" and "more than ever shut creative writers off from any benign influence

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[45]Frederick John Hoffman, The Twenties; American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 144. [Hoffman gives an excellent summary of the New Humanists who, he writes: "tried to hold steadfastly to the image of a 'classical poet,' neither exclusively American nor entirely European, from which standards of morality and taste might be formulated and to which all questions of taste, discipline, and moral control might be referred.

The historical importance of Humanism for the 1920s was that, in formulating and defending their standards, Humanist critics were almost universally indisposed to modern literature, or hostile to it, and so new writers of the decade thought a strong, vigorous opposition to them was indispensable to survival. To the extent that Humanists did affect the dominating literature of the decade, it was to increase the interest of writers in those things the Humanists most bitterly opposed."]

[46]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 13.

which might conceivably have come from the universities."[47] Lewis concluded, the universities and the New Humanist doctrine in particular were most guilty of fostering the gap between the intellectual or artistic life and the realities of the contemporary world.

From the New Humanism school of criticism, Lewis turned to an evaluation of individual critical contributions. He began pessimistically with this statement: "America never had a Brandes, a Taine, a Goethe, a Croce," and with all her wealth of creative ability, American criticism had not produced the genius needed to develop any significant standards. What was American criticism like?

> Most of it [has] been a chill and insignificant activity pursued by jealous spinsters, ex-baseball-reporters, and acid professors. Our Erasmuses have been village schoolmistresses. How should there be any standards when there has been no one capable of setting them up?[48]

Anticipating a mental rebuttal from his audience, the novelist analyzed the influence of certain famous literary Americans upon the history of criticism: Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, the Alcotts, they were "sentimental reflections of Europe." Whitman, Thoreau, Poe, and Hawthorne were

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[47] Ibid., p. 14.

[48] Ibid.

"outcasts, men alone and despised, berated by the New Humanists of their generation."[49] Oh yes, one man, William Dean Howells, did leave something like a standard, and "a very bad standard it was." He identified Howells as "one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men" who "had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage." Lewis deprecated Howells' influence upon his contemporaries down to the first World War. He added that Howells' influence was "not altogether gone." The genteel tradition of Howells put Mark Twain "into an intellectual frock coat and top hat" and changed Hamlin Garland from "a harsh and magnificent realist into a genial and insignificant lecturer."[50]

After reading Garland's Main-Traveled Roads Lewis said he discovered "there was one man who believed Midwestern peasants were sometimes bewildered and hungry and vile--and heroic."[51] "This vision" released him to "write of life as living life." But Garland was another example of the "American tragedy." Wasn't it "completely revelatory . . . that

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., p. 15.

[51] Ibid., p. 16. [The New York Times text does not include the words "and heroic."]

in our land of freedom, men like Garland, who first blast the roads to freedom, become themselves the most bound?"[52]

Lewis saluted the "authentic fellows" like Whitman and Melville and Dreiser and Mencken who had "insisted that our land had something more than tea-table gentility."[53] Lewis concluded his case with the remark that not only had American literature survived without significant standards, but for the "strong young men" it had "perhaps been well that we should have no standards."[54]

Conclusion.--Sinclair Lewis closed his speech "with a very lively sound of optimism":

> I have, for the future of American literature, every hope and every eager belief. We are coming out, I believe, of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see I am a little too old to be one of them.[55]

The novelist applauded these passionate young writers: Ernest Hemingway, "an authentic artist whose home is in the whole of life";[56] Thomas Wolfe, "a Gargantuan creature with

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[52]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 16.

[53]Ibid., [The New York Times text reads "great land."]

[54]Lewis, "American Fear of Literature," p. 16.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

great gusto of life"; Thornton Wilder, "who in an age of realism dreams the old and lovely dreams of the eternal romantics"; John Dos Passos, "with his hatred of the safe and sane standards of Babbitt and his splendor of revolution"; Stephen Benét, "has restored the epic poem with his glorious memory of old John Brown"; and, finally, the dozen or so young poets and novelists "most of them a little insane in the tradition of James Joyce, who, however insane they may be, have refused to be genteel and traditional and dull."[57]

With a final dramatic sentence, Sinclair Lewis saluted these new literary giants and the land which had produced them:

> I salute them, with a joy in being not yet too far removed from their determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities and lost farm cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, to an America that is as strange as Russia and as complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness.[58]

The speaker had accomplished his purpose: he had considered "certain trends, certain dangers and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature."[59]

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[57] Ibid., p. 17.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., p. 4.

Aftermath

Lewis had been greatly aware of the problem in establishing rapport between himself and his distinguished audience. He knew he must convince them that his words were motivated by a sincere desire to truthfully evaluate American literature and not by any need to take personal vengeance upon anyone or any institution which might have attacked him in the past. This motivation explains the clarity with which he worded his purpose sentence; the frank acknowledgment that he had been vigorously attacked from time to time; the reminder that he never spared others criticism and was not shocked when it was directed toward him. How successful he was in convincing the audience that he had no desire to use this occasion to repay grudges but only wanted to objectively discuss American literature, is difficult to know. He was warmly received by his Swedish audience. The very fact that their Academy had selected him as the first American writer to receive the Nobel Prize might incline them to accept his protestations. In America there was a different reaction.

Many Americans reading the text of the address in the New York Times the day after Lewis delivered it refused to credit the novelist with dispassionate motives. For

example, the editor of the New York Times sarcastically wrote:

> Mr. Sinclair Lewis's address to the Swedish Academy in acknowledgment of his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature is worthy of his almost ethereal delicacy of taste and of that impersonal impartiality characteristic of his literary criticism. He is a man without grudges. He has discharged the last of them, at gratifying length, against a distinguished gentleman of Princeton. . . .
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> A university man, he thunders against universities . . . he preaches against Academies . . . .[60]

Some Americans, however, felt Lewis was not discharging a grudge or seeking publicity. William Lyon Phelps, Lewis's teacher at Yale, praised the speech. Expressing delight that Lewis received the Nobel Prize, Phelps said the speech was "very inspiring," though he could not approve of all of the author's remarks. The Yale professor thought Lewis used poor judgment by attacking the American Academy of Arts and Letters, for "any academy in any country is always subject to attack and criticism."[61] Perhaps Lewis remembered these words when he accepted membership in the Academy in 1938.[62]

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[60]December 15, 1930, p. 22.

[61]New York Times, December 15, 1930, p. 14.

[62]Lewis wrote to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in February of 1938 expressing his "feelings of honor at being elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and . . . pleasure in accepting it." He occupied chair 17 which was vacated by John Russell Pope, an

He may have come to agree with Phelps that "all efforts to improve the standards of literature, literary taste and the English language are a good thing, and that is the American Academy's purpose."[63]

There were comments from other quarters. While drama critic, George Jean Nathan, thought the address "informed with a brave intelligence, an excellent critical acumen and a very welcome degree of common sense,"[64] his New York colleague, Brooks Atkinson, labeled the speech a "jeremiad," and called Lewis an incurable romantic. Atkinson, however, did think Lewis's praise of Eugene O'Neill was provocative. The drama critic defended the theatrical world from the word provincial.

> But the point is that whatever the situation may be in the novel the drama has completely shed its bucolic simplicity. It hates all the things that Mr. Lewis hates: like him, it is very lively, and it is not tediously mature.[65]

Thus, Brooks Atkinson damned Lewis with a simile.

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architect, and which was first occupied by John Singer Sargent. In his letter Lewis expressed a desire to be active in the affairs of the Academy: see New York Times, February 18, 1938, p. 21.

[63] New York Times, December 15, 1930, p. 14.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., December 21, 1930, VIII, 1.

Regardless of the sarcasm, the praise, or backhanded compliments, only a few charged Lewis with speaking from malice. Most seemed to agree with Dr. Phelps' evaluation:

> I think Lewis's speech as a whole will do me good. At heart "Red" Lewis is almost fanatical in his idealism and evangelism. He was as an undergraduate, and he has not changed very much with the years.[66]

This was just the sort of praise that infuriated Lewis. It contributed to his belief that the writer in America was oppressed spiritually by the feeling that what he said or did was disregarded as unimportant, and, in a way, confirmed his assertion to this effect in the speech. At any rate, the belief that the writer should make a significant contribution to the nation's life continued to motivate both Lewis's writing and speaking career. The more he was attacked the more he held to his convictions.

Summary

The structure of the speech is simple and direct. It included: (1) a clear statement of purpose; (2) an attempt to establish the honest motives of the speaker; (3) a development of the theme that American intellectual life is divorced from all national standards of importance and

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[66] Ibid., December 15, 1930, p. 14.

reality; and (4) a prediction of future literary greatness for America.

Carefully selected examples from American literary life support the theme. Van Dyke was typical of a vast number of Americans who demand the writer glorify not only the virtues but the faults of the nation. These citizens hate the scoffing of Sinclair Lewis, and they would reject other American writers. They spurn all the truly original and vigorous creative geniuses because these writers do not perpetuate the false but rosy American self-image.

Second, an attitude was prevalent in America that what the artist produced could not be compared with the miraculous materialistic accomplishments like skyscrapers, automobiles, or billions of bushels of wheat.

Third, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, institutions of higher education, and American literary critics had failed to produce standards or leadership for the artist.

Having stated and supported with examples his theme that the intellectual life of the nation was separated from all standards of importance and reality, the Nobel Prize winner predicted that in spite of this our literature would continue to develop significant writers. Finally, Sinclair Lewis praised certain men who seemed to him to be the

contemporary artistic giants. He asserted that America with her physical grandeur would develop a literature worthy of her vastness.

"The American Fear of Literature" address illustrates Sinclair Lewis's fascination with American culture, and his concern for the relationship of the artist to that culture. What he said was not startlingly new. He summarized the progress of American letters and predicted the direction that writing would take in the coming years. The address remains one of the best acceptance speeches by an American writer winning the Nobel Prize for Literature.

"Enemies of the Book"

On May 11, 1936, Sinclair Lewis spoke before the thirty-sixth annual dinner of the American Booksellers Association at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City. The address received such a warm response it was printed in the Publishers' Weekly and the Saturday Review of Literature.[67] On the surface the speech dealt with why more books were not sold to more people and what to do about it, but the speech did more than this. Like the Nobel acceptance speech, the

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[67]The typed outline of the address and two drafts of the speech are among the Lewis papers at the Yale Library.

"Enemies of the Book" address considered the relationship of literature to American society. The later was not as broad in scope, but it was carefully conceived and offers an excellent example of Lewis's platform style.

Probably the audience of his peers came prepared to listen and enjoy the Lewis platform personality. They may have felt like Clifton Fadiman: "Let posterity yank him up or pull him down, to us he remains the wonderful wizard who freed us from the thrall of dullness."[68] Some might even have agreed with critic Malcolm Crowley, that "Lewis was never a graceful writer (except in his public addresses)."[69] The audience must have expected to be surprised, amused and challenged. Lewis would not disappoint them.

The Speech

The purpose of the address was to define the specific problems facing the booksellers in 1936 as they attempted to secure a larger reading public, to suggest actions they might take to accomplish this, and to stimulate in the audience a greater pride in their profession. The theme was: the real

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[68]"Party of One," Holiday, XIII (March, 1953), 6.

[69]"George F. Babbitt's Revenge," New Republic, XC (January 26, 1938), 342.

"enemies" of the book are actually supplanters which have resulted from sociological changes in the national life.

The rough outline Lewis made of the talk begins with this list: "FELLOW BOOKSELLERS; RADIO; ALL ONE GUILD except teachers."[70] [Lewis's capitals] For the audience that expected surprise and humor and social protest, Lewis was off and running with an attack upon broadcasting, advertising, and college professors.

Introduction.--Lewis warned his "fellow-booksellers" that he regarded "political statements and news-bulletins" as admirable, but he intended in this his second public address in two years to "merely ramble around and talk." The author justified his refusal to have his "oracular utterances" broadcast because he didn't want to be bound by split-second timing. He was afraid he would only "be allowed exactly twelve minutes and nine seconds in between programs of the Lollypop Lilters and the Ex-Lax Symphony Orchestra, playing the classical masterpieces of Sousa and Irving Berlin."[71] Thus, early in the speech, Lewis established himself as one with the needs and interests of the audience with "Fellow-

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[70]Lewis papers at the Yale Library.

[71]Lewis, "Enemies of the Book," p. 2011.

booksellers," reminded them of his rebellious nature by his refusal to broadcast the talk, and gave them a sample of his satirical wit with a capsule criticism of radio programming. This was the kind of prologue Lewis's friends, or his enemies, expected of him.

As he did in the Nobel address, Lewis in this speech spent his early moments establishing rapport with his audience. He identified with his friends and named his enemies. The term "Fellow-booksellers" included:

> All authors--the frail poet just as much as the brisk writer for the pulps, with his office and his dictaphone; all publishing-house workers, from such venerable bearded guardians of the flame as Johnny Farrar and Nelson Doubleday to the smallest ink-splashed office boy; all book-dealers, whether they have one-room shops in Greenwich Village or million-dollar department-store sections; all librarians; all reviewers; all book printers and binders and paper-dealers; all wholesale distributors; and all literary agents who can read and write.[72]

The term, however, was not <u>all</u> inclusive. Two groups were excluded: teachers of English and rhetoric, and writers who regard themselves as prophets. Again, as in the Nobel speech, Lewis directed his attack upon those who held literature belonged to the past:

> I would like to include among the book-sellers all teachers of English and rhetoric, but so many of

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[72] <u>Ibid</u>.

> them, particularly in the colleges, are scornful of all of us who believe that literature is something that can be produced here and now, not merely in the Mermaid Tavern three hundred years ago, and who believe that it is no sacrilege to take literature out of the marbled morgue of college libraries and get it into the hands of plain people living in farmhouses or city flats.[73]

Thus, Lewis excluded the "priestly professors" from his greeting as well as all authors who felt "theirs is the only significant part of the distribution of literature." Of course, Lewis did not think of himself as a critic. He loved to deflate the ego of the self-styled prophets:

> It must be exciting to regard yourself as a maestro, a prophet, a combination of Boccaccio, Bach, and Jeremiah, and to believe that the world is quiveringly waiting to learn whether you have decided that it shall turn Communist, Catholic, or purely aesthetic, or whether, perhaps, you will let it wag along the way it is for a while yet.[74]

With some feeling, then, Lewis refused the "prophetic mantle." Besides, he had seen too many sides of bookselling to dare take it: "I have written everything from book-advertisements and God-awfully bad verse for children to long novels."[75]

At this point Lewis launched forth into an

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., p. 2012.

entertaining account of his career as a book-reviewer with the publishing houses of Stokes and Doran. Next, he told some of his adventures selling books behind the counter. He characterized himself as being like "the politicians who tell interviewers, 'My boy, I used to be a newspaperman myself!'"[76] The stories were humorous, the experiences similar to ones many in the audience had had, and they created a bond of common background between speaker and audience. "Red" Lewis added mimicry to his story of the little German lady who wanted to buy a particular book: "'It's a book for the children like my sister in Schenectady got; it's a green book about so big--don't you remember it?'" Three brief anecdotes followed. Lewis confessed, "I am indicating the reasons why I understand that all of us who produce or purvey books are, or ought to be, closely bound in one unorganized guild."[77]

The members of this guild were "merchants," but unlike soap merchants or steel-rail merchants, they were united with a "superior pride" in their product. They found books more amusing than musical shows, more exciting than screen

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[76]Ibid., [Shortly after his Helicon Hall experience, Lewis went to New York and for a few weeks before Christmas, in 1906, he worked at the Siegel-Cooper department store at Sixth Avenue and Eighteenth Street.]

[77]Lewis, "Enemies of the Book," p. 2012.

melodrama, and they believed that "more than any codified religion do books preserve against a troubled, half-mad world the treasures of learning and the aspirations of the human soul."[78] Lewis emphasized the statement with a terse analogy: "If the evangels of life-insurance sell security in death, we bookmen sell security in life!" And more important than security, "we sell the most diverting means yet known of keeping daily life from being a bore."[79]

Discussion.--Having established himself as one with his audience and stated his belief that their profession had spiritual significance for the nation, the novelist addressed himself to the theme of his speech. The supplanters and not enemies of the book threaten to reduce the sale of books. The decline in sales was so great, Lewis admitted, that "one wonders whether our allied trades are not going out completely, along with the manufacture of bustles and buggy-whips." Lewis refused to accept that idea. He believed nothing could or would completely supplant the "old-fashioned printed book." The old-fashioned books would not be replaced by "any nimble television apparatus, any series of phonograph records, any ingenious microscopic gadget whereby you can

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., p. 2013.

carry the entire works of Balzac in your cigarette case"; none of these will entirely supplant books. Nevertheless, facts must be faced. There was much greater selectivity by the reader, and fewer but better books were being written. This meant that the guild of book-sellers would have "to know vastly more and work a lot harder to write or sell any books."[80]

To support the assertion that reading taste had improved from the "many dollar-and-a-half packages of pink soap suds" of twenty or thirty years ago, he cited the best-sellers, Anthony Adverse, Europa, and The Last Puritan. These books, he said, demanded from the reader a "considerable knowledge of the world before he can swallow them." If some of them were purchased "merely to keep up with the Joneses," still the purchase indicated that this type of book was used by the "cultural climber" instead of The Sheik or Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall.

Another reason for increased reader discrimination was that the sentimentalists had deserted. They were "not buying books at all. They have gone off to the movies instead of reading Gene Stratton-Porter."[81]

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

The word "'enemies' is not the just word; they are not so much enemies as supplanters." After all the makers of saddles must have complained when books first were sold not only to universities and monasteries but to "the gentry in general"[82] and the vintners when the "squirearchy" read books in the evening "instead of manfully sitting at, or lying under, the table and finishing in the requisite genteel manner their four honest bottles of port." Why, books may simply be taking their turn at being devalued. But whatever the reason, "bookselling is taking such a beating as it has not known for years."[83]

What were the supplanters of the book? Lewis named the following: the radio, motion pictures, automobiles, bridge, night clubs, roadhouses, winter cruises, and cheap pulp magazines. Most important of all, Americans had changed their entire way of living. There was simply less space for books in the four-room apartment than in the twenty-room house of 1880. Expanding on the idea that living habits had changed, Lewis described what one room might be used for in the modern home:

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 2014.

> Library, tea, bridge, domestic quarrels, Uncle Timothy's solitaire, making out next month's budget and trying to discover just why last month's budget didn't work out right, and all other public diversions whatsoever.[84]

Where was the modern home library? A young couple in the Middlewest asked the novelist's advice on building a library and they disclosed that they owned "just three books: a cookbook, a telephone book, and a Gideon Bible."[85] An amusing anecdote, yet the book-sellers may have pondered the implications for their profession.

What could be done to get people to buy more books, to read more books? Lewis did not develop this part of the speech in detail. He was sure, however, that the book-sellers had not used all the possible outlets. Three ideas came to mind: send more books on approval to old customers, encourage sale of books to summer hotels and camps, and improve on the book caravan idea of "Chris Morley."[86] The popularity of the book clubs and bookmobiles of today indicates that Lewis's ideas were practical.

Conclusion.--The year 1936 was a depression year. Pessimistically Lewis warned his audience that "it may be

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

. . . all--book-dealers, writers, publishers--" were "in permanently for smaller profits." Lewis knew that some in the audience were like himself, financially successful at their trade, so he could afford to brag a little. "For those of us who for twenty and thirty and forty years have been proud of being booksellers, it may be a matter of pride that with much against us, we have survived, and in our love of the book are determined still to survive."[87]

Reluctant to end on a mood of gloom, he speculated that "perhaps the old days will come back." Clearly, the public would not "always be completely satisfied with the glaring screen," or "forever prefer the unctuous verbal caresses of radio-announcers to the many-colored pages of Dickens." Surely Hollywood would not remain "forever the New Jerusalem."[88]

Whatever the future might bring in the way of new idols, Lewis with his audience would still say, "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord in books!"[89]

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

Summary

The structure of the speech falls easily into four parts: (1) establishment of the speaker as a member of the bookselling profession; (2) introduction of the theme by a discussion of the relationship of bookselling to American culture, particularly the changes in United States reading habits because of social revolution; (3) possible actions booksellers could take to promote the reading of books by the public; and (4) an affirmation that books have spiritual significance in the life of a nation.

The theme that books had been supplanted by movies, radio, pulp magazines and the multiple sociological changes in America's way of life was supported by selected examples and anecdotes. Lewis did not extensively document his assertions because he felt that they were self-evident to his audience. Perhaps they were.

On the surface the speech was light and entertaining; however, the audience recognized the serious undercurrent of problems facing the book industry in a period of economic depression. They realized that their profession was being threatened by films, radio, cheap magazines as well as by the economic depression. That it was difficult to sell books was not news to the members of the audience. Also, they were

well aware that the taste of the American reading public was changing. You could not sell the sentimental novel for two fifty when the pulp magazine sold similar pap for fifteen cents.

Lewis was not giving his audience startling data; just as in the Nobel speech he really offered nothing new in information. He was just putting into words what the audience already felt. The purpose of his speech was to review the situation and stimulate a greater pride in the profession of bookselling. His tone was gay, optimistic, and his words straightforward and frank. He had analyzed his audience and gave them what they expected: humor, social satire, and provocative ideas.

"The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace"

With the publication of It Can't Happen Here Lewis showed more and more concern with the events in world politics. He hated Communism or Fascism or any form of dictatorship:

> While the Communists loathe the Fascists, their methods are the same. There are the same spies, the same sudden arrests and killings, the same third degrees under one system as under the other. Russia has demonstrated that the mass strength of communism provides no escape from dictatorship. Moreover, all dictators follow the same routine of torture.

> They must all be graduates of the same sadistic school. I am opposed to machine-gun rule irrespective of whether it is carried out by a worthy workman or a gilded general.[90]

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1937, he told his audience that the issue in America was not between Communism and Fascism but between dictatorship and Democracy.[91] With the beginning of the second World War, Lewis became even more concerned with world politics and he seemed to feel strongly the need to express himself as an artist involved with world problems.

The Speech

Saturday, December 16, 1944, the author appeared as guest speaker on the Third Opera Victory Rally of the Metropolitan Opera, broadcasting on the Blue Network, station WJZ. The title of his address was "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace."[92] Milton Cross, moderator, introduced the

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[90] New York Times, October 4, 1936, p. 3. [Lewis made the remark in an interview reported by S. J. Woolf.]

[91] New York Times, October 28, 1937, p. 27. [Lewis added a year later: "The struggle today is not one between communism and fascism; it is the struggle between tolerance and bigotry--bigotry preached equally by communism and fascism." See New York Times, October 4, 1936, p. 3.]

