

SHIFTING VALUES IN SINCLAIR LEWIS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine two characteristics in the life and works of Sinclair Lewis: his ambivalence in general, and his particular unambivalent hostility towards religion. Although he held inconsistent and incompatible views on America, its people, institutions, and beliefs, he was consistent in his dislike of American religious practices.

Chapter I examines Lewis's ambivalence respecting America and Americans, the Middle West, the Middle Class and Business; there is also an account of Lewis's persistent hostility towards religious beliefs, the clergy, and churchgoers.

Chapter II examines aspects of the life and personality of Sinclair Lewis for some of the factors which contribute to his ambivalent views and also to his anti-religious outlook.

Chapter III notes the timeliness of Lewis's novels, published in the Twenties when people were confused about their beliefs. Chapter III then analyses in detail four novels, Main Street, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and The God Seeker, which demonstrate how Lewis's attitudes change, except towards religion.

Chapter IV studies the style of Sinclair Lewis, and notes that he constantly applies mocking or hostile terms to clergy and Christians, while on other subjects he expresses incompatible views with noisy assurance. Chapter IV also suggests that Lewis's ambivalence and his anti-religion both stem from a lack of profundity in his thought and feeling. He is unable to understand and appreciate fully the truths of American life and the truths of religion.

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## INTRODUCTION

In analysing the life and works of Sinclair Lewis, the prime difficulty is to deal with his contradictoriness, inconsistency, and ambivalence. He has no settled perspective or viewpoint; his principles are insecure. Escaping definition, he is an "inconsistent and paradoxical iconoclast."<sup>1</sup> He assumes contradictory roles, "the proletarian plutocrat, the bourgeois gypsy, the patriotic expatriate, the unmannerly critic of manners,"<sup>2</sup> so that there seem to be many Sinclair Lewises. One critic called him "the victim of his own divided heart."<sup>3</sup>

He is Carol and Kennicott, heart and head, radical and orthodox, puritan and man of the world, "standing between East and West, Europe and America, Beacon Street and Main Street, the exotic and the ordinary, culture and vigor, refinement and crudity, convention and freedom."<sup>4</sup> Lewis is changeable and irregular and inconsistent, a man of multiple personality who "shifts his point of view so often that finally we come to wonder whether he has any."<sup>5</sup>

However, there are some consistent attitudes in the life and works of Sinclair Lewis. He believes in brotherhood, progress, science, and individual freedom. He always hates hypocrisy and inhumane acts, and he has a steady dislike of organised religion. "Apart from a brief conversion, while Lewis prepped for Yale at Oberlin, his hostility to religion and its ministry was constant."<sup>6</sup> He dislikes churches, dogma, pastors, and flocks; and all his novels, from first to last, have anti-religious elements.

This study will indicate some of the many aspects of American life about which Lewis was ambivalent, and it will also show his consistent dislike of religious practices.

Footnotes to Introduction

<sup>1</sup>D.J. Dooley, The Art of Sinclair Lewis. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Schorer, Sinclair Lewis: An American Life. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 483.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Dooley, Art, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Dooley, Art, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup>Sheldon N. Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis. (New Haven: College and University Press, 1962), p. 99.

## CHAPTER I

Lewis's ambivalence shows itself in his treatment of America and Americans, their standards and their behaviour. He both attacks and praises the Middle West, the Middle Class, and most of his characters. Like any satirist, he attacks more often than he defends, and it is easier to see what he is against than what he is for.

Lewis's criticism of the United States is summed up in his Nobel speech, when he contended "that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures."<sup>7</sup> He described it as a land of sterility and emptiness and "narrow frustrated lives."<sup>8</sup> Lacking serenity and maturity, its only definition of life is materialistic -- success, wealth, position. The Americans have no true home, no true church, no corporate life;<sup>9</sup> but they take smug satisfaction in a culture which lacks beauty, decency, and tolerance.

It is an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God.

A savorless people, gulping tasteless food, and sitting afterward, coatless and thoughtless, in



rocking-chairs prickly with inane decorations, listening to mechanical music, saying mechanical things about the excellence of Ford automobiles and viewing themselves as the greatest race in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Sinclair Lewis suggests that the motto of this "grossly materialistic, money-mad, smugly hypocritical, provincial civilization"<sup>11</sup> should be changed from "In God we trust" to "Government of the profits, by the profits, for the profits."<sup>12</sup> The Americans have no rational humane ideals, no good life, no honor of knight, artist, or priest, no truth, beauty, or goodness, no imagination or faith: "They understand democracy as little as they understand Christianity."<sup>13</sup> They cannot see the imperfections and false values of their country, but Lewis will "de-bamboozle the American public."<sup>14</sup>

You cannot heal the problems of any one marriage until you heal the problems of an entire civilization founded upon suspicion and superstition; and you cannot heal the problems of a civilization thus founded until it realizes its own barbaric nature, and realizes that what it thought was brave was only cruel, what it thought was holy was only meanness, and what it thought was success was merely the paper helmet of a clown more nimble than his fellows, scrambling for a peanut in the dust of an ignoble circus.<sup>15</sup>

American society is opposed to any disinterested effort or charitable action, and any deviation from pack behaviour is punished with malice and violence. Main Street can be a nightmare, and Americans are capable of obsessive cruelty and horror. "The U.S. is not civilized;"<sup>16</sup> the industrial giant is an emotional dwarf, a spiritual pauper<sup>17</sup> -- and what is worse -- the U.S. is "fired with a zeal, in the name of humanitarian idealism, to reduce the rest of the world to its own meager spiritual proportions."<sup>18</sup>

Lewis criticises "the cheapness of all standards, the shoddiness of all values,"<sup>19</sup> the seeking of money rather than wisdom. He complains that religious morality is superseded by business morality and the ethics of success; what is expedient and profitable is right. To be successful and accepted, one must lie, dodge, compromise, and do the expected. When Dodsworth returns to America after years in Europe he finds "life dehumanized by indifference or enmity to all human values."<sup>20</sup> There is no faith in the excellence of man, the law of progress, the ultimate reign of justice, the conquest of nature, or the sufficiency of democracy.<sup>21</sup>

The ideals of early America have been lost, and the pioneers have been replaced "by people with bathtubs and coupes and porch furniture and speed-boats and lake-cottages, who are determined that their possession of these pretty things shall not be threatened by radicals and that their comments on them shall not be interrupted by mere speculation on the soul of man."<sup>22</sup>

The "village virus" saps hope and energy and rebellion, as small-minded settlements grow into mediocre, inhibiting, materialistic cities. In American culture there is a discrepancy between public and private morality, between what is said and what is done. Schmalz, in The Man Who Knew Coolidge (1928), praises prohibition but enjoys drinking; and Fred Cornplow is similar: "like most Americans he was profoundly democratic except perhaps as regards social standing, wealth, political power and club membership."<sup>23</sup> This hypocrisy is part of an American preference for doing active good, "service" instead of over-thinking deeply and rightly.

Sinclair Lewis is not a deep thinker, but then a novelist's work is different from a philosopher's. A novelist does not come to conclusions about life, but discovers a quality in it, presents "a mode of experience." Lewis examines selected aspects of American life, and presents his findings in satirical novels;

but his peculiar ambivalence makes him praise at the same time as he blames. He criticises America's imperfections, but patriotically loves his country: "The only deeply rooted faith Lewis ever possessed [was] his faith in America."<sup>24</sup> In World So Wide, (1951), his last novel, Lewis praises the United States as the truest source of values, a nation with a destiny. The U.S. will rescue the world.<sup>25</sup> His romantic optimism was founded on a dream of a prosperous, enlightened America. He wanted the country to outgrow ideologies, and become free and great.