[92] The title of this address was originally "Artists, Scientists and World Peace." See Lewis papers, Yale Library. [In the margin of one draft typed by Lewis, he wrote: "7 1/2

General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera Association, Edward Johnson, who in turn presented Lewis: --

> Sometimes those whom we call "practical men of affairs" seem to occupy so much of the foreground of the world's stage that we are apt to forget that back of them stand the men of art, of science--the thinkers, the dreamers, if you like--but thinkers and dreamers who in their subtle, powerful way sometimes do more to influence the future than all the political leaders and so-called "practical men." . . . We know of few men who can speak with more conviction and authority than Mr. Sinclair Lewis.[93]

The general subject for the series was "The Fight for Peace." In the past the program had had addresses by diplomats, politicians, economists, and visiting foreign dignitaries; now Lewis was asked to speak as a man interested in science and as a novelist of world-wide reputation.[94]

By 1944, Lewis was convinced that the creative man could not live in an ivory tower. His purpose in this talk was to use what influence he might have to support those who

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on Thur 8 exact on Sat"--probably a reference to the timing of the address.]

[93]Radio script of the Third Opera Victory Rally of the Metropolitan Opera, pp. 27-28. See Lewis papers, Yale Library.

[94]Lewis's reputation as a man interested in science rested primarily upon the success of his novel, Arrowsmith, which was the saga of a young doctor. His reception of the Nobel Prize guaranteed his fame as a novelist with world stature.

were trying to persuade the American people that a peaceful world depended upon some form of world organization. The theme was:

> The scientist, the artist, can ultimately contribute to making a world fit to live in, only in a world that is fit to live in--not a city or a state or a nation, but a world that is fit to live in. That fact he must know, and must proclaim.[95]

Introduction.--With a statement of failure, Lewis began: "It is possible--it is at least possible--that no artist and no scientist has ever been able to carry out half his plans to make mankind more cheerful and decent." Why have they failed? "Since history began, all creative talents have been cramped by the insecurity of a world insane with war and tyranny." The artist and the scientist must bear part of the responsibility. The creative man contributed to war and tyranny as he "tried to hide himself from the age-long conflict for a more reasonable world." In the last few crisis years, however, some had realized that no matter "how detached from commerce or political ambition" their lives, they are "still dependent on the universal struggle for and against democracy"; they listened with the rest of mankind to the question: "'Which side are you on--

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[95]Lewis, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," p. 36.

isolation or world-control--which side are you on?'"[96] Now they answer it. In a way, this radio talk was part of Lewis's answer.

Discussion.--The creative man, like the average worker, faced a decision. Each must choose between tyranny or freedom. Lewis selected examples from literary and scientific history to illustrate how some men had made that choice in the past. Louis Pasteur, James Whistler, and Walter Pater "felt that their creative work was so superior that they could live in plush-lined clouds above the human struggle." A man like Voltaire or Dickens believed as the physician, Vesalius, who knew he could not have a private light to work by "if the whole world elsewhere was in darkness, and he cried 'Let there be universal light!' even if, in so crying, he lost his respectable reputation or his very life." During the first World War, "so timid and retired an etcher of society as Henry James" spoke out against the Kaiser. Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, and Carl Sandburg knew that "their little desks were nothing unless they were joined to all the other little desks in the world." Lewis, therefore, believed that of all men, "the artist, the scientist, must know and somewhat loudly state whether he is for

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[96] Ibid., p. 32.

tyranny and cruelty and machine discipline, or for the people, all the people."[97]

There had been men, however, who had not chosen freedom. An example of an artist who chose tyranny was the German writer, Gerhardt Hauptmann. Hauptmann preferred "safety and a handsome new farm and obsequiousness to all the goose-stepping lords of the revised Germany," and lost his self-respect and the "love of every decent man." But there were other Germans and Austrians, men like Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig, Sigmund Freud, Bĕla Schick, Thomas Mann, who "decided that new houses and new coats and the hoarse cheering of schmaltz-headed drill-sergeants weren't enough to make up for the loss of honor." They went into an exile which meant giving up "every neighbor, every title, even the sweet sound of their own accustomed language, that the world might know on which side they were."[98]

The above passage was significant for several reasons: (1) it illustrated that Lewis even at the height of World War II refused to indict any race or national group with total responsibility for the war; (2) it expressed his

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[97] Ibid., p. 33.

[98] Ibid.

love of the sound of his own language; (3) it suggested his own feelings of the loneliness of exile; (4) it was another attack upon the tyranny of dictatorship--"schmaltz-headed drill-sergeants" and the other representatives of the men of ritual land and the men of barbarism Lewis so vividly portrayed in It Can't Happen Here.

Isn't it, Lewis asked, "cosmic idiocy that an honest and competent man should have to lose even his own tongue and beloved citizenship because he is too honest and too competent to stand for the botched tyrannies of gangster rulers?"[99] The time had come for "a new kind of world organization" which will produce "security for the competent and honest." After all, "public murder has become a little too costly--there are people who are really thinking about some sort of a law against it!"[100] Lewis did not dwell on the practical construction of a world government, but he simply attempted to establish the idea that one was needed to prevent future wars and to secure freedom.

The author reminded the radio listeners that the lawyer, the garage mechanic, or the housewife was affected by

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[99] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[100] Ibid., p. 34.

war as well as the creative man. They all must make a living, "a diversion extremely cramped by war," but the artist or scientist had an additional problem. The ordinary workman, carpenter or Senator "works best when he scrupulously follows the best standards of the day," but the artist, the researcher, the inventor contribute to society "as their work is a little different from anything that has been done before." Conformity was death to the creative man. And, of course, the dictatorial society cannot brook non-conformity and the artist cannot "develop that differentness in a world of insecurity." Under tyranny, the artist's or the scientist's work is "judged not by its significance to mankind but by the way in which it tickles a gang of gorillas." Lewis concluded that no artist or scientist was able to dwell continuously in his native land of truth because it "always has been stormed by the lovers of power."[101]

Why should the average citizen be concerned with the special problem of the artist? Lewis guessed that the men and women tuned to the opera broadcast were probably a select group, particularly interested in the arts, so he directed his supporting arguments to the "admirers" of creative work:

> When the Nazis burned the books in Berlin--or for that matter, when a certain handsome old city in

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[101] *Ibid.*

> these United States flops back into medievalism and bans books that do not seem to do much injury to the other cities--then it is the would-be readers of the books that suffer more than the writers.[102]

Since many of the audience were music lovers, the novelist selected another illustration, this one about censorship of music: "When the Nazis decide that the music of Mendelssohn is Jewish and not at all the sort of thing that Dr. Goebbels would care to write, then it is the lovers of symphonies and not the ghost of the great master that are robbed." Lewis challenged his audience:

> If people really want great music, great poetry, great painting, if they really want medical discoveries which will save their babies from death, instead of wanting to live either in a Fascist slaughter-house or a comic-strip world of triviality, then they must give the artists and the scientists a civilization in which they can show what they really can do--as none of them has ever yet had the chance to show.[103]

Lewis's attack was two-pronged: upon Nazi Germany with its military state and upon the United States with its heroes of Mickey Mouse, Joe DiMaggio, and Rudy Vallee. The novelist implied that America promoted the trivial and rejected or ignored the weighty. Again, as in the Nobel speech and the "Enemies of the Book" address, the author asserted that the

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[102] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[103] Ibid., p. 35.

need of the artist was not material wealth--not a softer bed, more food, or publicity--but "an assurance that what he is doing is not futile, a sense that it profits him to produce what will demand of him the labor of years, that will demand a whole lifetime of the most honest devotion." The artist did not want to turn "out something that will please the fickle vanity of Fascist playboys whose toys are not only the machine-gun and the rope but pretty propaganda."[104]

Conclusion.--Despising the hypocrisy of a peace that was not peace, Lewis asked his audience to consider what may happen after this war. Is there going to be a "patched-up world," or a "few more pleasant fictions called treaties and tea-parties called conferences?" If so, he preferred "the most mulish kind of complete isolationism . . . to playing at world-government, because it is at least honest: you know what and where it is." For Lewis and for any artist or scientist it must be all or nothing because creative talent would be corrupted "by the cynicism that spreads in an insecure and dishonest world."[105] The germ of despair rots the whole: the work of the artist, the scientist, and all their

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

followers.

As in his other addresses, Lewis used examples to dramatize his ideas. He asked the audience to think of the "science of genetics, the science of birth and the production of better children," and the corruption of that science by the Nazis to produce only more and stronger Nazi children. That was evil! The science of genetics, he said, will not truly begin to be valuable "until it is devoted to producing not better little Germans--yes, or better little Americans or Englishmen--but universally, everywhere in the world, regardless of uniforms, better human beings." Lewis concluded the radio talk with a restatement of his theme:

> The scientist, the artist, can ultimately contribute to making a world fit to live in, only in a world that is fit to live in--not a city or a state or a nation, but a world that is fit to live in. That fact he must know, and must proclaim.[106]

Summary

In this radio talk Lewis expanded his early interest in the relationship between the artist and American society to a concern with the relationship of all creative men to world society. The novelist, as many other provincial Americans, had with World War II become more and more aware that

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[106] Ibid., p. 36.

freedom and democracy in the United States were affected by the growth or loss of freedom and democracy around the globe. The problem was more than academic for Lewis. His oldest son, Wells, had been killed by a sniper's bullet on October 29, 1944, eighteen days before this speech.

Chairman Johnson praised the address: "I assure you your fellow workers in the arts, and also I am sure in the sciences, appreciate having you as their spokesman." The Chairman concluded, "You have added a striking and highly individual note to our consideration of the Fight for Peace."[107]

True, Lewis's words had been highly individual, but many of his ideas in the radio speech were similar to ones expressed in the previous addresses studied in the chapter. Basically the speech falls into four parts: (1) identification of artists and scientists as part of the world community; (2) discussion of the need for individuality and creative endeavor; (3) discussion of what the artist does not need: excessive financial rewards or dictatorial restrictions; (4) and a statement of the theme that tyranny in any form--tyranny of censorship or tyranny of taste--stifles the creative worker and that only in an atmosphere of freedom and

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[107]Johnson, Radio script, p. 35.

and peace can the scientist or the artist "ultimately contribute to making the world fit to live in."[108]

Conclusion

The Nobel address, "The American Fear of Literature," expressed the final breaking away of American literature from European traditions; the "Enemies of the Book" focused upon changes in American reading habits in the depression years; and the "Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" demonstrated the maturity American letters had reached as Sinclair Lewis analyzed the broad relationship of all artists to world culture.

One idea underlies the three speeches, Lewis's passionate belief in freedom for the individual. He defended articulately the artist and the scientist, indeed, all men who wished to be different. Lewis hated restraint or tyranny in any form. His beloved Yale professor, William Lyon Phelps, characterized Sinclair Lewis with these words:

> Mr. Lewis is a warm-hearted, passionate, excitable, genial, friendly, affectionate man, who hates cruelty and injustice because he loves the inarticulate common people.
> . . . . . .

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[108]Lewis, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," p. 36.

> Restraint of any kind he cannot endure. Restraint, Repression, Respectability--those are the three R's that make him see Red.[109]

Chapter IV presents an investigation of the novelist as a rhetorician. How did Lewis use the novel to persuade the American people? What themes similar to the ones in the selected addresses did he express in his fictional work?

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[109]"As I Like It," Scribner's Magazine, XCIII (April, 1933), 256.

CHAPTER IV

THE NOVELIST AS RHETORICIAN

Introduction

The literary critic faces a problem in reconciling Sinclair Lewis's artistic failures with the impact he had upon the American reading public. Mark Schorer implied the problem when he wrote that Lewis was one of the worst writers in modern American literature and, then, added that without Lewis's writing one cannot imagine modern American literature. Shortly after Lewis's death, Time published this estimate of Lewis's career:

> He was not a great writer, nor even a very good one; but he hit the U. S. hard in its solar plexus, immortalized a national character, and added several household words to the American language.[1]

He immortalized a national character; he was not a great writer. How can these two statements be reconciled? They

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[1]"Sinclair Lewis 1885-1951," Time, LVII (January 22, 1951), 36.

can be reconciled when Lewis's novels are recognized as rhetorical in purpose rather than fictional. Sinclair Lewis did not write for the literary elite, his books were for the men and women of Main Street U. S. A.--they were his audience and he had a message for them. Lewis consistently subordinated the story telling art to the art of persuasion. As he tried in a novel to clarify or emphasize his thesis on a controversial topic, he tended to manipulate the characters or plot and the art of story telling suffered. Thus, the statement that Sinclair Lewis was often a bad writer though his ideas "hit the U. S. hard in its solar plexus" is an accurate one.

Eric Goldman in his article, "Books That Changed America," advanced the thesis that there had been three types of books that shaped American life: those that mold continuously American patterns of life--the Bible, Shakespeare, and the American Constitution; the ones that exploded with spectacular immediate effects; and "the volumes that had a substantial role in changing America during a particular period." The first group speaks to all generations, the second speaks for a moment only, but the third speaks to a generation. Lewis's books belonged to the third group. Goldman defined this group: "Appearing at some critical juncture, they caught

a latent trend, and, by catching it with just the right nuances, whirled it ahead."[2] In this group are Tom Paine's Common Sense, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Henry George's Progress and Poverty, Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, Charles Beard's An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution, John Dewey's Human Nature and Conduct, and Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt.[3]

Mark Schorer supports this theory when he writes, "American culture seems always to have had a literary spokesman, a single writer who presented American culture and American attitudes toward its culture, to the world."[4]

Uncle Tom's Cabin and Babbitt are the only fiction works in Goldman's list and to compare the two authors may not be as outrageous as it first seems. Both novelists lacked artistic stature, yet both created lasting national

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[2]Saturday Review, XXXVI (July 4, 1953), 7.

[3]Writing in 1953 Goldman expressed the idea that conservatives like Eisenhower reflected the nation's mood but he noted that there was no book reflecting this. Perhaps he would feel today that Barry Goldwater's Conscience of a Conservative reflects the conservative mood and also explains its surprising--surprising to its author and publisher--success.

[4]Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 270.

masterpieces. They were in the "vanguard of denunciation"[5] of some major American weakness. By distorting, exaggerating, and criticizing American society they stirred a vast level of Americans who rarely bought a book to rush out to buy and to read.

Harriet Beecher Stowe directed her denunciations against the institution of slavery. What were Lewis's targets? According to Mark Schorer they were the following:

> Beginning with Lewis's assault on the provincialism of backwoods America, the attack would come to include everything that Mencken denounced--"fundamentalism in religion, capitalism in industry, commercialism in education, science, and the arts, chauvinism in international affairs, reactionism in public opinion at large."[6]

It is the thesis of this chapter that Sinclair Lewis preached against the forces of tyranny which prevented America from fulfilling the American dream of a society of perfect freedom.

In Chapter II the idea was introduced that the majority of Lewis's novels had a rhetorical function, Chapter III was an investigation of the themes in the three selected addresses, and in the present chapter, Chapter IV, they will be compared to similar themes occurring in the novels. Six

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[5]Ibid., p. 288.

[6]Ibid.

of Lewis's most significant novels will be studied: Main Street, Babbitt, Elmer Gantry, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, and It Can't Happen Here.

Themes in the Novels

Main Street

Lewis's first great success, Main Street, satirized the culture of the American small town; it identified provincialism as the enemy of a free society. This adversary was illustrated through the struggles of the naïve Carol Kennicott against the confining restrictions of the customs and philosophy of a small midwestern village shortly after the turn of the century. Main Street offered a challenge, a demand--America must take stock of herself, examine the old ways, the traditions, and cast aside those that were no longer meaningful to men and women of the 20th Century. There was nothing revolutionary in the book, the author merely expressed his feeling that the horse and buggy days were over and with them the horse and buggy standards.

The protagonist, Carol Kennicott, was brimming with artistic and intellectual pretensions. She wanted to remake Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, into the Athens of America. Through her eyes the reader found Gopher Prairie a village of

"unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable"; the villagers were not only content with being "quite dead," but they were "scornful of the living for their restless walking"; the one positive virtue of the village was "negation canonized. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God." In Gopher Prairie the restless spirit of creative man was stilled:

> 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.[7]

Carol at first cast herself in the mold of "revolutionist, a radical, and therefore possessed of 'constructive ideas,' which only the destroyer can have, since the reformer believes that all essential constructing has already been done."[8] Carol, however, quickly learned that Gopher Prairie could not be changed at all until she became a part of its life. "And she stopped being patronizing. She wanted to be

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[7]Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), p. 265.

[8]Ibid., p. 254.

one of them. . . . It was they who would carry out her aspiration."[9] Thus, Carol began her pilgrimage through the intellectual and artistic circles of Gopher Prairie.

What is the intellectual life of the small town like? Is there a separation in America of the intellectual life from all realistic standards?

The town librarian introduced Carol to the women's study club, the Thanatopsis. "Such a cozy group, and yet it puts you in touch with all the intellectual thoughts that are going on everywhere."[10] Enthusiastically Carol met with the group for the reading of English poetry, but her enthusiasm waned as the thirteen members removed overshoes, ate peppermints, dusted fingers, folded hands, composed lower thoughts, "and invited the naked muse of poetry to deliver her more improving message."[11] The papers on the poets began with Mrs. Ole Jenson on the subject of "Shakespeare and Milton." Mrs. Ole Jensen reported that Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died in 1616 and he lived in London, England, and in Stratford-Avon, "which many American tourists loved to visit. . . ."

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[9] Ibid., p. 128.

[10] Ibid., p. 124.

[11] Ibid., p. 125.

Next, Mrs. Leonard Warren "reported the birth and death dates of Byron, Scott, Moore, Burns"; Mrs. George Edwin Mott gave "ten minutes to Tennyson and Browning";[12] Mrs. Nat Hicks "completed the day's grim task by a paper on 'Other Poets.' The other poets worthy of consideration were Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Gray, Mrs. Hemans and Kipling." The program closed with a "recital of 'The Recessional' and extracts from 'Lalla Rookh.'" Lewis comments: "Gopher Prairie had finished the poets. It was ready for next week's labor: English Fiction and Essays."[13]

Continuing her quest, Carol organized a community theatre and suggested Shaw's Androcles and the Lion as the first play only to have Rymie Witherspoon denounce Shaw as "downright improper." Rymie offered "a play that is clean, and there's some awfully funny scenes in it, too. I laughed out loud reading it. It's called 'His Mother's Heart.'" Juanita Haydock, however, persuaded the group a Broadway hit was the answer; "Carol's was the only vote cast against 'The Girl from Kankakee.'"[14]

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[12] Ibid., p. 126.

[13] Ibid., p. 127.

[14] Ibid., p. 218.

Next, Carol turned to the town library; she had a plan. Making a list of thirty novels and twenty "important books on psychology, education, and economics which the library lacked" she made her husband promise to contribute fifteen dollars if the board would match the same. The reaction of the board exemplifies the theme of the address to the booksellers:

> Lym Cass looked alarmed, scratched himself, and protested, "I think it would be a bad precedent for the board-members to contribute money--uh--not that I mind, but it wouldn't be fair--establish precedent!"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The rest of the meeting they gave to a bellicose investigation of the fact that there was seventeen cents less than there should be in the Fund.[15]

Carol remembered the death of the library plan as the incident of the seventeen cents.

When Carol heard of the Chautauqua program coming to Gopher Prairie, she pictured a "condensed university course brought to the people," but she found it a "combination vaudeville performance, Y. M. C. A. lecture, and the graduation exercises of an elocution class."[16] Sinclair Lewis's account of the Chautauqua, no doubt based upon his own childhood attendance at such programs, is one of his most vivid

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[15] Ibid., p. 232.

[16] Ibid., p. 237.

attacks upon the lack of leadership in the intellectual life of small town Americans:

> The sallow women in skirts and blouses, eager to be made to think, the men in vests and shirtsleeves, eager to be allowed to laugh, and the wriggling children, eager to sneak away. She [Carol] liked the plain benches, the portable stage under its red marquee, the great tent over all, shadowy above strings of incandescent bulbs at night and by day casting an amber radiance on the patient crowd. The scent of dust and trampled grass and sun-baked wood gave her an illusion of Syrian caravans; she forgot the speakers while she listened to noises outside the tent: two farmers talking hoarsely, a wagon creaking from Main Street, the crow of a rooster. She was content. But it was the contentment of the lost hunter stopping to rest.
>
> For from the Chautauqua itself she got nothing but wind and chaff and heavy laughter, the laughter of yokels at old jokes, a mirthless and primitive sound like the cries of beasts on a farm.
>
> These were the several instructors in the condensed university's seven-day course:
>
> Nine lecturers, four of them ex-ministers, and one an ex-congressman, all of them delivering "in spirational addresses." The only facts or opinions which Carol derived from them were: Lincoln was a celebrated president of the United States, but in his youth extremely poor. James J. Hill was the best known railroad-man of the West, and in his youth extremely poor. Honesty and courtesy in business are preferable to boorishness and exposed trickery, but this is not to be taken personally, since all persons in Gopher Prairie are known to be honest and courteous. London is a large city. A distinguished statesman once taught Sunday school.
>
> Four "entertainers" who told Jewish stories, Irish stories, German stories, Chinese stories, and Tennessee mountaineer stories, most of which Carol had heard.
>
> A "lady elocutionist" who recited Kipling and imitated children.
>
> A lecturer with motion-pictures of an Andean exploration; excellent pictures and a halting narrative.

> Three brass-bands, a company of six opera-singers, a Hawaiian sextette, and four youths who played saxophones and guitars disguised as washboards. The most applauded pieces were those, such as the 'Lucia' inevitably, which the audience had heard most often.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The final item was a man who neither lectured, inspired, nor entertained; a plain little man with his hands in his pockets. All the other speakers had confessed, "I cannot keep from telling the citizens of your beautiful city that none of the talent on this circuit have found a more charming spot or more enterprising and hospitable people." But the little man suggested that the architecture of Gopher Prairie was haphazard, and that it was sottish to let the lake-front be monopolized by the cinder-heaped wall of the railroad embankment. Afterward the audience grumbled, "Maybe that guy's got the right dope, but what's the use of looking on the dark side of things all the time? New ideas are first-rate, but not all this criticism. Enough trouble in life without looking for it!"
>
> Thus the Chautauqua, as Carol saw it. After it, the town felt proud and educated.[17]

This was the Chautauqua, as Sinclair Lewis saw it, too.

With the Chautauqua went much of Carol's hope that the village might display some intellectual curiosity. More and more she became aware that the citizens were actually proud of their ignorance. "To be 'intellectual' or 'artistic' or, in their own words to be 'highbrow,' was to be priggish and of dubious virtue." Carol became convinced that Gopher Prairie and all villages like it loved respectability, and this love of respectability "is reinforced by vows of

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[17] Ibid., pp. 237-39.

poverty and chastity in the matter of knowledge."[18]

Cherishing their ignorance, Gopher Prairie despised the critic and adored the booster. They flocked to hear James Blausser, land speculator, hustler, Honest Jim--honored guest of the Commercial Club Banquet at the Minniemashie House. Guffaws greeted Blausser's description of the mean critter he met in the streets "of our lovely little city. . . . And do you know what the animile [sic] was? He was a knocker! (Laughter and applause.)" Honest Jim filled his oratory with inspiring references:

> Pep, Punch, Go, Vigor, Enterprise, Red Blood, He-Men, Fair Women, God's Country, James J. Hill, the Blue Sky, the Green Fields, the bountiful Harvest, Increasing Population, Fair return on Investments, Alien Agitators Who Threaten the Security of Our Institutions, the Hearthstone the Foundation of the State, Senator Knute Nelson, One Hundred Per Cent Americanism, and Pointing with Pride.[19]

As Lewis asserted in the Nobel address that those who support the provincial image were loved by Americans and that those who criticized it were hated, so in the novel Carol who criticized the faults of the village was attacked and Blausser who offered false flattery was honored.

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[18]Ibid., p. 266.

[19]Ibid., p. 414.

Babbitt

In perhaps his best work, Lewis begins to contrast dramatically the material might of the nation with the lack of intellectual and artistic standards of the average citizen. How insignificant is George F. Babbitt in the land of "eighty-story buildings, motors by the million and wheat by the billions of bushels":[20]

> The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels or churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings.[21]

What manner of man moves among these towers of steel?

> There was nothing of the giant in the aspect of the man who was beginning to awaken on the sleeping-porch of a Dutch Colonial House in that residential district of Zenith known as Floral Heights.
>
> His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forty-six years old now, in April, 1920, and he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay.[22]

The towers of Zenith, slender and graceful, mock the "exceedingly well fed" Babbitt with his cheeks like "pads" and his

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[20]Sinclair Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature," The Man from Main Street, ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 10.

[21]Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 1.

[22]Ibid. p. 2.

"slightly puffy" hands.[23] And what of the future for George Babbitt? Unlike the tragic Willie Lohman of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, George Babbitt will never do anything as dramatic as suicide, he will do just what he has been doing, move through each day mechanically "no longer greatly interested in the possible and improbable adventures of each new day."[24]

What of the personal integrity and creative individuality Lewis asked for in the Nobel address and in "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace"? Well, there was integrity in the shining towers of Zenith, integrity and decision, but in George Babbitt there was little knowledge of integrity after years of sliding past decisions by treading the acceptable, respectable path. Once he was slightly disturbed by an odd news item about a preacher sworn in as mayor while wearing overalls; for a moment Babbitt was puzzled: "He searched for an attitude, but neither as a Presbyterian, an Elk, nor a real-estate broker did he have any doctrine about preacher-mayors laid down for him, so he grunted and went on."[25]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 3.

[25] Ibid., p. 21.

What place do books have in the life of Babbitt? What respect does he have for learning? Lewis portrays the intellectual vacancy in Babbitt's life in a scene between father and son. What was Babbitt's answer to his teen age son's challenge, Why study Shakespeare? This: "I'll tell you why . . . . It's because they're required for college entrance, and that's all there is to it!" Confidentally, Babbitt admitted, it would be more profitable for his son to study Business English to learn "how to write an ad, or letters that would pull."[26] The son suggested ignoring college and getting a practical education from the correspondence schools. Babbitt held that the degree was important for a business career, though he, too, was impressed with the magazine picture "of a young man with a pure brow, an iron jaw, silk socks and hair like patent leather"; he was still more impressed with the educational symbol above the picture--"no antiquated lamp or torch or owl of Minerva, but a row of dollar signs."[27]

Typical of the modern courses described in the magazone was "Shortcut Course in Public Speaking" taught by Professor W. F. Peet. The ad announced that Professor Peet was

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[26] Ibid., p. 76.

[27] Ibid., p. 77.

"a graduate of some of our leading universities, lecturer, extensive traveler, author of books, poetry, etc., a man with the unique PERSONALITY OF THE MASTER MINDS." And wonder of wonders this genius was "ready to give YOU all the secrets of his culture and hammering Force, in a few easy lessons that will not interfere with other occupations."[28] The course included the following in eight easy lessons:

> How to address your lodge.
> How to give toasts.
> How to propose to a lady.
> How to entertain banquets.
> How to make convincing selling-talks.
> How to build big vocabulary.
> How to create a strong personality.
> How to become a rational, powerful and original thinker.
> How to be a MASTER MAN![29]

Professor Peet's course was but one offered to the reader; Babbitt learned of courses in Short-Story Writing, Improving the Memory, Motion-picture-acting, Banking, Spanish, Chiropody, Photography, Electrical Engineering, Window-trimming, Poultry-raising, and Chemistry, and he decided: "Always figured somebody's come along with the brains to not leave education to a lot of bookworms and impractical theorists but make a big thing out of it." And yet, well, Babbitt warned

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[28] Ibid., p. 79.

[29] Ibid., p. 78.

his boy that advertisers sometime exaggerate, although, looking back at his own education at State University, he was willing to admit, "there's a whole lot of valuable time lost even at the U., studying poetry and French and subjects that never brought in anybody a cent."[30]

Lewis had made clear that Babbitt measures all knowledge by one standard, profit. Lewis explicitly tells the reader the danger of Babbitt minds to American society:

> The real villains of the piece are the clean, kind industrious Family Men who use every known brand of trickery and cruelty to insure the prosperity of their cubs. The worst thing about these fellows is that they're so good and, in their work at least, so intelligent. You can't hate them properly and yet their standardized minds are the enemy.[31]

What are they the enemy of? Of free creative thought.

Even poetry, the ancient muse, wilts under this standardization. T. Cholmondeley Frink, poet laureate of suburbia, author of "poemulations," presents another example of the intellectual and artistic shallows in American culture; Frink's poetry was syndicated daily in sixty-seven leading newspapers. The poet exhibited his practicality by lecturing and writing "Ads that Add."[32] Chum Frink's verses

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[30] Ibid., p. 84.

[31] Ibid., p. 101.

[32] Ibid., p. 111.

were philosophical, high in morality, and at the same time humorous and "easily understood by any child of twelve; and it added a neat air of pleasantry to them that they were set not as verse but as prose":[33]

> I sat alone and groused and thunk, and scratched my head and sighed and wunk, and groaned "There still are boobs, alack, who'd like the old-time gin-mill back; that den that makes a sage a loon, the vile and smelly old saloon!" I'll never miss, their poison house, whilst I the bubbling spring can use, that leaves my head at merry morn as clear as any babe new-born![34]

Chum Frink, "The recognized lord of language," however, grasped the cocktail at Babbitt's party with "Oh, man, let me dream on!"[35]

Measuring his own life by money, naturally Babbitt measured the artist's by the same standard:

> In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent businessman;[36]

Babbitt is happy to contribute money to support a Symphony Orchestra for Zenith after Chum Frink explains the need to

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[33] Ibid., p. 112.

[34] Ibid., p. 113.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 182.

Rotary members:

> Some of you may feel that it's out of place here to talk on a strictly highbrow and artistic subject, but I want to come out flat-footed and ask you boys to O. K. the proposition of a Symphony Orchestra for Zenith. Now, where a lot of you make your mistake is assuming that if you don't like classical music and all that junk, you ought to oppose it. Now, I want to confess that, though I'm a literary guy by profession, I don't care a rap for all this long-haired music. I'd rather listen to a good jazz band any time than to some piece by Beethoven that hasn't any more tune to it than a bunch of fighting cats, and you couldn't whistle it to save your life! But that isn't the point. Culture has become as necessary an adornment and advertisement for a city today as pavements or bank-clearances. It's Culture, in theaters and art-galleries and so on, that brings thousands of visitors to New York every year, and, to be frank, for all our splendid attainments we haven't yet got the Culture of a New York or Chicago or Boston--or at least we don't get the credit for it. The thing to do then as a live bunch of go-getters, is to capitalize Culture; to go right out and grab it.
>
> Pictures and books are fine for those that have the time to study 'em, but they don't shoot out on the road and holler "This is what little old Zenith can put up in the way of Culture." That's precisely what a Symphony Orchestra does do.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And I call on you good brothers to whoop it up for Culture and a World-beating Symphony Orchestra![37]

Babbitt applauded.

Babbitt is a book of contrasts, and Babbitt's trip to New York provides one dramatic demonstration of the middle class businessman's impotency in contrast to the vitality of

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[37] Ibid., pp. 260-61.

the machine; catapulting toward New York on a mechanical monster that was almost alive and certainly useful, the man in the Pullman car exchanged remarks that began with the trivial and ended with dirty stories.

Of what significance is George Babbitt in the land of "eighty-story buildings, motors by the million and wheat by the billions of bushels"?

Arrowsmith

Unlike Babbitt, Martin Arrowsmith believed the search for knowledge needed no profit motive; Arrowsmith attacks the Philistines in the world of medicine.

In this novel, Lewis succinctly comments on American universities and their goals: The University of Winnemach, twelve thousand students, fifteen miles outside Zenith; Winnemach had a baseball field under glass; "its buildings are measured by the mile"; it had hundreds of Doctors of Philosophy who gave swift instruction in everything from Sanskrit to department store advertising; its president was "the best money-raiser and the best after-dinner speaker in the United States;" Winnemach conducted extension courses by radio; Winnemach was the property of the state and did what the people wanted: "It is a Ford Motor Factory, and if its

products rattle a little, they are beautifully standardized, with perfectly interchangeable parts."[38]

One professor of science, Professor Gottlieb, resisted the process of standardization at Winnemach. He believed the "most important part of living is not the living but pondering upon it."[39] But more typical of the Winnemach professors was one Dr. Roscoe Geake who held that knowledge was valueless unless you could "sell it."[40]

The most colorful salesman of medicine which Martin met was Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, director of Public Health. Dr. Pickerbaugh contributed to science and to literature by writing pamphlets on public health called "Pickerbaugh Pickings." These were peppy jingles designed to jolly the public into health:

> You can't get health
> By a pussyfoot stealth
> So let's every health-booster
> Crow just like a rooster.[41]

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[38]Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1925), p. 7.

[39]This statement is probably a rephrasing of the remark by Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living."

[40]Lewis, Arrowsmith, p. 84.

[41]Ibid., p. 195.

Pickerbaugh's entire family joined him in the battle to sell health; and only the no-neck children created by Tennessee Williams in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof rival the daughters of Pickerbaugh in repulsiveness: Orchid, Verbena, Daisy, Jonquil, Hibisca, Narcissa, and the twins, Arbuta and Gladiola are all "bouncing, all blond, all pretty, all eager, all musical, and not merely pure but clamourously cleanminded."[42] Eagerly, gaily, the "Healthette Octette" performed:

> Winsome young womanhood wins with a smile
> Boozers, spitters, and gamblers from things
> that are vile.
> Our parents and teachers have explained the
> cause of life,
> So against the evil-minded we'll also make
> strife.
> We'll shame them, reclaim them, from bad habits,
> you bet!
> Better watch out, Mr. Loafer, I am a Healthette![43]

Pickerbaugh and family are as memorable as any of Dickens' characters. Pickerbaugh was happy, Pickerbaugh was respected, Pickerbaugh was successful, Pickerbaugh made medicine pay!

Martin Arrowsmith's life was a continuing struggle against forces which restricted his efforts to become a research scientist. Finally, he found the courage to leave the world of high society and his social climbing wife to pursue

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[42] Ibid., p. 201.

[43] Ibid., p. 202.

this goal. When she accused him of desertion, he answered:

> 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. The answer is that very few ever do, under any condition, willingly leave a soft bed for a shanty bunk in order to be pure, as you very properly call it, and those of us that are pioneers--Oh, this debate could go on forever! We could prove that I'm a hero or a fool or a deserter or anything you like, but the fact is I've suddenly seen I must go! I want my freedom to work, and I herewith quit whining about it and grab it.[44]

And Martin deserted his wife, society, and the companionship of his medical colleagues--"men of measured merriment" like Almus Pickerbaugh who dined with the President of the United States and dreamed of being "the first Secretary of Health and Eugenics in the country," or Dr. Rippleton Holabird who addressed "celebrated thinkers, assembled by the League of Cultural Agencies"--Martin deserted them to work in a primitive laboratory in the wilderness, free from restraint. He was happy:

> "I feel as if I were really beginning to work now," said Martin. "This new quinine stuff may prove pretty good. We'll plug along on it for two or three years, and maybe we'll get something permanent--and probably we'll fail!"[45]

But, as a man Martin had not failed but won; abandoning the

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[44] Ibid., p. 443.

[45] Ibid., pp. 447-48.

quest for material and social success he fulfilled himself. The story of Martin Arrowsmith made manifest Lewis's conviction that a man must be free for intellectual achievement.

Elmer Gantry

The most vitriolic of Lewis's novels, Elmer Gantry, exposes the Philistines in religion; in the process of exposure Lewis examines the education of the Protestant evangelical minister. The philosophical basis for this education was summed up in the advice of one of the professors at Tewillinger College of Gritzmacher Springs, Kansas: "Young man, I will give you an infallible rule. Never question the ways of the Lord!"[46]

Elmer Gantry, pulpit pitchman, plagiarized from the works of the agnostic Robert Ingersoll and piously attributed the poetic passages in his sermons to the inspiration of prayer. Love of God did not motivate Elmer, but he was moved by a true love of applause and money. In college he was most attentive to Mr. Ben T. Bohnsock, "Professor of Oratory and Literature, and Instructor in Voice Culture"; with Professor Bohnsock's aid, Elmer's eloquence "increased like an August

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[46]Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 10.

pumpkin."[47] Later, while traveling with Sister Sharon Falconer's sect, Elmer copied his sermons from "encyclopedias exegesis, handbooks for evangelists, and manuals of sermon outlines."[48] When he became the popular minister of a New York church, Elmer usually had a sermon on vice; if not, he had saxophone solos, singing of peppy songs, and once a professional juggler who wore a sign stating he stood "for 'God's Word' and who showed how easy it was to pick up weights symbolically labeled 'Sin' and 'Sorrow' and 'Ignorance' and Papistry.'"[49] The spectacle of spiritual concepts perverted to serve profit is sickening. Gantry's own words damn him:

> Some day I'll be able to put it over with the best of 'em socially. When I get to be a bishop, believe me I'm not going to hang around jawing about Sunday School methods! . . . . [The ellipses throughout this passage are Lewis's] Cleo would look fine at a big dinner, with the right dress. . . . If she wasn't so darn priggish. Oh, maybe she'll die before then . . . . I think I'll marry an Episcopalian. . . . I wonder if I could get an Episcopal bishopric if I switched to that nightshirt crowd? More class. No; Methodist bigger church; and don't guess the Episcopalopians [sic] would stand any good red-blooded sermons on vice and all that.[50]

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[47] Ibid., p. 116.

[48] Ibid., p. 189.

[49] Ibid., p. 358.

[50] Ibid., p. 364.

Elmer Gantry is easily Lewis's most despicable character.

When the Dayton evolution trial warned some of the brighter clergymen "that their influence and oratory and incomes were threatened by an authentic learning,"[51] Gantry upheld such "high standards of eloquence and scholarship" and in his own behavior presented "such an example of earnestness"[52] that he was appointed to Napap (National Association for the Purification of Art and the Press).[53]

The tale of Elmer Gantry, lecher and liar, ends with his earnest prayer that "we shall yet make these United States a moral nation."[54] Elmer Gantry is Lewis's ironic attack upon the intellectual and spiritual leadership of American ministers. Gantry exemplifies the theme of the Nobel address: he is the offspring of a nation that regards intellectual pursuits as unimportant and that considers the ultimate criteria for judging a man are his financial success and social prestige. Elmer Gantry is the complete hypocrite.

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[51] Ibid., p. 389.

[52] Ibid., p. 398.

[53] Ibid., p. 419.

[54] Ibid.

Dodsworth

Sam Dodsworth was an American "Captain of Industry," president of the Revelation Motor Company. He was a millionaire who rarely split infinitives, sometimes enjoyed Beethoven, was bored by free verse, and played golf with skill. Standing in the "shaft of the Plymouth National Bank Building,"[55] he dreamed of Europe, a Europe that was not representative of culture so much as representative of romance, beauty, and strange sights. Dodsworth offered Lewis the opportunity to contrast directly American with European culture by telling the story of a restless American businessman searching in Europe for what he feels he is missing in America.

But Europe was a disappointment to Dodsworth; he learned, as other travelers before and since have learned, that a man takes himself along on any journey. The plain American businessman soon sickens of the phonies of Europe just as he had sickened of the phonies at home. After all, "Why talk stupidly about pictures when he could talk intelligently about engines?"[56] Dodsworth learned to respect his

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[55]Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (New York: Grosset & Dunlap by arrangement with Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), p. 16.

[56]Ibid., p. 23.

own achievements and to resent the dictatorial efforts of the so-called arbiters of taste to force him to conform to their standards. He discovered:

> The American highbrow abroad is just like the Puritan back home--the Puritan says that if you drink anything at all, he'll disapprove of you, and the expatriate here says that if you drink anything but Chateau Haut Something-or-other at just the right temperature, he'll disapprove of you and--"[57]

For Dodsworth the new obligations were as binding and as false as the old, and "he dreaded these new obligations."[58] He became hungry for "a good wholesome lowness; for poker, shirt-sleeves, sauerkraut, obscene vaudeville, and conversation about motor sales and Zenith politics";[59] he decided that "if he had to take the arts as something in which he must pass an examination, he would chuck them altogether and be content with poker."[60] Dodsworth gradually came to the position that art was not superior to manufacturing nor was it inferior; he learned to respect art but he also developed an equal admiration for the industrial attainments of America. Thus, Lewis expresses in this novel, as he did in the Nobel

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[57] Ibid., p. 134.

[58] Ibid., p. 135.

[59] Ibid., p. 139.

[60] Ibid., p. 140.

acceptance speech, an admiration for the industrial and geographical grandeur of the United States, and he venerates genuine artistic endeavors while he scorns the self-appointed high priests of art.

It Can't Happen Here

This science fiction story illustrates both the idea that books are being supplanted in American life, and the idea that the creative individual cannot function properly in a world of tyranny and chaos.

The novel opened with the meeting of the Ladies' Night Dinner of the Fort Beulah Rotary Club. The membership was fearful that a free inquiring spirit threatened the "purity of the American home"; to protect this purity they resolved to advocate barring from the movie industry all persons who "declined to take an oath to revere the Flag, the Constitution, the Bible, and all other peculiarly American Institutions."[61] Ironically, the figurines on the banquet table range from Mickey Mouse to small American flags impaled in gilded hard-boiled eggs. The speakers for the meeting, Brigandier General Herbert Y. Edgeways, U. S. A. (retired)

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[61]Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here (Garden City, New York: The Sun Dial Press, 1935), p. 2.

and Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, D. A. R., asserted that what the country needed was Discipline:

> We don't want all this highbrow intellectuality, all this book-learning. That's good enough in its way, but isn't it, after all, just a nice toy for grownups? No, what we all of us must have if this great land is going to go on maintaining its high position among the Congress of Nations is Discipline--Will Power--Character![62]

Or, as Lewis's hero, Doremus Jessup, ironically remarked, "Cure the evils of Democracy by the evils of Fascism!"[63]

Doremus characterized himself as a small-town bourgeois intellectual who rejected not only Fascism but Communism because they prohibited "privacy, the right to think and criticize as he freakishly pleased." He had no desire to have his mind "policed by peasants in uniform," and before that happened he would live in Alaska with "beans and a hundred books and a new pair of pants every three years."[64]

The representative of the new Fascist movement was a provincial orator, Berzelius Windrip, who combined folksy speech with an anti-intellectual message:

> I don't pretend to be a very educated man, except maybe educated in the heart, and in being able

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[62] Ibid., p. 8.

[63] Ibid., p. 22.

[64] Ibid., p. 58.

> to feel for the sorrows and fear of every ornery fellow human being. Still and all, I've read the Bible through, from kiver to kiver, like my wife's folks say down in Arkansas, some eleven times; I've read all the law books they've printed; and as to contemporaries, I don't guess I've missed much of all the grand literature produced by Bruce Barton, Edgar Guest, Arthur Brisbane, Elizabeth Dilling, Walter Pitkin, and William Dudley Pelley.[65]

Even the sage Doremus was hypnotized by Windrip oratory: "a mishmash of polite regards to Justice, Freedom, Equality, Order, Prosperity, Patriotism, and any number of other noble but slippery abstractions."[66] Sitting in the crowd at a Corpo rally, Doremus was surprised to find he was not bored by Windrip but absorbed and excited:

> What if Buzz is right? What, if--in spite of all the demagogic pap that, I suppose, he has got to feed out to the boobs--. . . . And these Minute Men, his followers--oh, they were pretty nasty, what I saw out on the street, but still most of 'em are mighty nice, clean-cut young fellows. Seeing Buzz and then listening to what he actually says does kind of surprise you--kind of makes you think![67]

But what it was that Buzz had said, "Doremus could not remember an hour later when he had come out of the trance."[68] Even the ominous Minute Men, Buzz's private army, happy with

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[65] Ibid., p. 74.

[66] Ibid., p. 119.

[67] Ibid., p. 120.

[68] Ibid.

rifles, automatic pistols, and machine guns, did not convince Doremus that the descendants of Daniel Webster would give up their freedoms. Doremus, of course, was mistaken.

The United States became a Corpo state ruled by Windrip; Phillip, Doremus' son exulted that "the time for selfish individualism is gone. "We've got to have mass action."[69] Even dead men were declared the enemy of the state, men like Thoreau, Emerson, Whittier, Whitman, Mark Twin, Howells, Wilson, Wells, Marx, Shaw, Tolstoy, and "even The Collected Sayings of Will Rogers."[70]

Ultimately, Doremus Jessup realized that the battle in the world was not between Communism and Fascism, but a struggle of tolerance against bigotry. True, in America the worst Fascists disowned the word, Fascism, but they preached "enslavement to Capitalism under the style of Constitutional and Traditional Native American Liberty"; they quoted not only "Scripture but Jefferson."[71] Doremus placed his hope for the future in the type of people who supported Populism, the Non-Partisan League, and the La Follettes. He decided

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[69] Ibid., p. 291.

[70] Ibid., p. 265.

[71] Ibid., p. 432.

that the preservation of the free, inquiring, critical spirit was more important than the preservation of any social system and that "the men of ritual and the men of barbarism are capable of shutting up the men of science and of silencing them forever."[72] Thus, in It Can't Happen Here as in "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" address, Lewis preaches against both Communism and Fascism--any form of tyranny--and defends the old American ideal of the right of free critical inquiry.

Conclusion

Sinclair Lewis exemplified the theme that in American society intellectual life is separated from standards of importance and reality by dramatically contrasting the United States' material achievement--particularly the architectural grandeur of the cities--with the fumbling, bungling citizenry. The same theme was presented in his ironic narration of the average citizen's efforts to protect provincial traditions and Puritan taboos at the expense of honest, and free intellectual investigation.

That books were being supplanted in American life was shown indirectly by the catalogue of meaningless

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[72] Ibid., p. 433.

activities which filled the American's life--a catalogue which included the reading of nothing more demanding than want ads or comic books--and portraying the general scorn Americans felt for any activity, even scientific research, which didn't produce financial rewards. Lowell Schmaltz, hero of the Man Who Knew Coolidge, epitomized the Babbitt attitude: Schmaltz envisioned Lincoln as President of U. S. Steel, Edgar Allan Poe as a leading writer for Red Book, Emerson as president of Columbia or the University of Illinois, and Hawthorne as an ad writer "for the new model Hupmobile."[73]

Finally, the plea that the creative man--whether writer, scientist, or musician--must be given a free and peaceful world, in order to develop the individuality essential to any worthwhile contribution he might make to mankind, was emphasized in Arrowsmith and in It Can't Happen Here as the protagonists struggled to protect their integrity, individuality, and liberty.