The iconoclast of contemporary mores had, like his fellow iconoclast H.L. Mencken, a deep feeling for tradition."<sup>26</sup> He was a conservative, believing in the pioneers' heroic virtues, which he knew were based on Puritan beliefs. Sinclair Lewis would like to restore the "wintry Pilgrim virtues"<sup>27</sup> to his native land.

At the same time, he saw America as a new land, requiring new people, new social structure, and new values. In this connection, the Middle West can represent serenity, wisdom, and beauty:

In the midst of the babel she found enchanted quietude. Along the road the shadows from oak-branches were inked on the snow like bars of music. Then the sled came out on the surface of Lake Minniemashie. Across the thick ice was a veritable road, a short-cut for farmers. On the glaring expanse of the lake-levels of hard crust, flashes of green ice blown clear, chains of drifts ribbed like the sea-beach -- the moonlight was overwhelming. It stormed on the snow, it turned the woods ashore into crystals of fire. The night was tropical and voluptuous. In that drugged magic there was no difference between heavy heat and insinuating cold.

Carol was dream-strayed. The turbulent voices, even Guy Pollock being connotative beside her, were nothing. She repeated:

Deep on the convent-roof the snows  
Are sparkling to the moon.

The words and the light blurred into one vast indefinite happiness, and she believed that some great thing was coming to her. She withdrew from the clamor into a worship of incomprehensible gods. The night expanded, she was conscious of the universe, and all mysteries stooped down to her.<sup>28</sup>

For all his criticism of Americans, he offers no clear alternative to their conventions, though he hopes they can create:

an intellectual world, a world of culture and grace, of lofty thoughts and the inspiring communion of real knowledge, where creeds were not of importance, and where man asked one another, not "Is your soul saved?" but "Is your mind well furnished?"<sup>29</sup>

Some of the ideals that Sinclair Lewis is advocating for America are to be found in Europe. He admires European grace, elegance, and leisured wisdom; but he dislikes the rigidity and lack of democracy: "London is nothing but a bunch of fog and out-of-date buildings."<sup>30</sup> He is ambivalent too about the sophistication and snobbery of Eastern States, the friendliness and decency of Western States, and many other matters;

The important effect of Lewis's ambivalence is uncertainty in the mind of the reader who is never sure whether or not Lewis is sincere: "That was always the trouble: never knowing whether he really cared at all, for anybody or anything except his work".<sup>31</sup> Part of Lewis's baffling contradictoriness is caused by his double purpose in writing -- to tell a story and to expose a situation. The "softboiled romancer" clashes with the "hardboiled critic";<sup>32</sup> fantasy and romance oppose satire and verisimilitude. His characteristic tone is one of love-hate: "He combines contemptuousness with naive good heartedness to an incredible degree."<sup>33</sup> He mocks and idealizes, derides and sympathises, creating "the mature Lewisian

irony, that peculiar ability to present at once the romantic surface of new phenomena and the befouled underside."<sup>34</sup> He does not believe in solutions; he is "not detached, but curiously involved, identified in turn with each of two conflicting sides."<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes his criticism of American society is naive and "half-baked",<sup>36</sup> as when he describes "persons like myself that go sniffing about, wondering what it all means."<sup>37</sup> He takes Main Street with him everywhere he goes, and is so enmeshed in what he is fighting that he can neither separate evil from ignorance, nor be truly radical. At other times he is "a distressed and disgusted idealist"<sup>38</sup> with an "ardent, mocking, obscene love of truthfulness,"<sup>39</sup> or a Red Indian stalking his foes,<sup>40</sup> analysing the outward forms of American civilization with detachment: "He knew the details of American life as no one else did, but he could not tell what they added up to."<sup>41</sup>

Lewis's changeability is confusing, as he adopts different poses and looks at things with both love and hate. However, in almost every case, his reaction to religious matters is one of disapproval; one of the few unchanging tenets of Lewis's changeable faith is his constant dislike of religious organizations, Christianity's God, the clergy, and the churchgoers. He repeatedly wages a crusade against a system which prevents man's freedom and integrity.

"Institutions are the enemies,"<sup>42</sup> for they aim to safeguard the established order, if necessary by controlling the whole world. In Gopher Prairie, religion had become "repressive puritanism and prurient espionage."<sup>43</sup> U.S. religious practices were based on

fears and hatreds, not Christian love. Lewis weighed American religion against Christ's ideals and the Bible's teaching, and found it wanting. He said: "Conventional religions are among the most active foes of progress."<sup>44</sup> He found no joy in church teachings, only fear of impropriety and Hell, a "vicious mixture of nonsense and repression."<sup>45</sup> He opposed as clumsy, outworn, and ignorant, all religious systems, solutions, and ideologies. Una Golden, the heroine of The Job (1917), believed "that life is too sacred to be taken in war and filthy industries and dull education; and that most forms and organizations and inherited castes are not sacred at all."<sup>46</sup>

Lewis attacked the authority of the churches, the business techniques ("pep and piety"<sup>47</sup>) in religion, the superficiality of Sunday Schools and denominational colleges (factories for moral men<sup>48</sup>) the bullying and deceit of the Y.M.C.A., the "philanthrobbers" who used religious emotions to get gifts, and the evangelists who were interested only in emotion-stirring methods and money, not people or truth: "God save America from zealous idealistic organized do-gooders."<sup>49</sup> In this respect he was echoing Thoreau's fear of "self-styled reformers, the greatest bores of all."<sup>50</sup> The religious systems were so inhumane, so full of "childish and disgusting absurdities"<sup>51</sup> that sincere Christian believers could hardly exist, Lewis believed. He hated "the whole magic and taboo system of worshiping the Bible and the ministry, and all the other skull-decorated vestiges of horror there are in so-called Christianity!"<sup>52</sup>

Although on occasions Lewis quoted the Bible as a standard of moral wisdom, a positive ideal by which to judge churches and people, he also pointed out the nonsense, contradictions, indecencies, and

false prophecies of God's Word -- Hebrew poetry is "noble, moving, and meaningless."<sup>53</sup> He scorned "that antiquated anthology of superstitions,"<sup>54</sup> and also the "time-honored drool"<sup>55</sup> and "damned bad verse"<sup>56</sup> of church services. He blamed the churches for turning young minds to priest worship and symbols -- "trapping idiots into holy monkey-shrines"<sup>57</sup> -- and was appalled at church rivalries. When Zilla "got religion," she announced that the older churches were going to damnation: "Get saved our way or go to Hell."<sup>58</sup> Uriel Gadd, the father of the hero of The God Seeker (1959), refers to "our congregational God -- not that of the godless Roman Catholic Irish or the German Lutherans."<sup>59</sup>

Lewis cannot understand how clergymen can believe in a God so cruel that after creating human beings, he will burn half of them in Hell:<sup>60</sup> "Good Lord, what a concept Christianity's God is! Here is this supreme egotist sitting up there who fashions creatures and puts them on earth for the sole purpose of worshipping him"<sup>61</sup> -- a "literary, intrusive, vindictive God,"<sup>62</sup> "who speaks in riddles, and punishes with eternal torture those who get the wrong answers."<sup>63</sup> The Old Testament God who desires reeking slaughter is, for Lewis, a heathen hangover, an anachronism in the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup>

The clergy are also out of tune with modern times, and from his Yale days Lewis attacked the "Ambassadors of Christ."<sup>65</sup> They were opposed to the arts, sciences, learning and all ideas, and they perpetuated old forms and rituals: "word-splitting, text-twisting, applause-hungry, job-hunting, medieval-minded second-raters."<sup>66</sup> They were described by Ezra Pound:

These heavyweights, these dodgers and these preachers,  
Crusaders, lecturers, and secret lechers,  
Who wrought about his "soul" their stale infection.<sup>67</sup>

Certainly Lewis felt that godliness and eros were conjoined, and in Elmer Gantry (1927) pointed to the great number of sex-crimes committed by erring clergymen. What Babbitt's minister talked of wicked women, "the reverend eyes glistened."<sup>68</sup> The clergy "were all, indeed, absorbed in vice."<sup>69</sup>

He criticised them for their unwillingness to sacrifice themselves for Christian ideals, to follow Jesus into loneliness, ridicule, and perhaps, death.<sup>70</sup> Like one of his characters in The Trail of the Hawk, (1915) Lewis "did not believe that priests and ministers, who seemed to be ordinary men as regards earthly things, had any extraordinary knowledge of the mysteries of heaven."<sup>71</sup> The "nasty gentlemen of God"<sup>72</sup> were no help in lightening life,<sup>73</sup> and their clerical duties were social and commercial, not pious. According to Lewis, the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount were not preached or practised by Christians, who were more interested in this world than the Kingdom of Heaven. He attacked Christians for not living up to their ideals, but he also felt that the ideals themselves were inappropriate and out-of-date. In Ann Vickers (1933), Ann rejects old-fashioned Christian names, "ingratiating symbols like Charity, Hope, Faith, and Patience. But dumb patience, dull hope, and hang-jawed faith, these were no longer the merits of females. No, her child should be named Pride, and pride of life, pride of love, pride of work, pride of being a woman should be her virtues."<sup>74</sup>

Lewis was sure that the clergy must share his doubts concerning the practicality and relevance of Christianity. Rev.



Judson Roberts, "big as a grizzly, jolly as a spaniel pup, radiant as ten suns," muttered: "I do wish I could get over this doubting."<sup>75</sup> Reverend Frank Shallard commented: "Oh, Lord, Phil, what a job, what a lying compromising job, this being a minister!"<sup>76</sup> The clergy were seen as using platitudes and poetic rhetoric to avoid telling the truth: "As we doing any real thing in the world at all?"<sup>77</sup>

Lewis was angry at the pretensions of clergymen who "prayed as God to God,"<sup>78</sup> and claimed to have "wiped out all sin in the community."<sup>79</sup> He was afraid that a hellfire preacher like Bishop Prang, "not the still small voice of God,"<sup>80</sup> might easily become a hellfire fascist.<sup>81</sup>

Along with the clergy, Lewis criticised their dull, self-important, unthinking congregations who prevented freedom and compelled respectability: "a mechanical religion -- a dry hard church, shut off from the real life of the streets, inhumanly respectable as a top-hat;"<sup>82</sup> "solemn whiskery persons whose only pleasure aside from not doing agreeable things was keeping others from doing them."<sup>83</sup> They are uncritical churchfolks, whose worship has become a standardized public rite.

Church congregations are Babbitts, lacking the qualities of civilized life. They have no purposes, no rites; their morality and church attendance are meaningless.

Their religion has become a creed which they do not understand; it has ceased to be, as it was in Catholic Europe, or even in theocratic New England, a way of life, a channel of their hopes, an order with meaning.

They are creatures of the passing moment who are vaguely unhappy in a boring and senseless existence that is without dignity, without grace, without purpose.<sup>84</sup>

These people belong to a dead world of empty shibboleths, a society marked by drabness, sterility, and joylessness,<sup>85</sup> brought about by a religion which lacks "reason, decency, and kindness."<sup>86</sup> According to Lewis, man must leave religions, ideologies, and superstition, and stand on his own. In this way he will achieve freedom, autonomy, health and integrity:<sup>87</sup> "Come out of death into life."<sup>88</sup> "The Christian religion is a crutch. Until it is taken away we can never begin to walk well."<sup>89</sup>

All Lewis's works are inimical to religion, because religion is opposed to brotherhood, progress, and science, which he nearly always affirms. These few beliefs lie at the centre of Lewis's thinking, and animate his attacks on various institutions, classes, and points of view. At times his anger becomes shrill, and he curses religion for causing or allowing misery, for giving a false picture of life with its poisonous teaching. He portrays Christ as neither forgiving nor tender,<sup>90</sup> the Bible as enslaving, and God as an egotistical bully. Cleergy and laity are deceivers, seeking power, limiting thought and culture: "Do not forgive them, Lord, for they know what they do."<sup>91</sup> The world is "a booby blundering schoolboy," clumsy, raw, ignorant, slow, and "ten percent efficient."<sup>92</sup> In extreme moments, Lewis finds mankind unregenerate, and passes bitter judgment on the whole damned human race.<sup>93</sup> When he saw the drunken men and women brawling or lying unconscious in the slums of Glasgow,

Red stopped and raised his clenched fists to high heaven. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "I can't stand it any more," he cried. "I can't stand it." All the way back to the hotel he cursed and raved. "God damn the society that will permit such poverty!" "God damn the religions that stand for such a putrid system. God damn them all!"<sup>94</sup>

Lewis's attacks on religion are usually irrational and prejudiced. He makes a superficial criticism of church superficialities: "The amount of time and passion that theologians have spent on defining fairy-story words would, if sensibly applied, have eliminated all war and bad cooking."<sup>95</sup> He hates false religiosity, smug deceitful believers, unethical acts, and empty formalities: "All those mouldy barns of churches, and people coughing illiterate hymns, and long-winded preachers"<sup>96</sup> repeating "perfectly meaningless doctrine."<sup>97</sup>

He makes Elmer Gantry a monster, and uses him in "his war against the Old Testament God, against literal interpretation, puritanism, hypocrisy, bigotry, cruelty, and dollar evangelism,"<sup>98</sup> and through Elmer (like priest, like people) Lewis judges the whole church. He mocks established creeds and makes a "coarse misplaced, cheap jest of everything that yet has value in American culture, that is to say, religion."<sup>99</sup> He misreads the meaning and faith of America, but his bitterness is based on concern, and a feeling that something is wrong with religious life.

I have decided that no one in this room, including your pastor, believes in the Christian religion. Not one of us would turn the other cheek. Not one of us would sell all that he has and give to the poor. Not one of us would give his coat to some man who took his overcoat. Every one of us lays up all the treasure he can. We don't practise the Christian religion. We don't intend to practise it. Therefore, we don't believe in it. Therefore I resign, and I advise you to quit lying and disband.<sup>100</sup>

Lewis criticises Christians for not living up to Christ's teachings, and he scorns the Christian religion because he sees it as false and irrelevant. In order to understand his dislike of religion, and his ambivalency with respect to other values, it is

necessary to make a study of the man and his life. After that, his works will be considered in the light of these tendencies in his outlook.

Footnotes to Chapter I

<sup>7</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The Man from Main Street, eds. H.E. Maule and M.H. Cane (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920), p. 265)

<sup>11</sup>Mark Schorer, Introduction, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Mark Schorer (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962),

<sup>12</sup>Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here (New York: Collier, 1935), p. 441.

<sup>13</sup>Vernon L. Parrington, "Sinclair Lewis: Our Own Diogenes" (1927), Essays, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Morss Lovett, "An Interpreter of American Life" (1925), Essays, p. 34.

<sup>15</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Cass Timberlane (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 373.

<sup>16</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1929), p. 96.