Through all the novels and through the speeches is the underlying belief that the American dream of a society of free men is possible. From the dusty streets of Gopher

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[73]Sinclair Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), p. 265.

Prairie to the skyscrapers of Zenith, Lewis portrays Americans threatened by the "they" of society, afraid to live freely, afraid to think independently, afraid to act with integrity lest they lose their wealth, or their social position, or their comfortable belief in their own superiority. Saturated with the stories of the pitchmen of science, philanthropy, religion, art, business, the reader of the novels may come to agree with Sinclair Lewis that the struggle in the twentieth century, at least for Americans, is a continuing struggle for integrity and individuality against the tyranical forces of orthodoxy and standardization.

CHAPTER V

THE RHETORICAL METHODS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

Introduction

> Not only is history written with words. It is made with words. Most of the mighty movements affecting the destiny of the American nation have gathered strength in obscure places from the talk of nameless men, and gained final momentum from leaders who could state in common words the needs and hopes of common people.[1]

In critical studies, as in historical studies, each writer establishes his own pattern of treatment based upon his philosophy of criticism. The reader of a particular piece of criticism should know what pattern the critic selected to follow. The pattern developed in this chapter is that outlined by Marie Hochmuth, a leading American rhetorical critic, in her excellent essay, "The Criticism of Rhetoric." The term rhetoric is used in the same sense she used

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[1]William Norwood Brigance, "Preface," A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. W. N. Brigance (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1943), I, vii.

it, that is, as "verbal activity primarily concerned with affecting persuasion, whether it be done by writing or speaking."[2] In her article she identified the elements of the rhetorical situation as units consisting of "speaker, audience, place, purpose, time, and form,"[3] and the present chapter follows this organizational pattern in an attempt to grapple with the rhetorical methods of Lewis's speaking and writing. Of course, these units do not operate as separate entities, but they are useful as categories which allow detailed examination of the speaker's or the writer's methods. Ultimately, the critic must come to an evaluation of the total work examined.

Necessarily, this chapter presents a review of material discussed earlier in the dissertation, but employs only data which provide a basis for evaluation of Lewis's rhetorical methods.

What, then, were the rhetorical methods Lewis used in the three selected addresses? How do these methods compare or contrast to the ones he used in his fiction?

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[2] A History and Criticism of American Public Address. ed. Marie Hochmuth (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), III, 8.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

Speaker

The word speaker, for the purposes of the present investigation, includes Lewis both as a speaker and as a writer. Thus, when the question is asked, "What are the predispositions, if any, toward the man who is giving the speech?"[4] we must add: and toward the man who is writing the story? Aristotle's term for it is ethos.

The reader should by now be well acquainted with the somewhat eccentric, though fascinating, personality of "Red" Lewis. After the initial impact of Main Street the American public was kept fully abreast of Lewis's life through press and radio, and his success as a speaker as well as his popularity as a writer was enhanced by his public image as a man of controversy. The novelist seems to have been alert to the publicity value of his many newsmaking antics. In April, 1922, his business associate, Harrison Smith, commented to Lewis in a letter about this ability to stay in the public eye:

> I'm tremendously glad to hear from you directly, though it's extraordinary how little I have been actually out of touch with where you are and what you've been doing. Even in a desert you have the faculty of bumping into a lot of people who apparently rush to the nearest wireless station, tell the world how you look, what you said, and how many

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[4] Ibid.

glasses of beer you just had.[5]

The result of the publicity was that when Sinclair Lewis appeared on the public platform his audience expected him to live up to his reputation as a man who did and said the unusual. His awkward, almost grotesque, physical appearance only complemented his reputation as an eccentric.

The audience for the Nobel address offers a heightened example of a typical Lewis audience as they obviously anticipated with delight his expected satirical attacks upon his critics and upon American society.

Somewhat similar to this feeling was the eagerness with which his reading public anticipated each Lewis work following the publication of Main Street. That novel had established his reputation as a daring critic of the American scene; his next work, Babbitt, simply confirmed the reputation, and his public image enhanced the total effect. According to Mark Schorer, throughout the twenties Lewis happily profited from his notoriety.

> Lewis had managed again to put himself at the heart of a national controversy of many voices: on

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[5]Letter to Lewis on April 14, 1926, printed in From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Sinclair Lewis. 1919-1930, ed. Harrison Smith (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), p. 206.

> one side there were those who said simply that it was a great book [Babbitt], those who said it was a true picture, those who said it was a necessary corrective; on the other side were those who said that it was a poor novel, those who deplored its distortions, those who denounced its lies. What could have mattered less than the question of which voice was raised? Everyone was buying it.[6]

Lewis's letters to his publishers establish that he realized early in his career that controversy meant publicity and that, of course, publicity meant greater book sales. Shortly before Main Street appeared Lewis wrote Alfred Harcourt advising him to take advantage of the book's controversial nature in the publicity:

> It [advertising] would best be broken into two different notes: one about this-here author and how he got his material . . . and the other a challenging, attention-rousing, tho possibly trouble-making suggestion that Mr. Lewis does not find all beautiful and perfect in Red-blooded Small-town Americanism. I don't think it would hurt to let a hint of this critical attitude slip out; it would stir more eagerness than a supposition that (like all the rest save Sherwood Anderson) Mr. Lewis purrs over the American village as being God's own particular residence. Just as it is Keynes's criticism that makes his book go.[7]

But more than publicity to gain book sales, Lewis desired a hearing for his ideas. He was never greedy for financial

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[6]Sinclair Lewis: An American Life (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 345.

[7]Letter to Alfred Harcourt in June, 1920, in From Main Street to Stockholm, p. 32.

rewards, but he did want Americans to pay serious attention to his social criticism. Publicity helped him get that attention. Throughout the nineteen-twenties Lewis kept his reputation as a man of controversy prominent, but in the thirties it began to fade and today only a shadow of that reputation remains to influence the modern reader. Why did this happen? Perhaps the public became bored with the Lewis personality. Certainly his ability to exploit current issues waned, and his once startling attacks upon American provincialism, materialism, and standardization lost their impact--the public became accustomed to them as legitimate targets for the social critic.

In answer to the question, "What are the predispositions, if any, toward the man who is giving the speech or writing the story?" one can answer that in the case of Lewis his public image was a major factor in his rhetorical success. At the height of his notoriety the public eagerly awaited his opinions on all topics, and long after his words or his novels may have justified such attention he found a receptive audience. Unfortunately for Lewis's reputation today, the modern reader does not greatly care about that image.

Audience

Susanne Langer, philosopher of language, writes: "Every society meets a new idea with its own concepts, its own tacit, fundamental way of seeing things; that is to say, with its own questions, its peculiar curiosity."[8] The rhetorician attempts to understand his audiences so he may select the most effective method to persuade them. Marie Hochmuth outlines the rhetorician's task: "He aims to link his propositions to their value systems, and value systems differ with age, sex, educational development, economic class, social strata, political heritage, specialized interest, and so on."[9] What were the speaking and reading audiences of Lewis like? How did he go about adjusting his propositions to their value systems?

The Nobel address Lewis delivered before the members of the Swedish Academy of Arts and Sciences and their distinguished guests--an international group of men and women devoted to the arts and sciences. More important, Lewis had a world audience composed of both Europeans and Americans curious about what the first American winner of the Nobel Prize

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[8]Philosophy in a New Key (Mentor Books; New York: The New American Library, 1948), p. 4.

[9]"The Criticism of Rhetoric," p. 10.

for Literature would say. They were especially curious because so many of his countrymen had loudly proclaimed that the choice of Lewis was an insult to America; unlike Boris Pasternak, Lewis was present to receive his prize, and free to answer his critics. While the mood of the Stockholm audience was friendly, even partisan, a number of the home folk were openly hostile to the very idea that Sinclair Lewis should receive the Nobel Prize, hostile to his fictionalized criticism of the United States, and, therefore, hostile to the man himself and anything he might choose to say.

How did Lewis adjust to these audiences? He spent the early moments of the speech admitting that he knew he was under attack and asserting that his speech would not be a grudge answer to those attacks. After all, he had heaved a few bricks in his day, and a few heaved in return did not upset him. With his open manner Lewis hoped to disarm his audiences and to establish a rapport that would make them receptive to his evaluation of American literary development. Lewis praised particular European artists, and at some length honored certain American writers. His speech was a careful blend of attack and praise indicating his keen awareness of the problem of adjusting to his two audiences, the one in Stockholm and the one at home. Lewis did not have this

problem of an "immediate" and a "larger" audience with the two other speeches studied.

The audience for the "Enemies of the Book" address was composed of prominent American publishers, editors, authors, and book purveyors. They were probably friendly, but an audience of one's peers can be disturbing. Lewis chose to emphasize what he had in common with the audience: his opening word--fellow-booksellers--set the tone, and throughout the address Lewis stressed the common background, problems, and goals between himself and his listeners.

That vast anonymous group which listened to the radio in the nineteen-fourties posed a special problem for Lewis: he could not rely upon his personal magnetism. But without the audience viewing his awkward, humorous appearance he did have a better chance to deliver effectively a speech completely serious in tone. "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" is, perhaps, the only entirely somber speech Lewis ever made. As in the other addresses Lewis adjusted his supporting illustrations to his audience. Assuming that many had tuned in to hear the opera, Lewis selected examples from the world of music in addition to presenting his usual literary examples.

The three speeches investigated all indicate that

Lewis tried to adjust his remarks to the demands of each audience, and that he was particularly conscious of establishing rapport between himself and his audiences.

Unlike his listening public, his reading public was not made up primarily of men and women actively concerned with the arts, but was made up of that vast heterogeneous group that makes a best seller. Lewis's novels appealed to the average American citizen. Lewis must have realized this, and certainly his publishers noted it. After the publication of Arrowsmith with the subsequent critical attack upon Lewis's literary skill, Harrison Smith, who was with Harcourt and Brace at that time, wrote Lewis: "The writers whom I meet and the people who merely live and read books now and then have no reserves [sic] about it. They like it enormously."[10]

Why did people who merely live and read books now and then like the novels of Sinclair Lewis? One reason was because at heart they agreed with his premises. As they read the novels they became convinced that Lewis was justified in his attacks on provincialism, conformity, and materialism. The values of the men and women in his novels were their

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[10]Letter to Lewis on April 4, 1925, in From Main Street to Stockholm, p. 182.

values. They struggled against the same restrictions which Lewis's heroes fought against, and they believed in freedom and individuality just as Lewis did. In other words, they identified with his characters. As they identified with the characters they also became convinced that the forces of tyranny in America were the forces Lewis attacked in the novels. The sophisticated urbanite of today cannot as easily sympathize with the problems of Lewis's heroes. Schorer comments:

> But in 1920 hundreds of women saw themselves in Carol, and hundreds of small towns saw themselves in Gopher Prairie, and for that reason could with equal ease, praise or blame the book, and in either case buy it.[11]

And only in America in the nineteen-twenties would a population immediately recognize an Elmer Gantry, a George Babbitt, or a Carol Kennicott. Whatever present-day critics write of Lewis, most of them admit he was the spokesman for one generation of Americans, the generation of the twenties. As the press played up the violent attacks upon each new Lewis novel, the public responded by buying his books. He was not loved as Mark Twain was loved. They read Lewis much as they read H. L. Mencken's heretical pronouncements--with surprise,

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[11] Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, p. 272.

laughter, and secret agreement.

Lewis's listening audiences were usually men and women actively interested in the arts, but his reading audiences were more concerned with the minutiae of their own daily lives. Lewis was remarkably successful, at least for a decade, in adjusting to these audiences. His speeches abound with examples from the world of acholarship and the arts, and his novels with examples from the world of the Pullman sleeper and the revival tent. As a result the speeches, effective in their own day, still retain some relevance to modern life, but the novels often seem bound to a time that is remote or unreal.

Place

Place, as Marie Hochmuth points out, is more than just the physical environment. It is "also a metaphysical condition, an ideological environment."[12] The importance of place to Sinclair Lewis's speaking and to a lesser degree his fiction should not be minimized. Lewis was an American.

The ideological environment of the Nobel address made it a unique speech, one superior to other Lewis speeches,

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[12]"The Criticism of Rhetoric," p. 11.

and perhaps superior to any given by later American recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Lewis and his audience knew that the attention of the literary world was on him as the first American to win the Prize. He tried with careful preparation to make the speech worthy of that attention. The ambitious topic--encompassing the past, present, and future development of American literature--reflected Lewis's feeling that the Nobel Prize recognized not only his achievements but the maturity of American letters in general.

On a level less important the address to the booksellers also shows the influence of place. The lightly humorous handling of a serious topic during the great depression reflects the after-dinner setting of the speech.

The place of the radio speech offered Lewis the opportunity to give a serious speech without the intrusion of his appearance. An audience which could not see Lewis might not be motivated to laugh.

Speeches are given in places of common communion, but a novel must meet its audience in the private thoughts of one individual. A discussion of "place" cannot, therefore, be relevant to a rhetorical analysis of a novel except to say that Lewis's readers were usually average American citizens sharing a common moment of American history.

Purpose

The purposes of Lewis's addresses and novels have been examined previously, but as a part of his rhetorical method they must be re-examined. Marie Hochmuth writes:

> Whatever the end the speaker has in mind, his specific purpose is to speak with persuasive effect toward that end; his available resources for persuasion are those which can be directed toward fulfillment of purpose.[13]

A review, then of the purposes of Lewis's work leads to an examination of the proofs used by the writer to fulfill his purposes.

What were the purposes of the three addresses studied? What argumentative method did Lewis use to fulfill these purposes?

In his Nobel speech Lewis considered the trends, dangers, and promises in contemporary American literature; the speech to the booksellers defined certain problems the book industry faced in the depression, suggested actions to remedy these problems, and attempted to stimulate pride in the bookselling profession; the radio address attempted to influence the audience to support the efforts of world leaders to develop some form of world organization.

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[13] Ibid., p. 12.

The Nobel address offers a typical illustration of the method Lewis used to carry out his purposes. The author began by stating a thesis: American literary art lacked standards, maturity, and public respect. Lewis developed this thesis primarily through instances and examples. To prove that American literary art lacked maturity Lewis discussed the type of criticism he had received for suggesting America was less than perfect. He chose Henry Van Dyke as representative of the immaturity of this criticism, and in the discussion he used a mild form of invective: Van Dyke was identified as "an amiable old gentleman" best known for his "pleasant little essays on the joys of fishing," and the "learned fisherman" was held up as typical of the provincial attacks upon the cosmopolitan Lewis.[14]

To prove that American literary art lacked standards Lewis discussed the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New Humanism, and American literary critics. He charged the Academy represented not modern American writers but only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; he supported this assertion with over twenty instances of respected writers who were not

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[14]Sinclair Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature," in The Man from Main Street, ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 5-6.

members of the Academy. Lewis asserted the New Humanists represented not the present or the future but the dead past, and contrasted the typical subject matter of the New Humanists with what he felt literature should deal:

> Oedipus is a tragic figure for the New Humanists; man trying to maintain himself as the image of God under the menace of dynamos, in a world of high-pressure salesmanship is not.[15]

According to Lewis the New Humanists were reactionaries in a revolutionary world. Finally, Lewis asserted America had no great literary critics in the tradition of European masters like Taine, Goethe, and Croce; in comparison America had produced a chill and insignificant criticism: "our Erasmuses have been village schoolmistresses." As a final insult to American critics Lewis asked: "How should there be any standards when there has been no one capable of setting them up?"[16]

Lewis's argumentative method is essentially inductive. He gives the impression that his ideas and examples have led to his conclusions. He develops his arguments through use of example, comparison and contrast, invective, explanation, cause to effect reasoning, and effect to cause

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[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] Ibid.

reasoning. Rarely does he use argument from authority, and only occasionally does he use analogy.

In "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" Lewis appealed to the audience's desire for self-respect when he called Gerhart Hauptmann an example of a man who preferred "obsequiousness to the goose-stepping lords of the revised Germany" to honor.[17] Lewis contrasted Hauptmann with the men who had gone into exile rather than support tyranny. These men "gave up every neighbor, every title, even the sweet sound of their own accustomed language, that the world might know on which side they were."[18] Lewis asked the audience for recognition and respect for the artist. The creative man needed "an assurance that what he is doing is not futile."[19] In the speech to the booksellers Lewis appealed to the audience's pride in achievement:

> It [smaller profits] means that we belong to a profession which must become increasingly skilled; that writers will not find so easy a living out of "just dashing off a little story," and that book-dealers can less and less afford to give the hospitality of their shelves to any anemic romance that happens

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[17]Sinclair Lewis, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," in The Man from Main Street, p. 33.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 35.

> along. It may all be a little hard on the youngsters, who think more about mottos than about dust-rags, but perhaps to those of us who for twenty and thirty and forty years have been proud of being booksellers, it may be a matter of pride that with much against us, we have survived, and in our love of the book are determined to survive.[20]

The principal appeals in the speeches were to self-respect, recognition, and pride.

If one agrees that the term ethical proof means broadly the "attempts of the speaker to establish himself as a man of good character and intellectual honesty, to set himself up as an authority on the subject of discussion, to secure the good will of the audience,"[21] then Lewis used ethical proof as frequently as any other type of proof. This was discussed earlier under the topic of "Speaker," but the following is a typical example of Lewis's ethical proof:

> I have also sold books behind the counter. . . . I'll admit it wasn't very long . . . . But it was long enough to acquaint me with some of the more acute joys of practical bookselling, for I assure you that Siegel-Cooper's was no haunt for those who wanted to "browse" or to sit by a wood fire and discuss Dostoyeffsky. It had all the novel placidity of a 'bus-station.[22]

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[20]Sinclair Lewis, "Enemies of the Book," in Publishers' Weekly, CXXIX (May 23, 1936), p. 2014.

[21]Orville Hitchcock, "Jonathan Edwards," in History and Criticism of American Public Address, I, 230.

[22]"Enemies of the Book," p. 2012.

Each speech studied offers many examples which illustrate that Lewis was never afraid of personal reference.

Lewis also interjected his opinions in the novels, but not as directly, of course, as in the speeches. What were the purposes of Lewis's novels and how did he carry them out?

Broadly stated, Lewis's purpose in the novels was to attack the forces of restraint in American life, those forces which he believed prevented the United States from becoming a society of free men. He identified these forces in his various stories as provincialism manifested in religious fundamentalism, puritanism, and anti-intellectualism; as materialism manifested in the American contempt for anything --education, art, beauty--that could not be translated into dollars; and as standardization manifested by the drab sameness of the cities, people, and customs of America.

What argumentative methods did Lewis use to carry out his purpose in the novels? How do these methods compare or contrast with the methods he used in the speeches?

The method followed in the novels studied is strikingly similar to the method followed in Lewis's speeches. Main Street presents a typical example. Lewis began the story with a descriptive thesis: the American village

menaces civilization because it aspires to force its vulgar standards upon the world:

> But a village in a country which is taking pains to become altogether standardized and pure, which aspires to succeed Victorian England as the chief mediocrity of the world, is no longer merely provincial, no longer downy and restful in its leaf-shadowed ignorance. It is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills and sea of color, to set Dante at boosting Gopher Prairie, and to dress the high gods in Klassy Kollege Klothes.[23]

To support this thesis Lewis took the reader on a tour of what he assumed to be a typical American village, Gopher Prairie.

In the speeches Lewis acted as guide for the audience, but in each novel the protagonist conducts the tour. Not too surprisingly the protagonists often seem to share the prejudices of Sinclair Lewis. Carol Kennicott lead the reader of Main Street through the intellectual, artistic, and social life of Gopher Prairie, U. S. A. The reader was subjected to example after example of village life from the activities of the ladies' literary society to the performances on the dusty Chatauqua platform--each supporting Lewis's thesis. This essentially static presentation of

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[23]Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1920), p. 267.

material results in a "loosely episodic chronicle"[24] characteristic of Lewis's novels. Mark Schorer summarizes in the following example the episodes in Elmer Gantry which supported Lewis's assertion that religious fundamentalism was an evil force in American life:

> The action of Elmer Gantry is an entirely one-way affair. 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 the decline of his marriage to Cleo and his escape from Hettie, who threatens 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."[25]

Aside from Gantry's experiences with women, his life is a chronicle of the organizational manifestations of religious fundamentalism in America. These experiences ranged from his education in a small Kansas Baptist seminary, to his experiences with a woman evangelist, to his rise in the

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[24] Schorer, p. 477.

[25] Ibid.

Methodist church in New York City. Each is an episode attacking fundamentalism.

In Lewis's better works like Elmer Gantry and Babbitt the episodes seem to follow naturally one from the other, but in many of the lesser works like Work of Art or Ann Vickers the transitions are faulty and the episodes themselves seem to bear little relationship one to the other. This episodic organization will be examined in more detail under the discussion of style.

How, then, does Lewis's argumentative method in his speeches compare with his argumentative method in the novels? They are similar. In both Lewis states or implies a thesis and supports it by a variety of instances and examples. In the speeches the directness of the argumentative method produced clarity, but in the novels the reader often feels he is being bombarded with instance after instance, example after example, and that the author is unrealistically manipulating the plot and characters in order to force his thesis upon the reader. In addition, in the case of the novels, as each assertion became less revolutionary and the supporting examples less relevant to modern life, the reader finds Lewis's heavy-handed effort to hammer home his ideas more and more distasteful.

Time

Lewis was fortunate in the timing of most of his novels in the nineteen-twenties, and in the case of his speeches he was especially fortunate in the timing of the Nobel address. One reason the latter stands as a valuable comment on American literature is because of the time it was delivered. "Time represents a stage in the life of problems."[26] Lewis was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. The occasion seemed to mark the end of an age, to affirm the maturity of American letters. Thus, time itself made appropriate Lewis's survey of the strengths, weaknesses, and trends of American literature.

Though the timing of the other speeches seems less important, Lewis did adjust his topics, select his themes, and develop his supporting materials in relation to current topical issues. For example, the depression years were years of pessimism for the book industry; Lewis's efforts to bolster pride in the profession was in keeping with the needs of the time. Similarly, the radio address delivered near the close of the second World War reflected the common concern of mankind to find a way to preserve peace. Indeed,

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[26]Hochmuth, p. 14.

judging from newspaper accounts, a consistent characteristic of Lewis's speaking was his ability to respond to the issues of the time.

The timing of his novels in the decade of the twenties contributed fundamentally to their success. This was a decade of prosperity--people could afford to buy books. More important, it was a time of national self-examination resulting from the disillusionment following the first World War. Old standards were under fire. Lewis was the "spokesman for that generation."[27] But only for that generation--not for the generations of the thirties or forties. In only two novels after 1930 did Lewis utilize a national issue successfully: in Kingsblood Royal he attacked racial bigotry, and in It Can't Happen Here he warned of fascism in America. Ironically, Lewis's reception of the Nobel award marked the end of his leadership in the literary world. Schorer comments on this fact:

> And when the Nobel award came to him in 1930, international literary opinion sealed, as it were, the decade of his prominence, just as Main Street had opened it.[28]

Lewis continued to write, even to produce best sellers, but

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[27]Schorer, p. 270.