<sup>17</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties (New York: Collier, 1953), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Carl L. Anderson, The Swedish Acceptance of American Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>Vincent Sheean, Dorothy and Red (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 167.

<sup>20</sup>T.K. Whipple, "Sinclair Lewis" (1928), Essays, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup>Parrington, "Diogenes", Essays, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>Man From Main Street, p. 328.

<sup>23</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The Prodigal Parents, quoted in Essays, p. 160.

<sup>24</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 234.

<sup>25</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 416.

<sup>26</sup>Sheean, p. 338.

<sup>27</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup>Main Street, p. 205.

<sup>29</sup>Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware (New York, 1896), p. 198.

<sup>30</sup>Main Street, p. 415.

<sup>31</sup>Sheean, p. 336.

<sup>32</sup>Grebstein, preface.

<sup>33</sup>Sheean, p. 111.

<sup>34</sup>Robert J. Griffin, "Sinclair Lewis", American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize, eds. W.G. French and W.E. Kidd (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 48.

<sup>35</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup>Walter Lippmann, "Sinclair Lewis" (1927), Essays, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>Man from Main Street, p. 313.

<sup>38</sup>Robert E. Spiller et al., The Literary History of the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 1225.

<sup>39</sup>Sheean, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup>Whipple, "S.L.", Essays, p. 77.

<sup>41</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 162.

<sup>42</sup>Main Street, p. 430.

<sup>43</sup>Whipple, "S.L.", Essays, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Schorer, Life, p. 219.

<sup>45</sup>Grebstein, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The Job (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1917), p. 185.

<sup>47</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), p. 188.

<sup>48</sup>Arrowsmith, p. 9.

- <sup>49</sup>It Can't Happen Here, p. 426.
- <sup>50</sup>Henry D. Thoreau, Walden (Edinburgh: Douglas, 1884), p. 167.
- <sup>51</sup>H.L. Mencken, Prejudices: Fourth Series (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), p. 75.
- <sup>52</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 372.
- <sup>53</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The God Seeker (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 82.
- <sup>54</sup>Quoted in Schorer, Life, p. 178.
- <sup>55</sup>Grace Hegger Lewis, With Love From Gracie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 92.
- <sup>56</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 219.
- <sup>57</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 180.
- <sup>58</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn (New York: Harper, 1915), p. 46.
- <sup>59</sup>God Seeker, p. 53.
- <sup>60</sup>Wilfried Edener, Die Religionskritik in den Romanen von Sinclair Lewis, Beihefte zum Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien, No. 10. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1963), p. 145.
- <sup>61</sup>Quoted by G. H. Lewis, p. 302.
- <sup>62</sup>God Seeker, p. 176.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 211.
- <sup>64</sup>Edener, p. 86.
- <sup>65</sup>H.L. Mencken, Prejudices: Fifth Series (New York: Knopf, 1926), p. 114.
- <sup>66</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 89.
- <sup>67</sup>Quoted in Hoffman, Twenties, p. 28.
- <sup>68</sup>Babbitt, p. 394.
- <sup>69</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 348.
- <sup>70</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 449.
- <sup>71</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1915), p. 383.

- <sup>72</sup>Mencken, Prejudices: Fifth, p.111.
- <sup>73</sup>The Job, p. 261.
- <sup>74</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Ann Vickers (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933), p. 220.
- <sup>75</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 61.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 370.
- <sup>77</sup>H.G. Wells, Joan and Peter (New York: Macmillan, 1918), p. 10.
- <sup>78</sup>God Seeker, p. 6.
- <sup>79</sup>Arrowsmith, p. 258.
- <sup>80</sup>It Can't Happen Here, p.65.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 66.
- <sup>82</sup>Babbitt, p. 234.
- <sup>83</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 333.
- <sup>84</sup>Lippmann, "S.L.", Essays, p. 90.
- <sup>85</sup>Parrington, "Diogenes," Essays, p. 68.
- <sup>86</sup>Horton Davies, A Mirror of the Ministry in Modern Novels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 30.
- <sup>87</sup>Edener, p. 198.
- <sup>88</sup>God Seeker, p. 345.
- <sup>89</sup>Quoted in Schorer, Life, p. 92.
- <sup>90</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 377.
- <sup>91</sup>It Can't Happen Here, p. 384.
- <sup>92</sup>The Job, p. 182.
- <sup>93</sup>George J. Becker, "Sinclair Lewis: Apostle to the Philistines", American Scholar, XXI (Autumn 1952), 425.
- <sup>94</sup>Quoted from Frazier Hunt in Grebstein, p. 148.
- <sup>95</sup>God Seeker, p. 179.
- <sup>96</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 87.



<sup>97</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 87.

<sup>98</sup>Robert Littrell, "The Preacher Fried in Oil," New Republic, 50 (March 16, 1927), 108.

<sup>99</sup>Anderson, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 385.

## CHAPTER II

Sinclair Lewis was born and brought up in the small Midwestern town of Sauk Centre, and he fully understood its values. He had an "appalling regard"<sup>101</sup> for his father, Dr. E.J. Lewis, who thought that the church was a good thing for the community ("Religion is a fine thing to keep people in order"<sup>102</sup>), who believed in and practised "the sterner and more puritanical virtues"<sup>103</sup> -- especially duty. From his father, young Harry "inherited a considerable respect for the Puritan values,"<sup>104</sup> and though he rebelled against Sauk Centre and Dr. E.J. he was not blind to their merits nor free from their influence.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, it has been observed that he "developed an overt perversity and hatred for what he secretly loved and in which he wanted to share."<sup>106</sup>

He longed to join in the activities of his brother Claude, who was everything that Harry was not -- "sensible, steady, well-organized, happy, gregarious, good-looking and well-built, gifted at sports and at hunting and fishing, unimaginative, shrewd with money and thrifty, ambitious."<sup>107</sup> To win attention for himself, Harry felt a compulsion to show off, to do the opposite of what was expected of him, to delight in saying surprising things. His father complained: "Harry, why can't you do like any other boy ought to do?"<sup>108</sup> Lewis's character developed into one of extraordinary

contradiction, and throughout his life he won attention with his contrary ways.

The dynamo of energy, ideas, and words was also shy, lonely, and insecure. He read avidly and widely, and lived in worlds of his imagination. Sensing his superior endowments and social inferiority, he developed a degree of self-righteousness and piety.<sup>109</sup> He attended all the local churches, and at Yale wrote: "I certainly have a keen interest in the relation between the human spirit and That Power Not Ourselves."<sup>110</sup> He experienced a real spiritual need, and under the influence of an Oberlin YMCA man, felt himself called to be a Christian missionary. He said that prayer is "sacred and necessary"; and "God's word is eternal life."<sup>111</sup> However, his questioning mind and his reading of books by Paine, Haeckel, and Ingersoll undermined these new religious feelings, and he wrote a paragraph called "My Religion" advocating appreciation of the arts, kindness, minding one's business, sympathy, plain living and high thinking. He was "committed to curiosity, tolerance, and skepticism."<sup>112</sup>

He had turned eagerly to the church for spiritual wisdom and help in his loneliness; but he soon found many things impossible to believe in Christian theism.<sup>113</sup> He became disillusioned with Christianity, and at Yale proposed the abolition of the chapel. He was always rebellious, groping, dissatisfied. He had a "restless, dynamic, overcharged, demanding personality,"<sup>114</sup> and his ugly cancerous face and wild talk prevented him from attracting affection: "he was a meager and rusty-haired youth with protruding teeth and an uneasy titter . . . his voice shrill with desire to change the world."<sup>115</sup>