[28]Ibid., p. 271.

never again did his stories uniquely match the times.

Form

The unit of form is perhaps the most complex of all rhetorical units. Form concerns the "verbal instrument itself."[29] Knowing that matter and form in art are inseparable, nevertheless, the critic must consider the "broad structural pattern, and particular stylistic features"[30] of a work.

Earlier in this chapter the organizational pattern of Lewis's addresses and novels was briefly examined. The speeches followed a clear, logical development, and the novels followed a loosely episodic pattern. One other element of the organization of Lewis's work is important to note: he usually ended both his speeches and his fiction with optimism. For example, the Nobel address began with a pessimistic look at the lack of maturity and standards in American literary endeavors, but it concluded that "without standards, we have survived."[31] Furthermore, not only had

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[29]Hochmuth, p. 14.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Lewis, "The American Fear of Literature," p. 16.

the artist survived but Lewis predicted a great future for the new American writers like Hemingway, Dos Passos, and William Faulkner.

Beginning with a pessimistic point of view in the speech to the booksellers, Lewis similarly concluded with optimism. The public, he charged, will not continue to prefer radio to Dickens, Hollywood will not forever remain the New Jerusalem, and he could proudly say for himself and his audience that they would continue to serve mankind through books. The radio address, somber in tone, was nevertheless optimistic in supporting a hope that mankind would find a way to curb tyranny and prevent war.

Lewis's novels followed on the whole a similar pattern of optimistic conclusions. Babbitt, for example, concluded with the father embracing the son and urging him toward a better tomorrow. Main Street drew to a close with Carol turning to her baby sleeping in the crib and announcing that it was a bomb to blow up smugness. Kingsblood Royal ended dramatically with the implication that the Negro had only begun to fight for equality.

This optimistic manner of concluding both his speeches and his novels supports Lewis's own evaluation of himself as a romantic. Moreover, the optimism is additional

evidence that Lewis as his audience held to the unspoken conviction that the world of tomorrow will be a better world.

What are the characteristics of Lewis's spoken style? His style is precise, plain, and direct. There are few classical allusions; most of the allusions are to current events. For example, in the Nobel address Lewis discussed the respect the public felt for football in contrast to its indifference to literature, and he identified certain current American idols:

> During the football season, a capable player ranks very nearly with our greatest and most admired heroes --even with Henry Ford, President Hoover, and Colonel Lindbergh.[32]

The language of his speeches was simple as the above example shows, and it usually followed the language of the audience.

> To a true-blue professor of literature in an American university, literature is not something that a plain human being, living today, painfully sits down to produce. No; it is something dead; it is something magically produced by superhuman beings who must, if they are to be regarded as artists at all, have died at least one hundred years before the diabolical invention of the typewriter.[33]

Regardless of the presence of the expression, "true-blue," in the above passage, Lewis used little slang in his speeches;

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[32] Ibid., p. 12.

[33] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

when he did lapse into breezy language it was for a particular effect. In the address to the booksellers, Lewis mimicked himself lecturing to a group of traveling book salesmen:

> "Now this next novel--it's a dandy story--it's by some English woman--fine woman--she's a cousin of the Dean of Chichester--no, I'm wrong, that's that other gal--this one, well, she isn't his cousin, she's his aunt, and he isn't a dean, he's a chiropractor, and . . . ."[34]

In the radio address he ironically commented: "Public murder has become a little too costly--there are people who are really thinking about some sort of a law against it!"[35] In the first illustration Lewis used slang for humorous effect and in the second he used the cliché for ironic emphasis. But on the whole the speeches studied were surprisingly free from this use of language.

Most of his sentences were of medium length; the words were simple ones of one or two syllables; there were few figures of speech, and only an occasional rhetorical question. When Lewis did use the rhetorical question it was sharp, terse, and emphatic. In the radio speech he described artists who were forced into exile by tyrants, and asked:

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[34]"Enemies of the Book," p. 2012.

[35]"The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," p. 34.

"But it's time to stop all that, isn't it?"[36] Even more pointed was the rhetorical question in the Nobel speech: after asserting the lack of standards and leadership in American literature, Lewis demanded, "What institutions have we?"[37] Lewis was fond of parallel structure:

> But the paradox is that in the arts our universities are as cloistered, as far from reality and living creation, as socially and athletically and scientifically they are close to us.[38]

And he often used antithesis:

> Mr. Howells was one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage.[39]

Also, his speeches offer several good examples of the periodic sentence: "It does not represent literary America of today--it represents only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow."[40]

What effect did Lewis's delivery have upon his style? At best his appearance may be characterized as typical of the stereotype of the small-town editor. He looked like a

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[36] Ibid., p. 33.

[37] "The American Fear of Literature," p. 10.

[38] Ibid., p. 12.

[39] Ibid., p. 15.

[40] Ibid., p. 11.

Midwestern provincial. His body was lean, angular, and awkward. Standing before his audiences his arms seemed to shoot out from his body in erratic gestures; his words tumbled rapidly one after the other, and in moments of excitement his voice rose to a shrill pitch. This style of delivery, combined with Lewis's natural bent toward mimicry, was particularly suited to humorous material. Probably the major effect Lewis's delivery had upon his speeches was to encourage him to speak in a humorous vein and to avoid the grave manner. Radio speaking did offer Lewis an escape from his physical limitations, and in "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" we have a rare example of a completely serious speech by Sinclair Lewis.

In summary, then, the characteristics of Lewis's style are wit, directness, simplicity, and forcefulness--all characteristics of a good oral style.

What was the style used in his novels? As mentioned earlier, Lewis's novels are episodic in form. In most of the novels published in the twenties the episodes seemed to follow naturally one from the other, but in the stories published after 1930 the transitions were poor, the examples often ineffective, and the overall unity generally suffered.

In Elmer Gantry the static nature of the story had a

cumulative effect which contributed to the total mood. Mark Schorer compares the structure of the average novel with that which Lewis used in Elmer Gantry:

> Most novels operate through a conflict, dramatized in a plot, of social and individual interest, and the more sustained the pressures of the plot, the more likely is the individual to be forced into a position of new self-awareness, which prominently contains an awareness of his relation to his society. A certain dynamic interchange has been at work, and the result is that the historical forces which contain the individual's experience have been personalized in his awareness. What is more characteristic of the novels of Sinclair Lewis, above all of Elmer Gantry, is that there are no such dynamics of social action, that we are presented with a static, unpersonalized image--and that there lies its horror.[41]

But if this lack of dynamics in Elmer Gantry, Babbitt, and Main Street was in harmony with the total effect the author sought, in most of his stories written in the thirties and forties it was not.

One important reason Lewis failed in these later works was that the episodes themselves lacked dramatic interest. In the successful novels "the smell of Pullman car dust, the food at a church picnic, the contents of the library of a small Methodist bishop" were forceful enough to "fill the outlines of his stereotypes,"[42] but not many readers really

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[41]Schorer, pp. 478-79.

[42]Ibid., p. 478.

cared, for example, about the fine art of hotel keeping which Lewis tried to exemplify in Work of Art. Compare the following excerpt from Elmer Gantry with a typical passage from Work of Art. In the first example Lewis tells how Sharon Falconer accidentally became a healer:

> Sharon came to it by accident. She had regularly offered prayers for the sick, but only absent-mindedly. When Elmer and she had been together for a year, during her meetings in Schenectady a man led up his deaf wife and begged Sharon to heal her. It amused Sharon to send out for some oil (it happened to be shotgun oil, but she properly consecrated it) to anoint the woman's ears, and to pray lustily for healing.
>
> The woman screamed, "Glory to God, I've got my hearing back!"
>
> There was a sensation in the tabernacle and everybody itched with desire to be relieved of what ever ailed him.[43]

In Work of Art the hero solves the serious problem of bell-boy service in his new hotel:

> A yet greater extravagance was the veteran floor waiters. His whole scheme of superior service would fail if guests, when they rang the bell, were answered by the amiable but untrained college students on vacation who were the bell-boys and waiters in most summer hotels. The experienced guest wanted the bell answered by an initiate, to whom the procuring of coffee, stamps, aspirin, or wrapping paper and cord, was a passionate duty.[44]

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[43]Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 212.

[44]Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934), p. 362.

Sinclair Lewis may have been passionately concerned with how the hotel resident received his coffee, stamps, aspirin, or wrapping paper and cord, but it is doubtful if many other Americans worried about it in 1934. This passage serves to demonstrate how Lewis's material refused to support his style in the post 1930 books.

As in the speeches Lewis's language was usually plain, simple, direct, and precise, but unlike his speeches his novels abound with slang, clichés--the vernacular of the Athletic club. Critics have consistently praised him for his accuracy in reproducing talk. This accuracy in recreating American speech contributed to his novels' success in the twenties. Mark Schorer compares Lewis's ability to produce colloquial speech to the similar talent of other American writers:

> From them too (George Ade, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Finley Peter Dunne), but above all from Mark Twain, he derived the gift of the flow of colloquial speech that poured through his novels, here and there in the five early works, but consistently from Main Street on. And this is a strain that at once heightens verisimilitude and palliates terror.[45]

Listen to the speech of Elmer Gantry, minister of the Gospel, as he talks to his fellow voyagers during his first trip to

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[45]Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, p. 289.

Europe:

> Dr. Elmer Gantry was walking the deck of the Scythia, a bright, confident, manly figure in a blue suit, a yachting cap, and white canvas shoes, swinging his arms and beaming pastorally on his fellow athletic maniacs.
>
> He stopped at the deck chairs of a little old couple--a delicate blue-veined old lady, and her husband, with thin hands and a thin white beard.
>
> "Well, you folks seem to be standing the trip pretty good--for old folks!" he roared.
>
> "Yes, thank you very much," said the old lady.
>
> He patted her knee, and boomed, "If there's anything I can do to make things nice and comfy for you, mother, you just holler! Don't be afraid to call on me. I haven't advertised the fact--kind of fun to travel what they call incognito--but fact is, I'm a minister of the gospel, even if I am a husky guy, and it's my pleasure as well as my duty to help folks any-way I can. Say, don't you think it's just about the loveliest thing about this ocean traveling, the way folks have the leisure to get together and exchange ideas? Have you crossed before?"
>
> "Oh, yes, but I don't think I ever shall again," said the old lady.
>
> "That's right--that's right! Tell you how I feel about it, mother." Elmer patted her hand. "We're Americans, and while it's a fine thing to go abroad maybe once or twice--there's nothing so broadening as travel, is there!--still, in America we've got a standard of decency and efficiency that these poor old European countries don't know anything about, and in the long run the good old U. S. A. is the place where you'll find your greatest happiness--especially for folks like us, that aren't any blooming millionaires that can grab off a lot of castles and those kind of things and have a raft of butlers. You bet! Well, just holler when I can be of any service to you. So long, folks! Got to do my three miles!"[46]

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[46]Lewis, Elmer Gantry, pp. 402-03.

Lewis was so good at this sort of mimicry that he made one book, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, entirely of this noise. His skill at mimicry also accounts for the frequent use of public address in his fiction. The long-winded oratory often irritates the reader, but Schorer notes that it also contributes to the total effect.

> Nowhere does Lewis's pleasure in mimicry threaten to carry him so far beyond the demands of his fiction as in his use of public addresses of one sort or another; yet one might point out, too, that if these more than any other elements in his story tend to carry him to its periphery and only there, they are also a very integral part of his satire. Elocution is an old American institution, and a windy, mindless rhetoric has been of its essence. Lewis's use of elocution adds a swelling note to the already loud blat-blat of that public voice that roars and clacks throughout the novels, and if Lewis lets Babbitt admire Chan Mott because he "can make a good talk even when he hasn't got a doggone thing to say," he is also making an observation on the empty restlessness of American life.[47]

Although admired by his critics, Lewis's use of colloquial speech is one more factor that makes his fiction seem at times remote from the modern world.

In the excellent little book, The Elements of Style, William Strunk, Jr. lists twenty-one suggestions for improving style; interestingly, Sinclair Lewis consistently violated many of them:

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[47]Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, p. 353.

1. Place yourself in the background. (violated)
2. Write in a way that comes naturally.
3. Work from a suitable design.
4. Write with nouns and verbs. (violated)
5. Revise and rewrite.
6. Do not overwrite. (violated)
7. Do not overstate. (violated)
8. Avoid the use of qualifiers. (violated)
9. Do not affect a breezy manner. (violated, you bet!)
10. Use orthodox spelling. (sometimes violated)
11. Do not explain too much. (violated)
12. Do not construct awkward adverbs. (violated)
13. Make sure the reader knows who is speaking.
14. Avoid fancy words. (sometimes violated)
15. Do not use dialect unless your ear is good.
16. Be clear.
17. Do not inject opinion. (violated)
18. Use figures of speech sparingly.
19. Do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity.
20. Avoid foreign languages. (violated)
21. Prefer the standard to the offbeat. (violated)[48]

Lewis deliberately violated many of these suggestions for satirical effect. But sometimes the violations failed to enhance the characters, plot, or mood. This is especially true of the novels Lewis wrote after 1930.

In general, then, Lewis's speeches demonstrate a good oral style. The style of his fiction, however, was not

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[48](New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. xiv. [For a typical example of each above violation see the following: (1) Main Street, p. 343; (4) Dodsworth, p. 129; (6) The Man Who Knew Coolidge; (7) Elmer Gantry; (8) Dodsworth, p. 153; (9) Elmer Gantry, p. 328; (10) Arrowsmith, p. 209; (11) Work of Art; (12) Cass Timberlane, p. 139; (14) Main Street, p. 271; (17) Dodsworth, p. 161; (2) Main Street, p. 265; (21) The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 194.

consistent. In his best novels, Babbitt, for example, Lewis's style supported the mood, emphasized the thesis, and delineated the characters. But in many of his novels written after the Nobel Prize the episodes are repetitious, the slang annoying to the reader, and the interjection of Lewis's opinions obvious. When Lewis's ideas were new and his approach a novelty he prospered. Today, many of his ideas seem almost a cliché and his manner of expressing them dated and awkward.

Conclusion

A study of Lewis's rhetorical methods in his speeches and his novels indicates Lewis used many of the same methods in the two arts. In both his speaking and his writing Lewis's reputation as a man of controversy contributed to his popularity during his lifetime, though the modern reader is no longer greatly influenced by this factor. Lewis's listening audience was more often than not made up of men and women with an unusual interest in the arts--especially the literary arts. As a result Lewis selected topics and supporting examples from the world of art and scholarship, and made many references to current events. In his novels he adapted similarly by selecting subject matter and illustrations from the broad American scene. As a writer Lewis was not able to

continue successfully his adaptation to his reading public after 1930. But he was master of his audience and his material during the decade of the twenties. He can justly be praised as the spokesman for a generation of Americans. Schorer compares him to Charles Dickens:

> Like his master, Dickens, he created a gallery of characters who have independent life outside the novels, with all their obvious limitations, characters that live now in American tradition itself. If they are not as numerous or as rich as Dickens's, they are nevertheless of the same breed--gigantic, nearly mythological figures that embody (I do not say duplicate) the major traits of their class.[49]

Lewis exemplified an excellent spoken style though a limited one: his speeches were clear, precise, and entertaining. Characteristic of Lewis they have few classical allusions or few statements from authority, but many instances from contemporary life; he supported his theses through logical development of his ideas. Lewis's writing style was similar in certain respects to his spoken style. Interestingly enough what are strengths in the spoken style--use of topical data, numerous supporting instances or examples, logical development of arguments--contributes to Lewis's stylistic weaknesses as a novelist. The use of topical material makes the novels seem dated today. The

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[49] Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, p. 813.

development of a thesis supported by numerous examples produced an episodic organization that is sometimes both tedious and obvious. Also, Lewis's theses are largely accepted now and his stories seem more and more irrelevant to modern readers. Lewis's spoken style was relatively free from slang or cliché. In his novels the writer displayed great skill in reproducing the American vernacular, a skill which perhaps further dates the works. Mark Schorer summarizes both the weaknesses and strengths of Lewis's style:

> He did not know, one suspects, how increasingly old-fashioned he came to sound (the penalty of always striving to be "new") or that the generation immediately following upon his own--Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner--had nothing to learn from him, that he spoke for an older American experience than theirs. But in a larger sense than is suggested by the words style and structure, he was an extraordinary influence, the major figure, probably, in what is called the liberation of modern American literature. For writers just a little younger than the Hemingway group, he served as a kind of model of what the literary man can be.[50]

One lesson can be learned from comparing Lewis the writer to Lewis the speaker: the art of speaking and the art of writing have much in common, but the speaker's problem of adapting to an immediate audience at a particular juncture of history is only a small part of the author's

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[50] Ibid., p. 812.

problem in adapting to a timeless audience. If the writer succeeds too well in adapting to his contemporary audience he may lose much of his significance for later generations of readers.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Thirty-one years after Sinclair Lewis became the first American novelist to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, his biographer, Mark Schorer, characterized the Sauk Centre rebel as "one of the worst writers in modern American literature." Then, Schorer added, "But without his writing one cannot imagine modern American literature. That is because without his writing, we can hardly imagine ourselves."[1] These apparently contradictory statements pose the riddle of Sinclair Lewis. How could a novelist be a bad writer and yet make a significant contribution through writing to a people's understanding of itself? If Lewis did not achieve this feat through the artistry of his stories, how did he achieve it?

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[1]*Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 813.

This dissertation asserts that much of Sinclair Lewis's writing as his speaking was rhetorical in intention, and that in fulfilling his rhetorical goals he made a major contribution to America's understanding of herself. These same rhetorical goals, however, impeded his artistic development as a teller of tales.

Lewis's career offers a unique opportunity to examine the rhetorical methods of a man who was both a public speaker and a novelist. This dissertation attempted to answer two questions: (1) What ideas and values basic to Lewis's philosophy appear in both his speeches and his literary works? (2) How did he adapt his ideas to the various media and audiences in order to most effectively present a given argument?

In the process of answering these two questions the writer considered Lewis's career as a speaker and novelist in the context of the age in which he lived with an emphasis upon his development as a social critic. The writer investigated three of Lewis's most outstanding public addresses: "The American Fear of Literature," "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace." The novels selected for comparison were Main Street, Babbitt, Elmer Gantry, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, and It Can't Happen Here.

They represent, according to many critics, the best writing of Lewis. The themes in the addresses were then compared with similar themes in the six novels along with a general investigation of the rhetorical function of Lewis's novels. Finally, Lewis's rhetorical methodology in the three speeches was compared with that in the six novels. The present chapter presents a summary of the findings of this investigation.

Sinclair Lewis: American Writer and Speaker

The Writer in Context

World War I marked the change in America from an isolated nation to a world power. The war also marked a change in American literature. Instead of looking toward Europe for literary leadership, writers in the United States began to set their own standards. Sentimental romances like Gene Stratton-Porter's A Girl of the Limberlost found an outlet in the pulp magazines of the period or in the motion pictures. They were replaced in serious fiction by novels of realism and revolt. In particular, the new writers--Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Eugene O'Neill, H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis--were in revolt against the standards of America's provincial past. In the nineteen-twenties Sinclair Lewis became a specialist in depicting middle class Americans. In

the process he achieved for himself wealth and fame, and for his nation the first Nobel Prize for Literature.

When Lewis was born in the small village of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885, the United States was an isolated provincial country without the automobile, radio, or television. When he died in Rome in 1951, the United States had lost much of its provincialism because of two world wars and the amazing modern methods of transportation and communication. Lewis chronicled in his fiction this transition from provincial isolation to sophisticated world leadership.

Lewis thought of himself not as a propagandist but as a critic, and from Main Street to Kingsblood Royal his books satirized Americans. Because he loved to name names in both his novels and speeches, and because he attacked certain sacred cows in American society, Sinclair Lewis was sometimes hated, often personally abused, and always a topic of controversy. Each book he wrote created a stir in the press, each brought rich financial rewards to the author, and two of them are probably lasting American classics: Main Street and Babbitt. But literary fame did not bring the writer happiness.

Most of his life, Lewis was lonely, restless, and a heavy drinker. Perhaps his fascinating but almost grotesque appearance contributed to his isolation: red hair, bulging

blue eyes, irregular teeth, a face ravaged by skin cancer, an awkward angular body--long legs and short torso--combined with his fast-paced, shrill Midwestern speech to produce the semblance of an oaf. Ironically, "Red" Lewis seemed the personification of the country store type that he ridiculed in many of his novels. Newsweek cruelly referred to Lewis recently as the "scarecrow of Sauk Centre."[2] Probably Lewis was painfully aware himself of his physical shortcomings.

Whatever the reasons, Lewis was never successful in establishing close permanent relationships with others. From his childhood differences with his austere father through two unsuccessful marriages, Lewis displayed an unhappy ability to destroy any warm personal association with other human beings. His death in Rome ministered to by a few strangers seems to epitomize the isolation of his life.

But if his personal life was isolated, his public life was crowded.

Main Street brought Lewis fame and fortune. Published in 1920, it was only the first of many novels that created a hullabaloo in the nineteen-twenties. Crowning his

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[2]"Sauk Centre Scarecrow," Review of Sinclair Lewis: An American Life, by Mark Schorer, LVIII Newsweek (October 2, 1961), p. 89.

career was the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded him by the Swedish Academy in 1930. He was the first American writer to be so honored.

Lewis thought of the Prize not only as an honor to himself, but as world acknowledgment of America's literary maturity. Wisecrack as he might, he was deeply wounded by critics who said that awarding the Prize to Lewis was an insult to the United States. The Nobel Prize seems to be typical of the successes of Lewis's life. It caused strong public reaction with a mixture of high praise and bitter personal attack.

Lewis's life and writing have been compared with that of Charles Dickens: both were talkers, clowns, moralizers, exhibitionists; both loved the stage and the platform; humor and exaggeration characterize the work of both; both came of humble background--provincial backgrounds, if you will; both identified with their audiences, were excellent journalists and popular writers--in the sense that they were avidly read by the average man; most important of all, both were, as Clifton Fadiman said, "great enlargers of the sense of life."[3]

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[3]"Biographical Sketch," Saturday Review of Literature, (May 24, 1947), 9.

Mark Schorer and Eric Goldman, as well as the writer of this study, support the theory that Lewis was the literary spokesman for a generation of Americans. To the world and to the nation he presented American culture and American attitudes toward that culture. Lewis's Babbitt as Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is a lasting national masterpiece.[4] As novelists they distorted, exaggerated, and castigated American society, but they moved the public to read their social criticism. What the public read in Uncle Tom's Cabin was an attack upon slavery. What they read in Lewis's novels was an attack upon other forces of tyranny.

The Speaker in Context

That Sinclair Lewis could no more refrain from speaking than he could from writing is obvious from his long career upon the public platform. And his speaking career was as filled with controversy as his writing career. Lewis enjoyed conflict. Periodically throughout his life he took

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[4]Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane are among those who support the idea that Lewis helped Americans understand themselves. They wrote that Lewis's books "aroused the world to a better understanding of America and affected the course of our national thinking about America and Americans." See, e. g. their introduction to The Man from Main Street, ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. xiv.

part in public debates. In a way, most of his public addresses were refutations of current public attitudes.

As a speaker he was usually popular. True, he was eccentric in appearance, but he was also exciting and entertaining: speaking rapidly, moving restlessly about the platform, gesturing angularly, picking up and putting down a time piece, pushing his hands into his pockets and pulling them out again, glancing from time to time at his notes, and saying with energy and force what he believed about any topic current in the day, always naming names. His speeches were full of serious charges couched in frivolous language and frivolous charges couched in mockingly serious language. Most often he disparaged Americans for not taking their literature seriously. After all they took golf seriously, football, and Dick Tracy.

In spite of the charge that Lewis hated to speak, speak he did, and to every kind of audience. He spoke at funerals and banquets. He addressed Rotary clubs, Kiwanis clubs, Sauk Centre's Commercial Club, Sauk Centre's Citizens Club, and numerous ladies' book clubs. He talked before Sunday school classes, political rallies, journalism classes, crowds of correspondents, radio audiences, and state legislators. Hundreds of college students across America and

abroad heard Sinclair Lewis speak.

"Red" Lewis was a showman. He usually spoke from brief notes. Only on a few occasions did he use a manuscript. His delivery was swift and energetic. Mimicry and satire were his stock in trade. His words often produced headlines. Audiences were sometimes aghast at a comment, but his wit and charm softened them, and the typical evening ended with a warm friendship between "Red" and his audience.

Shortly after being named for the Nobel Prize, Lewis characterized himself:

> But I in my rashness, a rashness born, perhaps, of the fact that I have been awarded the Nobel Prize, venture to think that the writer of fiction who tries to give expression to the spirit of a time and a place and reveal the very soul of a man is also important. I venture to think that those who create poetry and music may be almost as important as the coach of a Mid-western football team or the manufacturer of a carburetor.[5]

Lewis was often rash, both with the spoken word and with the printed word. And he was an artist living in the age of the machine. Most important of all, however, both as a writer and as a speaker he was motivated by a knowledge that the creative man is part of the great struggle to protect the individualistic human spirit.

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[5]New York Times, November 30, 1930, p. 2.

The Writer as Rhetorician

Sinclair Lewis was an evangelist for the American dream of a society of free men. He honored the virtues of honesty and integrity, and he glorified individuality while he deplored hypocrisy, corruption, and standardization. Though Lewis was a teller of tales, he freely sacrificed the story when he needed or felt he needed to make his thesis clear to the reader. In this sense he was more rhetorician than fictionist. Lewis must have partly recognized the evangelical nature of his role when he said in the Nobel address that he was a writer "whose most anarchistic assertion has been that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures."[6]

Lewis denounced the restricting forces which he believed prevented the fulfillment of the American dream. He assailed provincialism as it expressed itself in religious fundamentalism and puritanism. He assaulted materialism as it expressed itself in commercialism in education, science, and the arts. He decried standardization in American language, dress, architecture, education, religion, business,

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[6]"The American Fear of Literature," in The Man from Main Street, p. 6.

art, and thought.

This American Diogenes was not afraid to name names. In the course of his career he antagonized many groups from Rotary to the D. A. R. Beginning with Main Street Lewis attempted in his speeches and his fiction to weaken the forces of restriction. When he referred to Europe in his novels to highlight American flaws many of his countrymen failed to notice that he also indicated certain American traits were superior to European traits. In all his stories the protagonist returns to the United States with a better understanding of his nation, a greater appreciation of both her faults and virtues.

Approximately fifteen of Lewis's novels can be classed as polemics. They can be divided into three categories: (1) the novels that present a vigorous social protest against some restrictive force, for example, Carol Kennicott's battle with the morés of the American village in Main Street (2) the novels that expose corruption, for example, religious hypocrisy in Elmer Gantry; (3) the novels that attempt to define and praise admirable American qualities through the personification of certain virtues in the protagonist, for example, the New England individuality of Doremus Jessup in It Can't Happen Here.

During the nineteen-twenties Sinclair Lewis did for American culture what the modern popularizing sociologists attempt to do: He presented American culture and American attitudes to the nation and to the world in the hope of correcting faults in American life.

Themes in the Selected Speeches and Novels

The Addresses

Though Lewis usually spoke from a few notes rather than from a text, some complete texts of his speeches are available. The texts of the three addresses investigated, "The American Fear of Literature," "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," exist in both Lewis's typed original and in published editions. These texts allow a detailed examination of Lewis's oratory as demonstrated in three distinct instances: the speeches were separate in time, audience, and topic.

Lewis delivered the Nobel address before an audience of international scholars on December 12, 1930. The author evaluated the evolution of American literature from about the turn of the century to 1930, and he predicted the direction of future development. Primarily, Lewis discussed the relationship of American letters to American culture. The theme

of the address was: America's intellectual life is divorced from all the national standards of importance and reality. Lewis carefully prepared his speech. The language was simple, clear, direct; he used wit, irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration to dramatize his contentions. Lewis explicitly stated his purpose: "I wish, in this address, to consider certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present day American literature."[7] He argued that his remarks were not motivated by any desire to gratify a grudge, that they were not intended as a complaint for himself but for American literature in general.

The author contrasted the state of letters in the United States with the commercial accomplishments of the nation. He emphasized the gap between American intellectual life and business life. According to Lewis, industrialism, finance, and science flourished in America, but the only arts that were respected were architecture and the film. The body of the speech included examples which illustrated America's lack of respect for literary art. These examples ranged from a castigation of New Humanism to a rebuke for all citizens who preferred glorification of national faults to a realistic

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[7] Ibid., p. 4.

appraisal of the country. Lewis was painfully clear. He identified by name those he believed were great artists and those he thought deleterious to American literary development. He concluded with an optimistic prediction of future literary greatness for the United States.

What Lewis said in this address was not startlingly new, but his remarks did place modern American literature in perspective and announced to the world the maturity of American letters.

The Stockholm audience warmly applauded the speech, but many in the United States attacked it. The address remains one of the outstanding speeches given by an American awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Six years after the Nobel award, Lewis addressed an audience of his peers at the American Booksellers Association's annual dinner in New York City, May 11, 1936. Lewis easily adjusted to the specialized nature of his auditors. The author spoke about the specific problems facing the publishing industry during the depression years, but he also discussed the general relationship of books to American culture. The "Enemies of the Book" address was lighter in tone than the Nobel address. Many of the illustrations were frivolous even to the point of burlesque. Typical of the tone

of his remarks was his apology for not permitting the talk to be broadcast in the "twelve minutes and nine seconds in between programs of the Lollypop Lilters and the Ex-Lax Symphony Orchestra, playing the classical masterpieces of Sousa and Irving Berlin."[8]

The address to the booksellers was as explicit in developing a theme as the Nobel address. Contradicting his title, Lewis stated that supplanters, not enemies, reduced the sale of books in America. The supplanters were pulp magazines, the radio, the phonograph, films, bridge, travel, etc. As in the Nobel address, the novelist ended his speech with optimism. According to Lewis, nothing would ever completely supplant the old-fashioned printed book. The public would not forever prefer the "unctuous verbal caresses of radio-announcers to the many-colored pages of Dickens."[9] With his final words he stated his conviction that books made a valuable, even spiritual, contribution to the culture of a nation. This speech as the Nobel address had an evangelical aura; Lewis attempted to motivate in the audience a new pride in bookselling. Unlike the other two speeches

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[8]Sinclair Lewis, "Enemies of the Book," Publishers' Weekly, CXXIX (May 23, 1936), p. 2011.

[9]Ibid., p. 2014.

studied, "Enemies of the Book" is similar in tone to the many extemporaneous talks given by Lewis. For this reason it offers the present-day reader insight into the easy, sometimes gay, always honest, approach Lewis used in his informal talks.

The nineteen forties were years of world war. Though the depression years of the thirties had been somber, they could not compare with the dark years of global war. Lewis lost a son in the conflict. The writer became more and more convinced that the creative man should take a positive stand on political issues. He used the occasion of the Third Opera Victory Rally of the Metropolitan Opera to broadcast his view that tyranny in any form, especially political oppression, stifles the creative worker. Only in an atmosphere of freedom and peace could the artist or the scientist make a worthy contribution to mankind.

The radio address was more serious in mood than either of the two addresses studied previously, and the rare flashes of humor were sarcastic in tone. "Public murder has become a little too costly--there are people who are really thinking about some sort of a law against it."[10] This talk

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[10]Sinclair Lewis, "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," in The Man from Main Street, p. 34.

as the others examined indicates Lewis's ability to reflect the mood of the audience.

The three addresses express the intrinsic honesty of the man. The language is plain. The assertions are stated directly. Each speech elucidates Lewis's constant concern with the relationship of American letters to American culture and his belief that the writer makes a realistic contribution to a nation's life.

The Novels

From Main Street to World So Wide Lewis attacked the forces that obstructed the perfectibility of American society. In Main Street, he first and perhaps most accurately, identified the enemy:

> It is the Harry Haydocks, the Dave Dyers, the Jackson Elders, small busy men crushingly powerful in their common purpose, viewing themselves as men of the world but keeping themselves men of the cash register and the comic film, who make the town a sterile oligarchy.[11]

Sinclair Lewis feared that H. L. Mencken's Boobus Americanus was the new breed of Americans.

Two types of individuals people Lewis's stories, those who resist tyranny and those who embrace it. The naïve

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[11](New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1920), p. 267.

Carol Kennicott was typical of those who resisted. Carol conducts the reader on a tour through Gopher Prairie, U. S. A., and the theme of the Nobel address as well as the themes of "Enemies of the Book," and "The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace" are indirectly exemplified.

Carol's failure to bolster the library fund indicates the breach between intellectual life in the community and the citizen's standards of importance. The supplanting of books is dramatically illustrated by Carol's own surrender to the movie houses. Each episode portraying the provincial curbs and puritan taboos supports Lewis's assertion that the individual cannot make any worthwhile contribution to his society without freedom.

Typical of the man who surrendered to dictatorship is George Follansbee Babbitt. Babbitt is perhaps the greatest of all Lewis's books, maybe the only one which will be read a hundred years from now. In it Lewis delineates the slow spiritual death--loss of individuality, freedom of action and choice--by the average citizen in the modern materialistic age. The theme that there is a breach between intellectual life and national standards of reality and importance is illustrated over and over again in the story of George F. Babbitt lost in a land of eighty-story buildings,

motors by the million, and wheat by the billions of bushels.

Babbitt with his bloated body is disgusting when contrasted with the slender steel towers of Zenith's business district. Love of learning is replaced in Babbitt by love of money. The theme of the supplanters of books is seen over and over in the story, but most revealing were Babbitt's efforts to guide his son's education. How wonderful that someone, the man who first thought of correspondence courses, had come along "with the brains to not leave education to a lot of bookworms and impractical theorists but make a big thing out of it." Babbitt put it in a nut shell: "There's a whole lot of valuable time lost even at the U., studying poetry and French and subjects that never brought in anybody a cent."[12]

The oppression of standardization is nowhere in Lewis's novels more graphically described than in Babbitt. Babbitt celebrates his own loss of liberty in a speech honoring the ideal citizen before the Zenith Real Estate Board. With cliché after cliché he praises conformity:

> I tell you, Zenith and her sister-cities are producing a new type of civilization. There are many resemblances between Zenith and these other burgs, and I'm darn glad of it! The extraordinary, growing, and sane standardization of stores, offices, streets,

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[12]Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 84.

> hotels, clothes, and newspapers throughout the United States shows how strong and enduring a type is ours.[13]

But even Babbitt senses something may be wrong with the miles of paved streets, the hundreds of bathrooms, and the millions of vacuum cleaners when they leave a man strangely unsatisfied.

In Dodsworth Lewis exemplifies the theme of the Nobel speech by praising the industrial and geographical grandeur of the United States, honoring genuine artistic endeavors, and ridiculing the self-appointed high priests of art. It Can't Happen Here and Arrowsmith reflect the theme that the creative man, indeed any worthy citizen, needs freedom before he can make any significant contribution to his society.

Thus, in novel after novel Lewis attacked provincialism, materialism, and standardization. In doing so he exemplified the themes in the selected speeches.

Rhetorical Adaptation

Lewis had a more celebrated reputation as a novelist than as a public speaker, but he was relatively successful

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[13] Ibid., p. 184.

in both areas. That is, he was in demand as a writer and as a speaker. How did his oral and his written methodology compare?

In philosophy the fiction and the speeches are alike: both express an underlying belief in the possibility of building a perfect society of free men in America. Both reveal, as Lewis himself recognized, that he was not a cold-eyed realist but a sentimental romantic. Both reveal a man who was in close touch with the period of the nineteen-twenties as a whole, and in his speaking and in his fiction he represented American mentality arriving at maturity. Lewis was not an innovator, but he held up a mirror, albeit a distorted mirror, to America and recorded a period which, according to Howard Mumford Jones, belongs to an "era distant now and strange as the days of Queen Victoria."[14]

Lewis's reputation as a man of controversy encouraged Americans to read his novels and to attend his lectures. Lewis was well aware of the value of publicity, and he may have deliberately exaggerated certain statements in his speeches and novels to assure a reaction in the press. At the same time he was a man who reacted passionately to events of

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[14]Review of Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis, by Sinclair Lewis, Saturday Review of Literature, XII (July 6, 1935), p. 35.

the time. The public interest in the Nobel award, for example, gave Lewis a world audience for his views on American literature. The controversy surrounding Elmer Gantry meant that Lewis had an opportunity to press his views on religious fundamentalism before a widespread reading public.

Lewis organized his novels and speeches in a strikingly similar manner. Each advanced a thesis and supported it with instances and examples. In the Nobel address Lewis selected examples from the world of scholarship and literary art, in the address to the booksellers he chose illustrations from the world of book publishing, and in the radio talk he took his examples from literary, musical, and scientific circles. Lewis usually preferred examples from the general American scene for his novels. For example, Babbitt has narrations of service club meetings and fishing trips along with detailed accounts of the mundane activities of a middle-class businessman from the brushing of his teeth in the morning to a minute report of luncheon high jinks at his club. Each illustration supported the thesis that America is becoming a nation of stultifying standardization.

Lewis rarely quoted from authorities in his addresses, but he attempted to establish himself as an authority on the particular subject. In the novels he expressed

himself on a kaleidoscope of topics from socialism to abortion. The accuracy with which he reported the routine activities of his characters may have encouraged the reader to accept also his social commentary.

Irony is a characteristic of Lewis's speaking and novels. Elmer Gantry, for example, closes with the depraved Elmer saying: "Dear Lord, thy work is but begun! We shall yet make these United States a moral nation!"[15] The entire story of Babbitt is an ironic comparison of magnificent architecture and awesome industrial power with the flabby, impotent modern American. In the Nobel address Lewis suggested how ironic it was that the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature should be bitterly attacked by his own countrymen. He extended this irony to the entire relationship of American letters to American culture by contrasting the lack of respect and leadership in the arts with America's intense regard for commercial enterprises.

The clarity of Lewis's addresses is due in part to his direct statement of a thesis with logically arranged supporting examples, and in part to his plain language. Most of the sentences have few figures of speech or classical

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[15](New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 432.

allusions, and when he used the rhetorical question, it was direct and terse. All in all the characteristics of Lewis's oral style are simplicity, directness, and wit.

The episodic arrangement of the novels complemented the mood in his best stories, Main Street and Babbitt, but in the novels published after 1930 the transitions between episodes are sometimes weak and the supporting examples often trivial or uninteresting. Lewis's speeches were relatively free from slang, but in his stories he used colloquial speech to delineate a character or for humorous effect, and this frequent use of slang does date his fiction. Most important of all, the theses in many of his novels are largely accepted today and the numerous supporting illustrations seem heavy-handed and obvious.

Summary

Sinclair Lewis's literary and oral efforts were deliberate attempts to promote changes in American attitudes. Lewis was an optimistic evangelist of the romantic American dream of a perfect society of free men. Both the speeches and novels examined rested upon a common premise: The fulfillment of the American dream was threatened by puritanism, provincialism, materialism, and standardization. The

speeches treated specifically the effects these forces had upon the development of American literary art, and the novels portrayed the effects these forces had upon the life of the average American citizen. According to Lewis, the struggle for Americans in the twentieth century was for integrity and individuality against the forces of orthodoxy and standardization.

Each speech was based upon a thesis which Lewis supported with numerous examples from current events, but with few classical allusions, statements from authorities, or figures of speech. The language was simple, precise, and usually free from slang.

In each novel Lewis also supported a thesis with example after example from contemporary life. This produced an episodic arrangement which sometimes becomes tedious. Lewis displayed great skill in reproducing the American vernacular, but his deliberate use of slang, clichés, and topical material dates the stories.

Lewis was remarkably successful in adapting his ideas to those of his audiences in the nineteen-twenties. He has been called the spokesman for a generation of Americans, but his theses are largely accepted today and his arguments are more and more irrelevant to modern readers.

This raises the question, "Can a novelist adjust to his contemporary reader so well that he loses much of his significance for future readers?" Clearly, the speaker's problem of meeting the needs of an audience living in a particular moment of history is only part of the novelist's problem of adapting to contemporary and future generations. The art of fiction is the art of telling stories, but sometimes Lewis intruded his opinions to the detriment of the story. Some flaws in his fiction may have resulted from a greater desire to press home a thesis than to tell the story well.

The novels and addresses reveal a passionate and excitable man who hated tyranny and loved freedom. The fury, indignation, and passion his works aroused during his lifetime have largely passed away, but his novels and speeches continue to generate thought.

If Sinclair Lewis preferred emphasis to proportion, he was, nevertheless, in harmony with the generation he represented. Perhaps he can be forgiven for his lack of subtlety, because within his limitations he helped the world to understand America and Americans to understand themselves: he created a recognizable American type.

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APPENDIX I

THE AMERICAN FEAR OF LITERATURE

An address by Sinclair Lewis before the Swedish Academy on December 12, 1930

Members of the Swedish Academy; ladies and gentlemen: Were I to express my feeling of honor and pleasure in having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, I should be fulsome and perhaps tedious, and I present my gratitude with a plain "Thank you."

I wish, in this address, to consider certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature. To discuss this with complete and unguarded frankness--and I should not insult you by being otherwise than completely honest, however indiscreet--it will be necessary for me to be a little impolite regarding certain institutions and persons of my own greatly beloved land.

But I beg of you to believe that I am in no case gratifying a grudge. Fortune has dealt with me rather too

well. I have known little struggle, not much poverty, many generosities. Now and then I have, for my books or myself, been somewhat warmly denounced--there was one good pastor in California who upon reading my Elmer Gantry desired to lead a mob and lynch me, while another holy man in the State of Maine wondered if there was no respectable and righteous way of putting me in jail. And, much harder to endure than any raging condemnation, a certain number of old acquaintances among journalists, what in the galloping American slang we call the "I Knew Him When Club," have scribbled that since they know me personally, therefore I must be a rather low sort of fellow and certainly no writer. But if I have now and then received such cheering brickbats, still I, who have heaved a good many bricks myself, would be fatuous not to expect a fair number in return.

No, I have for myself no conceivable complaint to make, and yet for American literature in general, and its standing in a country where industrialism and finance and science flourish and the only arts that are vital and respected are architecture and the film, I have a considerable complaint.

I can illustrate by an incident which chances to concern the Swedish Academy and myself and which happened a

few days ago, just before I took ship at New York for Sweden. There is in America a learned and most amiable old gentleman who has been a pastor, a university professor, and a diplomat. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and no few universities have honored him with degrees. As a writer he is chiefly known for his pleasant little essays on the joy of fishing. I do not suppose that professional fishermen, whose lives depend on the run of cod or herring, find it altogether an amusing occupation, but from these essays I learned, as a boy, that there is something very important and spiritual about catching fish, if you have no need of doing so.

This scholar stated, and publicly, that in awarding the Nobel Prize to a person who has scoffed at American institutions as much as I have, the Nobel Committee and the Swedish Academy had insulted America. I don't know whether, as an ex-diplomat, he intends to have an international incident made of it, and perhaps demand of the American Government that they land Marines in Stockholm to protect American literary rights, but I hope not.

I should have supposed that to a man so learned as to have been made a Doctor of Divinity, a Doctor of Letters, and I do not know how many other imposing magnificences, the

matter would have seemed different; I should have supposed that he would have reasoned, "Although personally I dislike this man's books, nevertheless the Swedish Academy has in choosing him honored America by assuming that the Americans are no longer a puerile backwoods clan, so inferior that they are afraid of criticism, but instead a nation come of age and able to consider calmly and maturely any dissection of their land, however scoffing."

I should even have supposed that so international a scholar would have believed that Scandinavia, accustomed to the works of Strindberg, Ibsen, and Pontoppidan, would not have been peculiarly shocked by a writer whose most anarchistic assertion has been that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures.

I believe that Strindberg rarely sang the "Star-Spangled Banner" or addressed Rotary Clubs, yet Sweden seems to have survived him.

I have at such length discussed this criticism of the learned fisherman not because it has any conceivable importance in itself, but because it does illustrate the fact that in America most of us--not readers alone but even writers--are still afraid of any literature which is not a

glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults as well as our virtues. To be not only a best-seller in America but to be really beloved, a novelist must assert that all American men are tall, handsome, rich, honest, and powerful at golf; that all country towns are filled with neighbors who do nothing from day to day save go about being kind to one another; that although American girls may be wild, they change always into perfect wives and mothers; and that, geographically, America is composed solely of New York, which is inhabited entirely by millionaires; of the West, which keeps unchanged all the boisterous heroism of 1870; and of the South, where every one lives on a plantation perpetually glossy with moonlight and scented with magnolias.

It is not today vastly more true than it was twenty years ago that such novelists of ours as you have read in Sweden, novelists like Dreiser and Willa Cather, are authentically popular and influential in America. As it was revealed by the venerable fishing Academician whom I have quoted, we still most revere the writers for the popular magazines who in a hearty and edifying chorus chant that the America of a hundred and twenty million population is still as simple, as pastoral, as it was when it had but forty million; that in an industrial plant with ten thousand employees,

the relationship between the worker and the manager is still as neighborly and uncomplex as in a factory of 1840, with five employees; that the relationships between father and son, between husband and wife, are precisely the same in an apartment in a thirty-story palace today, with three motor cars awaiting the family below and five books on the library shelves and a divorce imminent in the family next week, as were those relationships in a rose-veiled five-room cottage in 1880; that, in fine, America has gone through the revolutionary change from rustic colony to world-empire without having in the least altered the bucolic and Puritanic simplicity of Uncle Sam.

I am, actually, extremely grateful to the fishing Academician for having somewhat condemned me. For since he is a leading member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has released me, has given me the right to speak as frankly of that Academy as he has spoken of me. And in any honest study of American intellectualism today, that curious institution must be considered.