Originally called "God Forbid," he was renamed "Red" at Yale for his hair and his hazy utopian socialism: "If all the people worked as a team, we would have a perfect world."<sup>116</sup> Brotherhood became a kind of religion. Throughout his life, "Red" wanted to improve the world and society; he really did care about people, and his criticism of society was fundamentally moral. He desired human perfection. To make "systematic observations"<sup>117</sup> of people and places, he travelled to Europe and to Panama, and in 1906 he went to work at Upton Sinclair's utopian experiment in communal living, Helicon Hall. He enjoyed discussing ideas with the "worthwhile people"<sup>118</sup> there, and afterwards completed his Yale studies. He planned to be a writer, but the next years were "a miscellany of false starts, lost jobs, lost hopes, loose ends, erratic wandering."<sup>119</sup>

He seemed to have enormous and inexhaustible enthusiasm, but his disappointments were many and bitter. He was gawky and bumbling, poor, restless, rejected, derided, and lonely, "at once naive and yet familiar with a quite tough experience of life."<sup>120</sup> When he met Grace Livingstone Hegger, pretty, spirited, arrogant, smart, given to airs, he fell in love with her because "she objectified his own divided being."<sup>121</sup> The mixed quality of Lewis is shown in this phrase, and it is also shown in the ambiguous tone of the novel that he dedicated to Gracie, Our Mr. Wrenn (1914).

It is a patronizing tone, not quite satirical, that tries at once to make us take Wrenn seriously and at the same time allow us to be superior to him, a coy sentimentality about his sentimentality that seems at once to want both to sanction the choice as the wise, general choice, and to deride him as an unimportant chooser -- an eaten-uneaten cake situation.<sup>122</sup>

His next novels had the cheerful exuberance and bright optimism of the years before America entered the war. Amid the

disillusion and criticism after the war many Americans clung to a belief in the small town as the friendliest place, the real America. Sinclair Lewis sometimes thought the same, but in his best-seller Main Street (1920) he portrayed Gopher Prairie as an unpleasant place fixed in the rigidities of the past. "His attitude toward the Middle West is as ambiguous as his attitude toward the middle class: both drawn as hopelessly narrow, the first is shown finally as somehow the only sensible place, and the second as somehow the only sensible people."<sup>123</sup>

In spite of conflicting elements in the novel, Main Street sold 500,000 copies, was translated into nearly every European language, gave a new phrase to dictionaries, and made Lewis a world figure. It also involved him in a storm of controversy, but instead of worrying he eagerly wrote other provocative books, Babbitt (1922), Arrowsmith (1925), and Elmer Gantry (1927). As a successful novelist, Lewis led a busy social life. The painter C.R.W. Nevinson called him "restless, clownish, and intense," as "he poured forth the most remarkable monologue of love and hate, shrewdness and sentimentality."<sup>124</sup> Lewis believed in the value of imaginative indecision and doubt. "I don't know,"<sup>125</sup> said Aaron Gadd, when seeking religious understanding. Arrowsmith and Gottlieb looked for scientific truths, but always with scepticism. Dodsworth tried to analyse the qualities of America and Europe without prejudice.

In his search for knowledge, Sinclair Lewis studied the ideas of Socialist Eugene Debs, whom he called a "Christ spirit" because he was wise and kind and forgiving -- yet a fighter for truth. When Debs said: "Be true to the God within oneself," Lewis wept.<sup>126</sup> He also studied the works of Thoreau and Emerson, who believed in individual freedom, and taught that man could be religious, but nobly, wisely. With Melville, Hawthorne, and Whitman, they created an American

tradition of revolt.<sup>127</sup>

Lewis joined the literary tradition of criticism of American religious practices, based originally on Eighteenth Century French Enlightenment; he had read the works of Voltaire, Franklin, Jefferson and Paine ("My mind is my own chapel"<sup>128</sup>). These authors believed that art could change lives for the better, and were sincere and courageous in the search for reason.

British writers also helped form Lewis's positive ideals, and H.G. Wells taught

that mankind can, by taking thought, by real education, acquire such strange, crimson-shot, altogether enchanted qualities as cheerfulness, kindness, honesty, plain decency, refusal to make ourselves miserable and guilty just to please some institution that for a century has been a walking and talking corpse.<sup>129</sup>

Lewis's criticism of the church followed that of H.G. Wells, but it was also based on his awareness of a powerful, unapproachable God: "an overwhelming light with streamers that reach out to pierce a man's soul."<sup>130</sup> Lewis's sense of God was vague, but he had sincere religious feelings, expressed in his love of charity and honesty, which made him attack the practice of religion in America. He refused all obligations of religion because no worship satisfied his own religious feelings: "As a satirist, he saw too clearly the faults and foibles and the undue pretensions of the church ever to bring himself under its wing."<sup>121</sup> In addressing the Sunday evening forum of the Community Christian Church, Kansas City, on the subject of a religion for the modern man, he tried to introduce the idea that God is not the petty avenging God of some men's imagination: "I don't think God is like that."<sup>132</sup>

With is "considerable streak of adolescent piety,"<sup>133</sup> he was appalled at the churches' presumption and self-righteousness in

proclaiming God, and hated smug self-important clergy who showed little respect and understanding for God:

... and that, yes, the Maker of the universe with the stars a hundred thousand light-years apart was interested, furious, and very personal about it if a small boy played baseball on Sunday afternoon.<sup>134</sup>

From his Sunday School days to his death -- "supposing after they throw the last spadeful of dirt on us, we find out it's all true!"<sup>135</sup> --

Sinclair Lewis was trying to find out truths about God and religion.

He talked of the deep heart's experience, the personal search, and

"the yearning for union with the divine."<sup>136</sup> The search of the soul

for God he called an "adventure,"<sup>137</sup> Rev. G.E. Beilby wrote, "Religious Commitment was an idea that caused him much torture . . . He did sense positive elements in Christianity, and, I think, at least subconsciously, he longed to make them his own."<sup>138</sup>

Lewis believed in "decency and kindness and reason,"<sup>139</sup> love friendship, tolerance, integrity, beauty, intellect,<sup>140</sup> and a democratic faith in justice and progress. He was driven by the gospel of work ("What's the purpose of life?" -- "Work."<sup>141</sup>), and in his neatness, lack of tenderness, sex embarrassment, and guilt shows "a profound and provincial puritanism."<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, with a typical contradiction, he claimed that his aim was to live fully, to experience beauty and joy and love. He wanted every individual to achieve self-realization, to be a "free, inquiring, critical spirit"<sup>143</sup> -- and this meant leaving the fables and dictates of the churches. He desired a wiser and more just social order, with pride and fulfillment in good work, and a new Trinity of "Reason, Humanitarianism, and Progress."<sup>144</sup> In Elmer Gantry, he suggested that men should be pointed to "uncharted plateaus called Righteousness, Idealism, Honesty, Sacrifice, Beauty, Salvation."<sup>145</sup>

He never clearly or consistently defined these ideals, but he used them in his angry railing at American faults. He was a

satirist (more fully discussed in Chapter IV) presenting distorted pictures of institutions and beliefs so that readers could perceive them as if for the first time. His reaction to social wrongs was immediate, intense, and rebellious: "He loved getting angry, especially in a righteous cause,"<sup>146</sup> said his second wife, Dorothy Thompson. She was a brilliant and popular newswoman, vital, warm, and intelligent, whose opinions were multitudinous and firm. Lewis was enchanted by her at first; and proposed several times; but she hesitated about loving a man who lacked direction and had "something slippery"<sup>147</sup> about him. They were married in May, 1928, in civil and religious ceremonies, but there were bitter clashes in their relationship. Lewis was a difficult man to live with: "he hated prohibition of any kind."<sup>148</sup> He said, "My mission in life is to be the despised critic, the eternal fault-finder. I must carp and scold until everyone despises me. That's what I was put here for."<sup>149</sup>