Before I consider the Academy, however, let me sketch a fantasy which has pleased me the last few days in the unavoidable idleness of a rough trip on the Atlantic. I am sure that you know, by now, that the award to me of the

Nobel Prize has by no means been altogether popular in America. Doubtless the experience is not new to you. I fancy that when you gave the award even to Thomas Mann, whose Zauberberg seems to me to contain the whole of intellectual Europe, even when you gave it to Kipling, whose social significance is so profound that it has been rather authoritatively said that he created the British Empire, even when you gave it to Bernard Shaw, there were countrymen of those authors who complained because you did not choose another.

And I imagined what would have been said had you chosen some American other than myself. Suppose you had taken Theodore Dreiser.

Now to me, as to many other American writers, Dreiser more than any other man, marching alone, usually unappreciated, often hated, has cleared the trail from Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life. Without his pioneering, I doubt if any of us could, unless we like to be sent to jail, seek to express life and beauty and terror.

My great colleague Sherwood Anderson has proclaimed this leadership of Dreiser. I am delighted to join him. Dreiser's great first novel, Sister Carrie, which he dared to publish thirty long years ago and which I read twenty-five

years ago, came to house-bound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman.

Yet had you given the Prize to Mr. Dreiser, you would have heard groans from America; you would have heard that his style--I am not exactly sure what this mystic quality "style" may be, but I find the word so often in the writings of minor critics that I suppose it must exist--you would have heard that his style is cumbersome, that his choice of words is insensitive, that his books are interminable. And certainly respectable scholars would complain that in Mr. Dreiser's world, men and women are often sinful and tragic and despairing, instead of being forever sunny and full of song and virtue, as befits authentic Americans.

And had you chosen Mr. Eugene O'Neill, who has done nothing much in American drama save to transform it utterly, in ten or twelve years, from a false world of neat and competent trickery to a world of splendor and fear and greatness, you would have been reminded that he has done something far worse than scoffing--he has seen life as not to be neatly arranged in the study of a scholar but as a terrifying, magnificent and often quite horrible thing akin to the tornado, the earthquake, the devastating fire.

And had you given Mr. James Branch Cabell the Prize, you would have been told that he is too fantastically malicious. So would you have been told that Miss Willa Cather, for all the homely virtue of her novels concerning the peasants of Nebraska, has in her novel, The Lost Lady, been so untrue to America's patent and perpetual and possibly tedious virtuousness as to picture an abandoned woman who remains, nevertheless, uncannily charming even to the virtuous, in a story without any moral; that Mr. Henry Mencken is the worst of all scoffers; that Mr. Sherwood Anderson viciously errs in considering sex as important a force in life as fishing; that Mr. Upton Sinclair, being a Socialist, sins against the perfectness of American capitalistic mass-production; that Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer is un-American in regarding graciousness of manner and beauty of surface as of some importance in the endurance of daily life; and that Mr. Ernest Hemingway is not only too young but, far worse, uses language which should be unknown to gentlemen; that he acknowledges drunkenness as one of man's eternal ways to happiness, and asserts that a soldier may find love more significant than the hearty slaughter of men in battle.

Yes, they are wicked, these colleagues of mine; you would have done almost as evilly to have chosen them as to

have chosen me; and as a chauvinistic American--only, mind you, as an American of 1930 and not of 1880--I rejoice that they are my countrymen and countrywomen, and that I may speak of them with pride even in the Europe of Thomas Mann, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Knut Hamsun, Arnold Bennett, Feuchtwanger, Selma Lagerlof, Sigrid Undset, Werner von Heidenstam, D'Annunzio, Romain Rolland.

It is my fate in this paper to swing constantly from optimism to pessimism and back, but so is it the fate of any one who writes or speaks of anything in America--the most contradictory, the most depressing, the most stirring, of any land in the world today.

Thus, having with no muted pride called the roll of what seem to me to be great men and women in American literary life today, and having indeed omitted a dozen other names of which I should like to boast were there time, I must turn again and assert that in our contemporary American literature, indeed in all American arts save architecture and the film, we--yes, we who have such pregnant and vigorous standards in commerce and science--have no standards, no healing communication, no heroes to be followed nor villains to be condemned, no certain ways to be pursued and no dangerous paths to be avoided.

The American novelist or poet or dramatist or sculptor or painter must work alone, in confusion, unassisted save by his own integrity.

That, of course, has always been the lot of the artist. The vagabond and criminal Francois Villon had certainly no smug and comfortable refuge in which elegant ladies would hold his hand and comfort his starveling soul and more starved body. He, veritably a great man, destined to outlive in history all the dukes and puissant cardinals whose robes he was esteemed unworthy to touch, had for his lot the gutter and the hardened crust.

Such poverty is not for the artist in America. They pay us, indeed, only too well; that writer is a failure who cannot have his butler and motor and his villa at Palm Beach, where he is permitted to mingle almost in equality with the barons of banking. But he is oppressed ever by something worse than poverty--by the feeling that what he creates does not matter, that he is expected by his readers to be only a decorator or a clown, or that he is good-naturedly accepted as a scoffer whose bark probably is worse than his bite and who probably is a good fellow at heart, who in any case certainly does not count in a land that produces eighty-story buildings, motors by the million, and wheat by the billions

of bushels. And he has no institution, no group, to which he can turn for inspiration, whose criticism he can accept and whose praise will be precious to him.

What institutions have we?

The American Academy of Arts and Letters does contain along with several excellent painters and architects and statesmen, such a really distinguished university-president as Nicholas Murray Butler, so admirable and courageous a scholar as Wilbur Cross, and several first-rate writers: the poets Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost, the free-minded publicist James Truslow Adams, and the novelists Edith Wharton, Hamlin Garland, Owen Wister, Brand Whitlock and Booth Tarkington.

But it does not include Theodore Dreiser, Henry Mencken, our most vivid critic, George Jean Nathan who, though still young, is certainly the dean of our dramatic critics, Eugene O'Neill, incomparably our best dramatist, the really original and vital poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Carl Sandburg, Robinson Jeffers and Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters, whose Spoon River Anthology was so utterly different from any other poetry ever published, so fresh, so authoritative, so free from any gropings and timidities that it came like a revelation, and created a new school of

native American poetry. It does not include the novelists and short-story writers, Willa Cather, Joseph Hergesheimer, Sherwood Anderson, Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, Louis Bromfield, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Fannie Hurst, Mary Austin, James Branch Cabell, Edna Ferber, nor Upton Sinclair, of whom you must say, whether you admire or detest his aggressive Socialism, that he is internationally better known than any other American artist whosoever, be he novelist, poet, painter, sculptor, musician, architect.

I should not expect any Academy to be so fortunate as to contain all these writers, but one which fails to contain any of them, which thus cuts itself off from so much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters, can have no relationship whatever to our life and aspirations. It does not represent literary America of today--it represents only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

It might be answered that, after all, the Academy is limited to fifty members; that, naturally, it cannot include every one of merit. But the fact is that while most of our few giants are excluded, the Academy does have room to include three extraordinarily bad poets, two very melodramatic and insignificant playwrights, two gentlemen who are known only because they are university presidents, a man who was

thirty years ago known as a rather clever humerous draughtsman, and several gentlemen of whom--I sadly confess my ignorance--I have never heard.

Let me again emphasize the fact--for it is a fact--that I am not attacking the American Academy. It is a hospitable and generous and decidedly dignified institution. And it is not altogether the Academy's fault that it does not contain many of the men who have significance in our letters. Sometimes it is the fault of those writers themselves. I cannot imagine that grizzly-bear Theodore Dreiser being comfortable at the serenely Athenian dinners of the Academy, and were they to invite Mencken, he would infuriate them with his boisterous jeering. No, I am not attacking--I am reluctantly considering the Academy because it is so perfect an example of the divorce in America of intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality.

Our universities and colleges, or gymnasia, most of them, exhibit the same unfortunate divorce. I can think of four of them, Rollins College in Florida, Middlebury College in Vermont, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago--which has had on its roll so excellent a novelist as Robert Herrick, so courageous a critic as Robert Morse Lovett--which have shown an authentic interest in contemporary

creative literature. Four of them. But universities and colleges and musical emporiums and schools for the teaching of theology and plumbing and sign-painting are as thick in America as the motor traffic. Whenever you see a public building with Gothic fenestration on a sturdy backing of Indiana concrete, you may be certain that it is another university, with anywhere from two hundred to twenty thousand students equally ardent about avoiding the disadvantage of becoming learned and about gaining the social prestige contained in the possession of a B.A. degree.

Oh, socially our universities are close to the mass of our citizens, and so are they in the matter of athletics. A great college football game is passionately witnessed by eighty thousand people, who have paid five dollars apiece and motored anywhere from ten to a thousand miles for the ecstasy of watching twenty-two men chase one another up and down a curiously marked field. During the football season, a capable player ranks very nearly with our greatest and most admired heroes--even with Henry Ford, President Hoover, and Colonel Lindbergh.

And in one branch of learning, the sciences, the lords of business who rule us are willing to do homage to the devotees of learning. However bleakly one of our trader

aristocrats may frown upon poetry or the visions of a painter, he is graciously pleased to endure a Millikan, a Michelson, a Banting, a Theobald Smith.

But the paradox is that in the arts our universities are as cloistered, as far from reality and living creation, as socially and athletically and scientifically they are close to us. To a true-blue professor of literature in an American university, literature is not something that a plain human being, living today, painfully sits down to produce. No; it is something dead; it is something magically produced by superhuman beings who must, if they are to be regarded as artists at all, have died at least one hundred years before the diabolical invention of the typewriter. To any authentic don, there is something slightly repulsive in the thought that literature could be created by any ordinary human being, still to be seen walking the streets, wearing quite commonplace trousers and coat and looking not so unlike a chauffeur or a farmer. Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.

I do not suppose that American universities are alone in this. I am aware that to the dons of Oxford and Cambridge, it would seem rather indecent to suggest that Wells and Bennett and Galsworthy and George Moore may, while they commit

the impropriety of continuing to live, be compared to any one so beautifully and safely dead as Samuel Johnson. I suppose that in the universities of Sweden and France and Germany there exist plenty of professors who prefer dissection to understanding. But in the new and vital and experimental land of America, one would expect the teachers of literature to be less monastic, more human, than in the traditional shadows of old Europe.

They are not.

There has recently appeared in America, out of the universities, an astonishing circus called "the New Humanism." Now of course "humanism" means so many things that it means nothing. It may infer anything from a belief that Greek and Latin are more inspiring than the dialect of contemporary peasants to a belief that any living peasant is more interesting than a dead Greek. But it is a delicate bit of justice that this nebulous word should have been chosen to label this nebulous cult.

Insofar as I have been able to comprehend them--for naturally in a world so exciting and promising as this today, a life brilliant with Zeppelins and Chinese revolutions and the Bolshevik industrialization of farming and ships and the Grand Canyon and young children and terrifying hunger and

the lonely quest of scientists after God, no creative writer would have time to follow all the chilly enthusiasms of the New Humanists--this newest of sects reasserts the dualism of man's nature. It would confine literature to the fight between man's soul and God, or man's soul and evil.

But, curiously, neither God nor the devil may wear modern dress, but must retain Grecian vestments. Oedipus is a tragic figure for the New Humanists; man, trying to maintain himself as the image of God under the menace of dynamos, in a world of high-pressure salesmanship, is not. And the poor comfort which they offer is that the object of life is to develop self-discipline--whether or not one ever accomplishes anything with this self-discipline. So this whole movement results in the not particularly novel doctrine that both art and life must be resigned and negative. It is a doctrine of the blackest reaction introduced into a stirringly revolutionary world.

Strangely enough, this doctrine of death, this escape from the complexities and danger of living into the secure blankness of the monastery, has become widely popular among professors in a land where one would have expected only boldness and intellectual adventure, and it has more than ever shut creative writers off from any benign influence

which might conceivably have come from the universities.

But it has always been so. America has never had a Brandes, a Taine, a Goethe, a Croce.

With a wealth of creative talent in America, our criticism has most of it been a chill and insignificant activity pursued by jealous spinsters, ex-baseball-reporters, and acid professors. Our Erasmuses have been village schoolmistresses. How should there be any standards when there has been no one capable of setting them up?

The great Cambridge-Concord circle of the middle of the Nineteenth Century--Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, the Alcotts--were sentimental reflections of Europe, and they left no school, no influence. Whitman and Thoreau and Poe and, in some degree, Hawthorne, were outcasts, men alone and despised, berated by the New Humanists of their generation. It was with the emergence of William Dean Howells that we first began to have something like a standard, and a very bad standard it was.

Mr. Howells was one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage. He abhorred not only profanity and obscenity but all of what H. G. Wells has called "the jolly coarseness of life." In his

fantastic vision of life, which he innocently conceived to be realistic, farmers and seamen and factory-hands might exist, but the farmer must never be covered with muck, the seaman must never roll out bawdy chanteys, the factory-hand must be thankful to his good employer, and all of them must long for the opportunity to visit Florence and smile gently at the quaintness of the beggers.

So strongly did Howells feel this genteel, this New Humanistic philosophy that he was able vastly to influence his contemporaries, down even to 1914 and the turmoil of the Great War.

He was actually able to tame Mark Twain, perhaps the greatest of our writers, and to put that fiery old savage into an intellectual frock coat and top hat. His influence is not altogether gone today. He is still worshipped by Hamlin Garland, an author who should in every way have been greater than Howells but who under Howells' influence was changed from a harsh and magnificent realist into a genial and insignificant lecturer. Mr. Garland is, so far as we have one, the dean of American letters today, and as our dean, he is alarmed by all of the younger writers who are so lacking in taste as to suggest that men and women do not always love in accordance with the prayer-book, and that common

people sometimes use language which would be inappropriate at a women's literary club on Main Street. Yet this same Hamlin Garland, as a young man, before he had gone to Boston and become cultured and Howellized, wrote two most valiant and revelatory works of realism, Main Travelled Roads and Rose of Dutcher's Coolly.

I read them as a boy in a prairie village in Minnesota--just such an environment as was described in Mr. Garland's tales. They were vastly exciting to me. I had realized in reading Balzac and Dickens that it was possible to describe French and English common people as one actually saw them. But it had never occurred to me that one might without indecency write of the people of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, as one felt about them. Our fictional tradition, you see, was that all of us in Midwestern villages were altogether noble and happy; that not one of us would exchange the neighborly bliss of living on Main Street for the heathen gaudiness of New York or Paris or Stockholm. But in Mr. Garland's Main-Travelled Roads I discovered that there was one man who believed that Midwestern peasants were sometimes bewildered and hungry and vile--and heroic. And, given this vision, I was released; I could write of life as having life.

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.

But, all this time, while men like Howells were so effectively seeking to guide America into becoming a pale edition of an English cathedral town, there were surly and authentic fellows--Whitman and Melville, then Dreiser and James Huneker and Mencken--who insisted that our land had something more than tea-table gentility.

And so, without standards, we have survived. And for the strong young men, it has perhaps been well that we should have no standards. For, after seeming to be pessimistic about my own and much beloved land, I want to close this dirge with a very lively sound of optimism.

I have, for the future of American literature, every hope and every eager belief. We are coming out, I believe, of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see that I am a little too old to be one of them.

There is Ernest Hemingway, a bitter youth, educated by the most intense experience, disciplined by his own high standards, an authentic artist whose home is in the whole of life; there is Thomas Wolfe, a child of, I believe, thirty or younger, whose one and only novel, Look Homeward, Angel, is worthy to be compared with the best in our literary production, a Gargantuan creature with great gusto of life; there is Thornton Wilder, who in an age of realism dreams the old and lovely dreams of the eternal romantics; there is John Dos Passos, with his hatred of the safe and sane standards of Babbitt and his splendor of revolution; there is Stephen Benét who, to American drabness, has restored the epic poem with his glorious memory of old John Brown; there are Michael Gold, who reveals the new frontier of the Jewish East Side, and William Faulkner, who has freed the South from hoop-skirts; and there are a dozen other young poets and fictioneers, most of them living now in Paris, most of them a little insane in the tradition of James Joyce, who, however insane they may be, have refused to be genteel and traditional and dull.

I salute them with a joy in being not yet too far removed from their determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities and lost

farm cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, to an America that is as strange as Russia and as complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness.

ENEMIES OF THE BOOK

Address by Sinclair Lewis at the Annual Dinner of the American Booksellers Association in New York City May 11, 1936

Fellow-booksellers, I'm afraid your committee was mildly vexed with me for declining to have these oracular utterances of mine on the radio. Now for political statements and news-bulletins, I regard that medium as admirable, but tonight--in this, which is about my second public address in two years--I do not desire to make any precise and binding statement. I shall inform your electoral ears about neither the A.A.A. nor the sanctions against the New York Giants. I want merely to ramble around and talk, and not be bound by the split-second timing--detestable phrase and detestable custom!--of the radio, whereby I should be allowed exactly twelve minutes and nine seconds in between the programs of the Lollypop Lilters and the Ex-Lax Symphony Orchestra, playing the classical masterpieces of Sousa and Irving Berlin.

I speak of my fellow-booksellers, and by that I mean the whole lot of us. We belong all to one guild, whether we know it or not, and if we don't know it, it's time we woke up and learned it. In this one guild I include all authors--the frail poet just as much as the brisk writer for the pulps, with his office and his dictaphone; all publishing-house workers, from such venerable bearded guardians of the flame as Johnny Farrar and Nelson Doubleday to the smallest ink-splashed office boy; all book-dealers, whether they have one-room shops in Greenwich Village or million-dollar department-store sections; all librarians; all reviewers; all book printers and binders and paper-dealers; all wholesale distributors; and all literary agents who can read and write--mine happens to be able to do both, as is indicated by her notes when I pass a dead-line.

I would like to include among the booksellers all teachers of English and rhetoric, but so many of them, particularly in the colleges, are scornful of all of us who believe that literature is something that can be produced here and now, not merely in the Mermaid Tavern three hundred years ago, and who believe that it is no sacrilege to take literature out of the marbled morgue of college libraries and get it into the hands of plain people living in farmhouses or

city flats.

Like these priestly professors, there are a good many authors who feel that theirs is the only significant part of the distribution of literature. They are delicate spirits, living apart, revealing the profundities of human nature, and the rest of us are lucky to be allowed to lug their weighty messages along the highway. I wish I could feel that way! It must be exciting to regard yourself as a maestro, a prophet, a combination of Boccaccio, Bach, and Jeremiah, and to believe that the world is quiveringly waiting to learn whether you have decided that it shall turn Communist, Catholic, or purely aesthetic, or whether, perhaps, you will let it wag along the way it is for a while yet.

But I am afraid that I have seen too many sides of bookselling to dare thus to drape myself in the prophetic mantle. I have written everything from book-advertisements and God-awfully bad verse for children to long novels.

I have been learned yet snappy as a book-reviewer. I divided nearly four years between the publishing houses of Stokes and Doran, and learned the devious ways of traveling salesmen from diplomats like Billy Corrigan and Eddie Ziegler. Have I not, as publishers' editor, lectured them

on the calamitous list of books they were about to take on the road, loftily saying, "Now this next novel--it's a dandy story--it's by some English woman--fine woman--she's a cousin of the Dean of Chichester--no, I'm wrong, that's that other gal--this one, well, she isn't his cousin, she's his aunt, and he isn't a dean, he's a chiropractor, and he isn't at Chichester, he's at Little Higgenbotham, but anyway--It's a nice, wholesome love story, laid in a lovely little English village--No, just a second; now that I look into it, I guess it's a detective story and it's laid in Constantinople, but anyway--We're just importing it in sheets. Try and see if you can get tens and fives."

The More Acute Joys

I have also sold books behind the counter. I am, tonight, like the politicians who tell interviewers, "My boy, I used to be a newspaperman myself!" I'll admit it wasn't very long; it was a few weeks before Christmas, in the old Siegel-Cooper department-store at Sixth Avenue and Eighteenth Street. But it was long enough to acquaint me with some of the more acute joys of practical bookselling, for I assure you that Siegel-Cooper's was no haunt for those who wanted to "browse" or to sit by a wood fire and discuss Dostoyeffsky.

It had all the noble placidity of a bus-station.

All this was not so very recently--in fact, it will be just thirty years ago next Christmas!--but I definitely remember such incidents as that of a man who spent the whole noon-hour going through an enormous pile of dictionaries marked down from a dollar to twenty-five cents, to find the least spotty one--and afterward, I had to build the whole pile over, and while I had been in college, that hadn't at all been my notion of how I was going to serve literature. Piling two-bit dictionaries!

Great Days!

I recall the rather sweet old German lady who wanted: "It's a book for the children like my sister in Schenectady got; it's a green book about so big--don't you remember it?" And the lad who demanded a novel by a completely unknown also-ran, and who snarled, "Don't any of you bookclerks know your own business? And don't you keep anything in stock?" And the scared rabbity man whom I recognized from his picture as, say, Leopold Milquetoast, author who wanted to know whether we had any of the new masterpieces by Mr. Milquetoast and when, unfortunately, to some small extent we actually did have, explained that he had left his purse at home.

Great days!

I am not trying to give you a sketch of my curiously perilous career which, as you can see, is so like that of Floyd Gibbons or Negley Farson. I am indicating the reason why I understand that all of us who produce or purvey books are, or ought to be, closely bound in one unorganized guild.

Merchants?--yes, we are merchants, as other men are soap merchants or soup merchants or steel-rail merchants. But what unites us as those men can never be united is a superior pride in our product. I have known plenty of book-sellers, plenty of book-travelers, who could have made much more money out of this or that lively modern racket, but they went on expounding the gospel of books because they liked to handle the confounded things! They believed that books can be more amusing than any musical show, more exciting than any melodrama on the screen, and they believed and still believe that more than any codified religion do books preserve against a troubled, half-mad world the treasures of learning and the aspirations of the human soul.

It is amusing to consider certain recent advertise-ments of life-insurance companies. I had supposed that sell-ing life-insurance was merely a way of making a living, prob-ably rather tiring to the poor old feet and the tongue and

the hand-shaking hand. But it appears that life-insurance agents are interested only in the missionary labor of getting young fathers to assure the security of the Little Woman and the Little Ones after Father shall be gone. Well, if the evangels of life-insurance sell security in death, we book-men sell security in life!--and what is probably more important than security, we sell the most diverting means yet known of keeping daily life from being a bore.

This sense of solidarity among all manner of book-sellers, of which I have hinted as already existing yet certainly subject to great increase, is particularly necessary now, when there are so many enemies of the book; so many factors to reduce the sale of books that sometimes one wonders whether our allied trades are not going out completely, along with the manufacture of bustles and buggy-whips. This I do not believe. I do not believe that anything will altogether supplant the old-fashioned printed book, which has changed so very little since Gutenberg finished printing the first book, a Bible, back in 1455, almost five hundred years ago. I do not believe that any nimble television apparatus, any series of phonograph records, any ingenious microscopic gadget whereby you can carry the entire works of Balzac in your cigarette case, will take the place of books, just as

we know them.

But there is a change, and that change is in a much greater selectivity on the part of a majority of readers, so that perhaps we shall continue the past decade's process of writing fewer and better books and alas, selling fewer and better books, and having to know vastly more and work a lot harder to write or sell any books.

Civilized Books

I don't know what future historians will say about it, but I suspect that if any of them shall be discerning enough, they will assert that the most important event of the last three or four years in America has not been the New Deal or the Bruno Hauptmann case or the trans-Pacific flights, but the continued sale, as best-sellers, of "Anthony Adverse," "Europa," and now, "The Last Puritan"--books which have given my own books plenty of grief, and which I admire fervently. Not one of these is what we would have considered, in my days in publishing houses, twenty years ago, as having a chance for a sale of even twenty-five hundred copies. They are infernally long, so closely woven that one cannot skip, and free equally of salaciousness on the one hand and of prejudice-tickling hypocrisy on the other. They are not merely civilized

books; they are books demanding in the reader a considerable knowledge of the world before he can swallow them.

Pink Soap Suds

Twenty and thirty years ago, the conspicuous best-sellers were usually, not always but usually, just so many dollar-and-a-half packages of pink soap suds, and it is this change, this development in American taste and learning, that I speak of as a veritably important historical event. We must not, of course, too ardently congratulate ourselves. Undoubtedly there are plenty of copies of "Anthony," "Europa," and "Last Puritan" which have been purchased merely to keep up with the Joneses, and which lie on drawing-room tables proud, spotless, and quite unread.

But even so, it must be noted that the books which the cultural climber is using to advertise his superiority are such as these, along with books like "Now in November" and "The Thinking Reed" and "February Hill" and "Life with Father," instead of "The Sheik" or "Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall."

Another thing to calm our pride a little is the possibility that the sentimentalists whose purchases once determined the best-selling list are not buying books at all.

They have gone off to the movies instead of reading Gene Stratton Porter, and their proxies have been taken over by more literate readers. But whatever doubts there may be, my guess is that the booksellers are now appealing to a clientele about one hundred per cent more canny than that of twenty years ago--and if they are buying only half as many books, that's hard on all of us, but we must consider it, face it, and feel no particular hatred of the inevitable enemies of the book.

Who, what, are these enemies?

But really, "enemies" is not the just word; they are not so much enemies as supplanters. Probably when books first came to have a sale not merely to universities and monasteries and lone scholars but to the gentry in general, the makers of saddles complained that the degenerate patrons of that day were wasting on costly and useless books the money that by rights belonged to the sellers of leather and horseflesh; and the vintners complained ferociously when the squirearchy--a few of them!--stayed awake most of the evening and read books instead of manfully sitting at, or lying under, the table and finishing in the requisite genteel manner their four honest bottles of port. Perhaps we are merely taking our turn at being devaluated. But whatever the philosophy of

the business, the fact is that bookselling is taking such a beating as it has not known for years.

Well, again, what are these our supplanters?

It is obvious that people listen to the radio and go to the motion pictures instead of reading books. But there are plenty of other Cossacks on our trail: the automobile, which takes millions away from home and the bookshelf on bland evenings; the increasing number of night clubs in cities and roadhouses in the country; the new fashion of winter cruises on which the victims we so cannily stalked take what we fondly viewed as their book-money and go off to Bermuda or Trinidad; and the magazines--not such magazines as Harper's and Scribner's, which encourage book-reading, but the welter of cheap pulps which offer two dollars' worth of paradise for fifteen cents.

Less Space for Books

And we must remember that increasingly the modern household has less space for books. The family that was reared in a twenty-room "mansion," with one room entirely devoted to the library, is now living in an eight-room house with just one room for library, tea, bridge, domestic quarrels, Uncle Timothy's solitaire, making out next month's

budget and trying to discover just why last month's budget didn't work out right, and all other public diversions whatsoever.

The family that used to live in an eight-room house is now in a four-room apartment, and the family that was in a four-room apartment is in Hooverville. Even for that keeping up with the Joneses, to a family in such quarters, a library is less of a decoration of honor than is a car parked in the street outside. I remember a quite prosperous young couple in the Middlewest who asked my advice, not long ago, about having a "library." They were pretty vague, but I think their notion was of a treasurehouse of about forty volumes. When I asked them what they already had, they admitted that they owned--and this is no evangelical fable but an accurate case-history--they admitted that they owned just three books: a cookbook, a telephone book, and a Gideon Bible.

New Outlets Needed

Probably, as a remedy for the reduced sale of books, we have not yet developed all possible new outlets. I am sure that more could be done by stores in the way of sending out books on approval to old customers whose tastes the store knows thoroughly; more done with the sale of books to summer

hotels and camps. The book caravan, beloved of Cris Morley, has not yet been particularly successful, but it might be if it made regular scheduled rounds and were more advertised.

It may be that we are all--book-dealers, writers, publishers--in permanently for smaller profits. But even if this should be so, there is one merit in the situation. It means that we belong to a profession which must become increasingly skilled; that writers will not find so easy a living out of "just dashing off a little story," and that book-dealers can less and less afford to give the hospitality of their shelves to any anemic romance that happens along. It may all be a little hard on the youngsters, who think more about mottos than about dust-rags, but perhaps to those of us who for twenty and thirty and forty years have been proud of being booksellers, it may be a matter of pride that with much against us, we have survived, and in our love of the book are determined still to survive.

And perhaps the old days will come back. I do not believe that the public will always be completely satisfied with the glaring screen, or that they will forever prefer the unctuous verbal caresses of radio-announcers to the many-colored pages of Dickens. I do not think that Hollywood can remain forever the New Jerusalem. There may be new gods,

but I think that most of you will say with me, "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord in books!"

THE ARTIST, THE SCIENTIST AND THE PEACE

A radio address by Sinclair Lewis from the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on December 16, 1944

It is possible--it is at least possible--that no artist and no scientist has ever been able to carry out half his plans to make mankind more cheerful and decent, and possible that this failure has been due less to the illness or laziness of the artist than to the fact that, since history began, all creative talents have been cramped by the insecurity of a world insane with war and tyranny. Yet it has been the artist-scientist himself who has least acknowledged this, who has most tried to hide himself from the age-long conflict for a more reasonable world.

But a strange thing about the present wartime is the number of artist-scientists who have realized that their work, no matter how detached from commerce or political ambition it may be, is still dependent on the universal struggle for and against democracy; who have come out of the studio or the laboratory or the theater to stand with their fellow-workers;

who are listening to the question: "Which side are you on--isolation or world-control--which side are you on?"--and who are now answering it.

The old-fashioned type of artist-scientist--the Pasteurs and Whistlers and Walter Paters--felt that their creative work was so superior that they could live in plush-lined clouds above the human struggle. Here and there a Voltaire or a Dickens or a physician like Vesalius knew that he could have no private light to work by if the whole world elsewhere was in darkness, and he cried "Let there be universal light!" even if, in so crying, he lost his respectable reputation or his very life. Then, during the last war, so timid and retired an etcher of society as Henry James saw that he and his work were meaningless unless he came out and rejoined the human race, and at last, rather timidly, he did so, and took his stand against Germany.

All along, people like Bernard Shaw and Professor Einstein and Carl Sandburg have seen that their little desks were nothing unless they were joined to all the other little desks in the world, and that not least, but most of all men, the artist, the scientist must know and somewhat loudly state whether he is for tyranny and cruelty and machine discipline, or for the people, for all the people.

In this war, among the German writers, the renowned Gerhart Hauptmann, once the darling, almost the Frank Sinatra, of all revered German novelists and dramatists decided on just which side he belonged. He belonged with safety and a handsome new farm and obsequiousness to all the goose-stepping lords of the revised Germany. So, even in wartime, he got these luxuries--he lost nothing but his self-respect, and the love of every decent man. That's excellent--he openly took his side--he didn't hide his shamefulness.

But certain Germans and Austrians, like Franz Werfel, Bruno Walter, Stefan Zweig, Freud, Béla Schick, Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger decided that new houses and new coats and the hoarse cheering of schmaltz-headed drill-sergeants weren't enough to make up for the loss of honor, the loss of that quiet satisfaction with your work which is life itself, and they went into exile, gave up every neighbor, every title, even the sweet sound of their own accustomed language, that the world might know on which side they were.

But it's time to stop all that, isn't it? It's cosmic idiocy that an honest and competent man should have to lose even his own tongue and his beloved citizenship because he is too honest and too competent to stand for the botched tyrannies of gangster rulers. The world has always allowed

that sort of thing, since long before the exile of Dante, and it is time, it always has been time, for a new kind of world organization which won't merely yearn for but actually produce security for the competent and honest, and not permit them again to be smashed by incessant and senseless wars. Public murder has become a little too costly--there are people who are really thinking about some sort of a law against it!

Everybody suffers from the usurpation of wars, whether lawyer or garage-mechanic or farmer or housewife, but the problem of the scientist or the artist--and consequently the problem of such citizens as want to enjoy the product of the artist and to benefit by the discoveries of the scientist--is two-fold. Like everybody else, he must think about that interesting task, making a living, a diversion extremely cramped by war, but his supreme interest has little to do with a mere living. The ordinary workman, whether he is a carpenter or a senator, works best when he scrupulously follows the best standards of the day. When a surgeon takes out an appendix, we don't think more highly of him if he tries the experiment of getting at the appendix through the right elbow. But the creator in the arts and the researcher in the laboratory and the inventor in the workshop have a value

exactly as their work is a little different from anything that has been done before. And they can never develop that differentness in a world of insecurity, where they know that anything they do, trivial or important, is judged not by its significance to mankind but by the way in which it tickles a gang of gorillas. Their native land is truth, but no artist or scientist in history has yet dwelt utterly and continuously in that land of truth, because it always has been stormed by the lovers of power.

But it is not important merely for the artists and the scientists themselves to see how their truth has been corrupted, to see where they stand; it is just as important for their admirers. When the Nazis burned the books in Berlin--or for that matter, when a certain handsome old city in these United States flops back into medievalism and bans books that do not seem to do much injury to the other cities--then it is the would-be readers of the books that suffer more than the writers; and when the Nazis decide that the music of Mendelssohn is Jewish and not at all the sort of thing that Dr. Goebbels would care to write, then it is the lovers of symphonies and not the ghost of the great master that are robbed. If people really want great music, great poetry, great painting, if they really want medical discoveries which

will save their babies from death, instead of wanting to live either in a Fascist slaughter-house or a comic-strip world of triviality, then they must give the artists and the scientists a civilization in which they can show what they really can do--as none of them has ever yet had the chance to show.

It isn't that the artist needs softer beds or more food, and as for publicity, in these days of radio and tabloids, he probably gets too much of it! It is a spiritual thing that he needs--an assurance that what he is doing is not futile, a sense that it profits him to produce what will demand of him the labor of years, that will demand a whole lifetime of the most honest devotion, instead of quickly turning out something that will please the fickle vanity of Fascist playboys whose toys are not only the machine-gun and the rope but pretty propaganda.

But the artist will never do his possibly magnificent best if there is going to be a patched-up world in which the prospects for an unending peace are just a <u>little</u> better than in 1936--if there are to be merely a few more pleasant fictions called treaties and tea-parties called conferences. I am not at all sure but that the most mulish kind of complete isolationism is not preferable to playing at world-government,

because it is at least honest: you know what and where it is. By the way, I imagine that this will be the only time during this series of broadcasts when confirmed isolationism is going to have such ardent praise!

In the matter of civilization for the artist or scientist, it has been all or nothing, and usually it has been nothing. However great his talent, if it is at all corrupted by the cynicism that spreads in an insecure and dishonest world, then that one germ of despair will flourish until it rots the whole, and the artist or scientist, along with all his followers, will have a shining brilliance, but it will be the autumnal color of decay.

Consider the science of genetics, the science of birth and the production of better children. So long as that science is devoted to producing more and stronger little Nazis, it is evil, and the more skillful it may become, the more evil it will be. That knowledge will not even begin to be valuable until it is devoted to producing not better little Germans--yes, or better little Americans or Englishmen--but universally, everywhere in the world, regardless of uniforms, better human beings. The scientist, the artist, can ultimately contribute to making a world fit to live in, only <u>in</u> a world that is fit to live in--not a city or a state or

a nation, but a world that is fit to live in. That fact he must know, and must proclaim.

APPENDIX II

A PARTIAL ACCOUNT OF THE SPEAKING OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

For the following list of the speaking of Sinclair Lewis, the author is particularly indebted to the New York Times, Grace Hegger's book, With Love from Gracie, Claude Lewis's Treaty Trip, and Mark Schorer's biography of Lewis, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life.

"Work of Water on Geologic Ages," a speech given before the Delphian Literary Society at Sauk Centre high school in the fall, 1900.

Debates before the Delphian Literary Society on the propositions: "Lincoln Faced Greater Difficulties than Washington," (Lewis defended the affirmative); "Indians Should Have More Liberty," (Lewis defended the negative); these debates were held during the fall and spring of 1900-01.

"Some Things We Need to Encourage in Athletics," a speech given at Sauk Centre high school during the year 1900-01.

"The Puritans Criticized," a Thanksgiving address given in Sauk Centre in 1901.

"Traditional Customs in School," a speech for the Junior Oratorical Contest at Sauk Centre high school during 1900-01.

Debates before the Freshman Union, a debating society at Yale, during the years 1903-04.

Debate before the Freshman Union on the proposition: "An Eighteen-dollar Athletic Tax Should Be Levied on All Students," (Lewis defended the negative), October, 1906.

Speeches on behalf of woman suffrage in the neighborhood of Port Washington sometime during 1914.

Speech before the Commercial Club of Sauk Centre in April, 1916.

Speech before the Citizens' Club of Sauk Centre in the spring, 1916.

Lecture to the journalism students of the University of Washington in the fall of 1916.

"Contemporary Fiction as an Interpretation of Modern Life," address to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in 1919.

Speech to the Sunday Afternoon Club of the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston, Illinois, in February of 1920.

Lecture tour promoting Main Street during the spring of 1921. The general theme of the tour was that American fiction has come of age and could be compared favorably with the best of European fiction. Among the places visited were New York City; Princeton University; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; Omaha, Nebraska; and Hamilton, Canada.

Speech to the Savage Club in London, England, during the summer of 1921.

Speech to the members of his Yale class at their fifteenth reunion dinner on June 18, 1922.

Speech to the Country Club of St. Cloud in July, 1922.

Lecture to the University of Chicago faculty and students in St. Paul on July 21, 1922.

Speech in Hartford at a dinner attended by newspapermen and various prominent Hartford citizens in September, 1922.

Lecture tour originally planned for six weeks but cut short after the third week; he gave the first lecture in Detroit on October 12, 1922, and the last one on November 2, 1922, before the Philadelphia Forum.

"Main Street and High Street," debate with Ian Hay (Major John Hay Beith) before the London School of Economics for charity on May 29, 1923.

Campaign talks supporting Bertrand Russell in England during the fall of 1923.

Speech to the American Women's Club in December, 1923.

Speech to the Kiwanis Club at a luncheon meeting in Winnipeg in June, 1923.

Speech to the Kiwanis Club at a combined meeting of the Men's and Women's Canadian Kiwanis Club in June, 1923.

Speech to luncheon groups in Saskatoon, Canada, in June, 1923.

Speech to the Rotarians at a Sunday luncheon in Saskatoon in June, 1923.

Speech to the Kiwanis Club at a ladies-night dinner at Prince Albert, Canada, in June, 1923.

Speech before the English-Speaking Union in England during February, 1924.

Pulpit appearances in Kansas City, Kansas, in April, 1926. Schorer reports that Lewis spoke in several church pulpits as well as before Rotary Clubs, the Ad Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and several literary groups during this time.

Pulpit address in the Linwood Boulevard Christian Church in Kansas City, Kansas, on April 18, 1926. This was the talk in which Lewis challenged the Fundamentalist's God.

Public proposal to Dorothy Thompson at a party given by Lewis's Berlin publisher, Ernst Rowohlt in July, 1927.

Speech before the Berlin-American Club denouncing the Sacco and Vanzetti trial on July 16, 1927.

Lecture to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference at Middlebury College at Middlebury, Vermont, in August, 1929. This is the occasion at which Mark Schorer relates Lewis appeared "fantastically drunk."

Speech to the Rotary Club on ladies-night in Rutland, Vermont, during September, 1929. Lewis praised the natural beauty of Vermont and urged the citizenry to preserve it.

Speech to the students and faculty of the University of Pittsburgh the afternoon of December 13, 1929.

Speech to the PEN Club at a dinner given at the Hotel Commodore in honor of Lewis's winning the Nobel Prize on November 25, 1930. He urged that authorship be taken as seriously by Americans as manufacturing and football.

"American Fear of Literature," address to the Swedish Academy and noted guests in the Stock Exchange Hall on December 12, 1930.

Radio address over a Stockholm station in December, 1930; Lewis talked about his boyhood life in Minnesota.

Speech before the Anglo-Swedish Society in Gothenburg in December, 1930; Lewis agreed with Henry Van Dyke that Willa Cather should have received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Radio interview over a Berlin station in December, 1930; Lewis stated he was always first an American though he greatly respected Europe.

Speech at a dinner before the American Newspaper Correspondents' Association at the Savoy in London during February, 1931; Lewis talked about the "torture" of his public appearances.

Speech at the Central High School in Washington, D. C., during March, 1931; this was the address that the

Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow Lewis to present in Constitution Hall.

"American Literature Comes of Age," a speech given in Town Hall, New York City, on March 19, 1931.

Impromptu speech accusing Theodore Dreiser of plagiarism before an audience of writers, journalists, and publishers at a dinner of the Metropolitan Club honoring Russian novelist, Boris Pilnyak, on March 19, 1931.

"Fields for Novelists," a speech to the League for Political Education which praised the native tradition in American literature given in late March, 1931.

Discussion with H. G. Wells on the topic "Visiting Britishers," before a luncheon of the Railroad Club in October, 1931.

"A Conservative Menace," a speech before the Institute of Arts and Sciences in November, 1931.

Speech at a dinner commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alfred Nobel in December, 1933.

Speech before Dartmouth students in which Lewis lashed out against Communism during the winter of 1935.

"Enemies of the Book," speech given before the American Booksellers Association on May 11, 1936.

Lecture tour across the nation publicizing the book, It Can't Happen Here. The tour extended from late October, 1937, to late February, 1938. The topics were "The Novelist as a Prophet," "It Has Happened Here," and "Main Street Revisited." He lectured in twenty-two cities; the tour began in New York and progressed on to such places as Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Norman, Oklahoma; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Lawrence, Kansas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Los Angeles, California; and Lewis ended the tour on February 24, 1938, in Washington, D. C.

Speech to the American Booksellers Association in March, 1938; Lewis defended ivory tower learning.

Impromptu curtain speech following his performance as the hero, Doremus Jessup, in his play, "It Can't Happen Here," in Cohasset, Massachusetts, on August 19, 1938. Lewis pleaded that fascism not be allowed to happen in America.

"Provincialism," a speech before the joint session of the Minnesota legislature in January, 1939.

Speech in Chicago during the spring of 1939. This is the speech in which Lewis made the remark about Dorothy Thompson: "I also am married to a very distinguished woman. She disappeared into the NBC building ten years ago."

Memorial remarks at the funeral service of Ernst Toller in May, 1939.

Lecturer before his writing class of twenty-two students at the University of Wisconsin during the fall of 1940. Lewis met the class only five times.

Radio talk supporting Franklin Roosevelt for President of the United States on November 1, 1940.

"How Not to Write Popular Stories," a speech to the student body of Bennington College on May 19, 1941.

Speech presenting the gold medal award of the Limited Editions Club to Ernest Hemingway in November, 1941.

Debates with Lewis Browne on the topics: "Has the Modern Woman Made Good?" "The Country versus the City," "Machines versus No Machines," and "Can Fascism Happen Here?" They debated in cities like Newark, Syracuse, Ann Arbor, Dayton, Olivet, and at the Town Hall in New York City. The tour extended through January 11, 1942; part of the tour was canceled because of the United States' entry into the war.

Lecturer before his story-writing class at the University of Minnesota. Lewis appeared for three two-hour sessions during January, 1942.

"Environments Don't Make Writers," speech to the students of Hamline University, Saint Paul, in the spring of 1942.

Speech at the First Congregational Church in Sauk Centre on its seventy-fifth anniversary on May 17, 1942.

"Stay West, Young Woman," a speech to the Ladies' Literary Society at the University of Minnesota, May, 1942.

Lecturer to his writing class at the University of Minnesota during the fall of 1942. Forty-five students attended the class during October and November, but only twenty-nine were enrolled for credit.

Radio talk supporting the war savings drive for the War Savings Staff, Speakers Division on station WQXR, at 2 p. m. on March 28, 1943.

Debates with Lewis Browne during October, November, and December of 1943. They appeared in Salt Lake City, Spokane, Seattle, St. Louis, Kansas City, Dallas, New Orleans, San Antonio, Houston, Iowa City, and Town Hall in New York City; the tour closed in Toronto, Canada, in late December of 1943.

"What the Young Writers Are Up To," a speech before a dinner meeting of the National Institute on March 13, 1944; the address supported the idea that contemporary literary culture was in fine form.

Speech at a Madison Square Garden Rally supporting Franklin Roosevelt for a fourth term for President of the United States, September 22, 1944.

Radio talk supporting Roosevelt for President on station WEAF, November 1, 1944.

Debates with Lewis Browne during the fall of 1944. They toured towns like Kankakee, Chicago, Elgin, Lafayette, and it was in Kankakee on November 14, 1944 that Lewis learned of his son's death in the war.

"The Artist, the Scientist and the Peace," a radio speech for the Opera Victory Rally series broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on December 16, 1944.

Seconding speech for the nomination of Bernard De Voto for membership in the National Institute in November, 1944.

"The Excitement of Learning," a commencement address before the State Teacher's College in Duluth, Minnesota, during the spring of 1945.

"The Craft of Writing (and the Art of Reading)," a series of summer lectures in Duluth from June 20 to July 24, 1945.

Lecture to a teachers college in Bemidiji, Minnesota, during the summer of 1945.

Lecture to Carleton College at Northfield, Minnesota, during the summer of 1945.

Lecture in Washington, D. C., during the fall of 1945.

Speech to the students at Columbia University at Columbia, South Carolina, on November 19, 1945.

Speech to the students at Benedict College, a Negro Baptist institution in Columbia, South Carolina, in November, 1945. Lewis was working on Kingsblood Royal.

Speech to the students of South Carolina State College for Negroes at Orangeburg. Lewis praised the literary talent of Richard Wright. Speech was given November, 1945.

Speech to a banquet of the Chamber of Commerce in Sauk Centre during October, 1947.

Lecture to the students and faculty of the University of Leiden, Holland, in October, 1949.

Speech to the Unione Fiorentina in the Palazzo Strozzi, on April 20, 1950; the speech praised the beauties of Florence and Lewis added that he was finishing a novel in which the hero would live a while in Florence.