Thomas Wolfe admired the sincerity behind the anger. He described Lewis-McHarg in You Can't Go Home Again:

He knew how much integrity and courage and honesty was contained in that tormented tenement of fury and lacerated hurts. Regardless of all that was jangled, snarled, and twisted in his life, regardless of all that had become bitter, harsh, and acrid, McHarg was obviously one of the truly good, the truly high, the truly great people of the world.<sup>150</sup>

Lewis aimed to castigate America until it was pure and worthy of his love.<sup>151</sup> He felt a self-appointed mission to reform by exposure, believing that the lot of man could be improved if its faults were pointed out; and his favourite targets were smugness, hypocrisy, dishonesty, conformity, snobbery, and prejudice. He made slashing attacks on creeds and practices, derided dullness and formalism, and was indignant at narrow people for their "constriction of the soul."<sup>152</sup>

All these faults Lewis found in American religion, and for most of his life, he showed "a complete lack of sympathy for any form



of religious belief."<sup>153</sup> He mimicked clergymen and sang tasteless songs about Jesus Christ at parties, he dragged his sick wife down Billy Sunday's "sawdust trail" for fun, and left instructions that nothing of a religious nature was to occur in connection with his funeral.<sup>154</sup> He was not interested in theology and abstract discussion,<sup>155</sup> but he had an impressive knowledge of religious matters, and in collecting material for Elmer Gantry cross-examined his Sunday School Class of twenty Kansas City clergymen with such questions as, "Why don't you be honest in your pulpits?" He called them "a fine bunch. You get up and preach things that neither you nor your congregations believe."<sup>156</sup> As if to show their insincerity, he himself entered their pulpits for "damned fool preaching;"<sup>157</sup> and on one celebrated occasion, "spoke up to Papa God."<sup>158</sup>

Sinclair Lewis knew that religion, which is concerned with man's deepest mysteries, cannot be rational, cannot be analysed -- "I believe because it is impossible,"<sup>159</sup> -- but he was determined to write a tract to prove that religion is impossible. In writing Elmer Gantry Lewis "got so excited making faces at God that he forgot his craftsmanship."<sup>160</sup> The satire goes too far; Christianity is made inconceivable, as all religious people are presented as either hypocrites or morons. The satire fails to generate a realistic view of religion in America; instead, it is just peevish "foaming at the mouth."<sup>161</sup> It indicates Lewis's revulsion and loathing for Christian practices, perhaps a reaction to his own impulse to be an evangelical missionary.<sup>162</sup>

... paying my compliments to the Methodist Cardinals, the Lords Day Alliance, the S.P.V., and all the rest -- not slightly and meekly as in M.St. and Babbitt but at full length, and very, very lovingly. I think it'll be just the right time for this novel, and I think I can do it con amore ... I long to deal with the religiousers soon.<sup>163</sup>

The book Elmer Gantry caused a storm of controversy and pulpit fury, and Lewis was threatened with jail and lynching. At the time he was

travelling in Europe and revising Dodsworth (1929), the novel in which he turned back to a reassertion of the middle-class, middle-brow, and Middle Western values that he had criticised in Main Street and Babbitt. However, the stock market crash drastically altered the old-fashioned values, and also modified Lewis's plans for a labour novel, never completed. He was drinking heavily because he lacked the "arduous and godly labors"<sup>164</sup> of novel writing; then suddenly he was notified that he had won the Nobel prize in literature for 1930. Americans were disgusted at the news; Dr. Henry Van Dyke wrote, "You say God's dead, and life's a bawdy tale..... You mock mankind with lewd ungainly mirth;"<sup>165</sup> but the award showed that the importance of new American literature was recognised in Europe.

Lewis claimed that his publishers, Harcourt, Brace and Company, had not taken full advantage of the Nobel publicity, and broke off his contract. He did not perceive that Alfred Harcourt sensed that Lewis's version of American reality, which had brought them enormous success, was no longer relevant in the 1930's. History had left Sinclair Lewis behind, though he continued to be a popular novelist, and Ann Vickers (1933) brought large dividends to Nelson Doubleday, his new publishers. Dorothy Thompson was very much involved with world affairs, and her knowledge of Nazi Germany and Hitler provided material for It Can't Happen Here (1935), in which Lewis described a fascist takeover of the United States.

This successful book was received as a major political act, not an artistic achievement. Lewis was called "a publicist in fiction"<sup>166</sup> by Richard P. Blackmur, but he thought of himself as primarily a novelist: "I'm not in the business of exposing things... I write novels ... I don't know what the hell this country needs."<sup>167</sup> According to his publishers, Lewis's attitude to his own work was one of detachment, "the absence of any genuine imaginative commitment to his material,"<sup>168</sup> even though his books were written with great enthusiasm and industry. This detachment

allowed him to present opposing views with equal conviction, or to be angry in conflicting causes. It Can't Happen Here does not have the intellectual coherence of Aldous Huxley or the persuasive vision of a nightmare future of George Orwell, but it caught public attention at just the right time.

Lewis made a series of lecture tours, talking about politics and literature, and wrote The Prodigal Parents (1938) which defended the American business and capitalist system. He also tried acting and play-writing, but his performances lacked discipline. However, he enjoyed the company of the young actress, Marcella Powers, and with her played the clergyman in Shadow and Substance. His novel about a stage-company, Bethel Merriday (1940), was unsuccessful, and his behaviour became marked by "nervousness, the unrelenting agitation, the insistence of his fierce and frothy energy, the endless placing up and down, up and down."<sup>169</sup> He lost his friends and was divorced by Dorothy; his social conduct was unpredictable, and when he addressed university classes on the subject of writing, he made his students wonder what he stood for: "His literary judgments were always so whimsical."<sup>170</sup> It was reported that he was "without self-deception"<sup>171</sup> and recognized tawdry repetition and decline in his later work, but when he called The God Seeker (1949) his best, most serious book, his biographer noted: "his miscalculations about his own work are part of his miscalculations about everything."<sup>172</sup>

Lewis was never at ease -- "driven all his life, all over the world, from house to house, by his unmanageable restlessness, he was never at home, only always wishing to be."<sup>173</sup> He drank to excess, and suffered two heart attacks. No friends visited him in his Rome hospital, and he died on January 10, 1951. His body was brought back to America, the land he loved and hated, documented and made aware of itself. "Without his writing one cannot imagine modern American literature. This is because, without his writing, we can hardly imagine ourselves."<sup>174</sup>

Footnotes to Chapter II

- 101 Schorer, Life, p. 463.
- 102 Main Street, p. 325.
- 103 Sheean, p. 353.
- 104 Dooley, Art, p. 25.
- 105 Grebstein, p. 71.
- 106 Ibid., p. 21.
- 107 Schorer, Life, p. 20.
- 108 Ibid., p. 264.
- 109 Ibid., p. 40.
- 110 Man from Main Street, p. 113.
- 111 Schorer, Life, p. 50.
- 112 Ibid., p. 89.
- 113 Ibid., p. 64, 77.
- 114 Sheean, p. 297.
- 115 Elmer Gantry, p. 7.
- 116 Trail of the Hawk, p. 81.
- 117 Schorer, Life, p. 110.
- 118 Ibid., p. 115.
- 119 Ibid., p. 139.
- 120 Ibid., p. 207.
- 121 Ibid., p. 207.
- 122 Ibid., p. 212.
- 123 Ibid., p. 295.
- 124 Ibid., p. 395.
- 125 God Seeker, p. 380.
- 126 Schorer, Life, p. 456.
- 127 Man From Main Street, p. 242.

- <sup>128</sup>Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason -- Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology, p. 6.
- <sup>129</sup>Man from Main Street, p. 249.
- <sup>130</sup>God Seeker, p. 95.
- <sup>131</sup>G.H. Lewis, p. 302.
- <sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 301.
- <sup>133</sup>Edener, p. 55.
- <sup>134</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 236.
- <sup>135</sup>Quoted in Grebstein, p. 106.
- <sup>136</sup>Trail of the Hawk, p. 426.
- <sup>137</sup>Grebstein, p. 139.
- <sup>138</sup>G.H. Lewis, p. 302.
- <sup>139</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 28.
- <sup>140</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 355.
- <sup>141</sup>Dodsworth, p. 20.
- <sup>142</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 595.
- <sup>143</sup>It Can't Happen here, p. 433.
- <sup>144</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 240.
- <sup>145</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 120.
- <sup>146</sup>Sheean, p. 147.
- <sup>147</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 489.
- <sup>148</sup>G.H. Lewis, p. 68.
- <sup>149</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 311.
- <sup>150</sup>Quoted in Geoffrey Moore, "Sinclair Lewis: A Lost Romantic" (1959), Essays, p. 163.
- <sup>151</sup>Sheean, p. 88.
- <sup>152</sup>Grebstein, p. 65.
- <sup>153</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 228.
- <sup>154</sup>Edener, p. 70.
- <sup>155</sup>Sheean, p. 142.

- <sup>156</sup>Quoted in Dooley, Art, p. 121.
- <sup>157</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Letters, From Main Street to Stockholm  
(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 207.
- <sup>158</sup>Quoted in Schorer, Life, p. 447.
- <sup>159</sup>Elmer Gantry, p. 71.
- <sup>160</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 126.
- <sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 130.
- <sup>162</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 480.
- <sup>163</sup>Lewis, Letters, p. 150.
- <sup>164</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 536.
- <sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 550.
- <sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 690.
- <sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 545.
- <sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 598.
- <sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 658.
- <sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 709.
- <sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 726.
- <sup>172</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 776.
- <sup>173</sup>Stanley I. Kunitz, Twentieth Century Authors: First  
Supplement (New York: W. H. Wilson, 1955), p. 578.
- <sup>174</sup>Schorer, Life, p. 813.

### CHAPTER III

Many of Sinclair Lewis' novels made their criticisms at just the right time. The Twenties rejected Victorianism and Puritanism, attacked provinciality, and lack of sophistication and culture, with an intellectual superiority based on science, sociology, and psychology. The American Mercury proclaimed scepticism and "crystallized the misgivings of thousands."<sup>175</sup>

To these readers, Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry and It Can't Happen Here were up-to-date, realistic and important books. Lewis "tapped a swollen mood of iconoclasm and escapism."<sup>176</sup> Like his readers, he rebelled against old restrictions and was insecure about new ideas. He made people and institutions self-critical, but did not persuade them to eradicate their faults. His books sold well because, with the exception of Elmer Gantry, they presented all tastes and all points of view.

Elmer Gantry appeared in "the most hotly charged religious atmosphere since the Salem witch burnings,"<sup>177</sup> when the Scopes Trial was being debated with passionate excitement, when Billy Sunday, Aimee Semple McPherson, and other hellfire evangelists were conducting their conversion campaigns, when Bible Fundamentalists and Ku Klux Klansmen marched through the land. There was lively controversy as modernist theology interpreted the Bible as myths, and as sociology blamed environment, rather than sin, for man's evil-doing. Science promised an earthly paradise, and all concepts based on spiritual intuitions and beliefs rather than on scientific proofs were made suspect. Americans in the Twenties were living in plenty, and as wealth increased, fear of the devil decreased<sup>178</sup> The church was viewed as a purely social and political organization: "our present churches are as absurd as a belief in witchcraft."<sup>179</sup>

MAIN STREET (1920)\* is marked by Lewis's ambivalent views on the United States, Gopher Prairie and its people, culture and beauty, class-distinction and democracy, thought and action, women's rights, love and marriage, Carol and Kennicott; but on the subject of religion, Lewis is antagonistic throughout.

America is generally criticised in Main Street as lacking "the scientific spirit, the international mind, which would make it great" (p. 267), because it is made up of Gopher Prairies and their philosophy of dull safety: "Nine-tenths of the American towns are so alike that it is the completest boredom to wander from one to another" (p. 268). Factories, houses, shops, clothes and people are standardized. Americans move on because they hope to find adventure of the spirit in changing their horizon (p. 247). Those who stay are infected with the Village Virus (p. 156), and forget the ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (p. 117). Foreign immigrants do not practise their customs, but are "ironed into mediocrity" (p. 266).

Americans dressed up remain unchanged (p. 303). When they travel on vacation they long for familiar situations (p. 404); when they go to the theatre, they demand nothing "improper" (p. 218). One of their movies is described:

The feature film portrayed a brave young Yankee who conquered a South American republic. He turned the natives from their barbarous habits of singing and laughing to the vigorous sanity, the Pep and Punch and Go, of the North. . . . He changed nature itself. A mountain which had borne nothing but lilies and

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\*Note: For the remainder of this chapter, textual references will be found in parentheses after quotations.



cedars and loafing clouds was by his Hustle so inspirited that it broke out in . . . piles of iron ore. (p. 198)

The qualities of Vigor and Enterprise are characteristic of Americans, according to Mr. Blausser the Booster: "you take a genuwine, honest-to-God homo Americanibus and there ain't anything he's afraid to tackle. Snap and Speed are his middle name. He'll put her across if he has to ride from hell to breakfast. . . ." (p. 414)

Sinclair Lewis, the "alien cynic" (Head Piece), criticises this mad rush of energy because it lacks spiritual understanding. He is sarcastic -- "Main Street is the climax of civilization" (Head Piece), and just look at it!

There are redeeming features of America. When Kennicott sees historic Fort Snelling and the work of the pioneers, he cries: "It's a good country, and I'm proud of it. Let's make it all that those old boys dreamed about" (p. 17). Vida Sherwin, whose reforms are slower and more realistic than Carol's, says: "I'm a conservative. So much to conserve. All this treasure of American ideals. Sturdiness and democracy and opportunity" (p. 65). She has "overwhelming belief in the brains and hearts of our nation, our state, our town" (p. 66).

America is compared to the outside world, which is "topsy turvy" (p. 441), and also "the world of gaiety and adventure, of music and the integrity of broze, of remembered mists from tropic isles and Paris nights and the walls of Bagdad" (p. 111), Carol dreams romantically of Mentone, "a picture drenched with gold and hard bright blues" (p. 234), of "startling exotic things" (p. 270), and of "a think, black-bearded, cynical Frenchman who would sit about and drink and sing opera and tell bawdy stories and laugh at our proprieties

and quote Rabelais and not be ashamed to kiss my hand" (p. 270).

Carol's notions of civilized living are vague, but she looks for culture in Washington, D.C.

People go to the East to conquer themselves (p. 440), and they find good and bad. The Eastern cities have eager enthusiasm and mystery (p. 426), but they also suffer from "a thick streak of Main Street" (p. 427), cautious dullness and gossip. City people have easy gentleness, cheerfulness and efficiency (p. 428); but the Bohemians shock Carol (p. 10), and she hates "creamy skinned fat women, smeared with grease and chalk, . . . playing bridge with puffy pink-nailed, jeweled fingers, women who after much expenditure of labor and bad temper still grotesquely resemble their own flatulent lap-dogs" (p. 25).

Carol returns to the West: "the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middlewest; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos like red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless" (p. 24).

This mixed view is characteristic of Lewis's ambivalence. He describes the bleakness, "the vastness and the emptiness of the land" where "the unprotected houses would crouch together in terror of storms galloping out of the wild waste" (p. 33), "the panting summer and the stinging winter" (p. 82). Though the land can be frightening (p. 25), it has "dignity and greatness" (p. 58) and beauty.

Like earlier writers criticising America, Lewis is distressed at the discrepancy between the promises of the New World -- justice, equality, and happiness for all men -- and the reality. He has a romantic longing for what might have been, but his analysis is mainly concerned with current conditions. Sometimes

Lewis believes in America and American myths, and at other times he attacks them. "It's one of our favorite American myths that broad plains necessarily make broad minds" (p. 343), but the pioneers who tamed the land (pp. 150-151) with hardship and joy have narrow philosophies (p. 152). Another tradition is that "the American village remains the one sure abode of friendship, honesty, and clean sweet marriageable girls" (p. 264); but Main Street was written to show the dull deadness of small towns. America is great, but it kills the spirit:

a dominion which will rise to unexampled greatness when other empires have grown senile. Before that time . . . a hundred generations of Carols will aspire and go down in tragedy devoid of palls and solemn chanting, the humdrum inevitable tragedy of struggle against inertia. (p. 450)

But Carol would not be utterly defeated. She was glad of her rebellion. The prairie was no longer empty land in the sun-glare . . . in the village streets were shadows of her desires and the sound of her marching and the seeds of mystery and greatness. (p. 442)

She will look at everything, and ask why it is, and who first laid down the law that it had to be that way. "A rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest" (p. 1).

All the bewilderment is summed up in Gopher Prairie, the unattractive small town: "It was not only the unsparing unapologetic ugliness and the rigid straightness that overwhelmed her. It was the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors" (p. 37). However, Bea Sorenson finds Gopher Prairie beautiful, and Carol

learns to enjoy it: "everybody bowed to her, strangers and all, and made her feel that they wanted her, that she belonged here" (p. 62).

The local citizens believe "it's a darn pretty town" (p. 14), but to a newcomer it is "a frontier camp. . . not a place to live" (p. 27), "this junk-heap!" (p. 29) "Main Street was a black swamp from curb to curb. . . the town was barren under the bleak sky. Softened neither by snow nor by waving boughs the houses squatted and scowled, revealed in their unkempt harshness" (p. 139). Carol's dreams of creating a beautiful town are ludicrous: "she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer" (p. 34). Her house squeaks, "Choke her - choke her - smother her" (p. 31).

Conversation does not exist in Gopher Prairie (p. 46), but everybody gossips. Carol is fully discussed, and judged to be "showing off" and "frivolous" (p. 95). She cannot endure their derision: "she had tripped into a meadow to teach the lambs a pretty educational dance and found that the lambs were wolves. There was no way out between their pressing gray shoulders. She was surrounded by fangs and sneering eyes" (p. 99). The town is "filled with busybodies, that have plenty of time to stick their noses into other folks' business" (p. 395).

Carol moans: "I came here trusting them. They beat me with rods of dullness. They don't know, they don't understand how agonizing their complacent dullness is" (p. 364). Gopher Prairie citizens believe they are living in a paradise, but Carol perceives that they are bored, living lives of "vacuousness and bad manners and spiteful gossip" (p. 284). Will Kennicott protests: "This is

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

Kennicott is a local, and perceives things differently from Carol. When she sees hopeless houses, vile garbage, scarecrow people, he sees new fencing, improved signs, and friends (p. 408). She resolves to "love the fine Will Kennicott quality that there is in Gopher Prairie. The nobility of good sense" (p. 405). She realizes that the prying curiosity and gossip of the citizens is a form of affection: "Nobody in Washington cared enough for her to fret about her sins as Sam did" (p. 432). She remembers with sympathy her husband's description of the people: "a lot of pretty good folks, working hard and trying to bring up their families the best they can" (p. 442). Gopher Prairie may not be as wonderful as the town described in the Commercial Club booklet (p. 416), but it is much better than many other places (p. 429).

Gopher Prairie citizens believe they are superior to the simple hardworking farmers. The town leaders are opposed to socialism and profit sharing. Jack Elder becomes excited and belligerent and patriotic: "I stand for freedom and constitutional rights. . . they like what I pay 'em, or they get out" (p. 50). All agitators should be hanged, agrees Kennicott.

The aristocracy of Gopher Prairie consists of "all persons engaged in a profession, or earning more than twenty-five hundred dollars a year, or possessed of grandparents born in America" (p. 74). They believe in democracy -- the doctor hunts with the tailor and the undertaker (p. 42) -- but they despise their servants. "Juanita

Haydock rattled, 'They're ungrateful, all that class of people. . . I don't know what the country's coming to, with these Scandahoofian clodhoppers demanding every cent you save, and so ignorant and impertinent'." (p. 89) Carol loves common workmen (p. 4), sees the Scandinavians as "the hardiest and best people" (p. 89), and is friendly with her maid (p. 62); but she dares not share her table with Bea and Miles (p. 204).

Carol is happy to be invited to the Thanatopsis: "These are the real people. When the housewives, who bear the burdens, are interested in poetry, it means something" (p. 204). The self-satisfied women finish the English poets in a single meeting -- "they have their culture salted and hung up" (p. 127). Shaw's plays are rejected because they are "risky" (p. 218), and Balzac's novels are taken off the library shelves.

The Gopher Prairie Librarian insists that the first duty of a conscientious librarian is to preserve the books, rather than to get people to read (p. 92). Carol retorts that books are cheaper than minds; and is delighted when she is appointed to the town library-board, for she considers herself the only one with knowledge of books and library methods. Her condescension is ruined when she discovers that the men on the board are extremely well-read -- even though they leave the library "as dead as Moses" (p. 232).

Such committees as the library-board are hampered by lack of funds. Every reform is blocked by stupidity and "scared pocket-books" (p. 138), and the difficulty of deciding matters of taste: "It's art but is it pretty?" (p. 66) Kennicott points out the foolishness of "artistic guys" like Raymie Wutherspoon and Erik "Elizabeth" Valborg. Most artists, he says, are "grinding out a bum

living" (p. 397).

Carol has ideas about art and beauty and romance:

We're going to find elephants with golden howdahs  
from which peep young maharanees with necklaces of  
rubies, and a dawn sea colored like the breast of a  
dove, and a green house filled with books and silver  
tea-sets. (p. 424)

but her notions are vague and often silly, and soon swamped by the deadness of Main Street: "She felt oozing through the walls the spirit of small houses and righteous people" (p.409). Her attempts to redecorate the house and enliven the party are pathetic (p. 70), and she is not artistic enough to answer Mr. Blausser's claim that the town has "as much refinement and culture as any burg on the whole bloomin' expanse of God's Green Footstool" (p. 416). Sinclair Lewis does not lay down canons of taste in the novel: His longings for culture and satisfaction in life are indefinite. In this respect he differs from his models, Voltaire and Dickens, satirists who suggest or infer very real values by which to measure the faults of society. Lewis is vague about standards, but his mockery is clear: "Whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider" (Head Piece).

The respectability of Gopher Prairie is "reinforced by vows of poverty and chastity in the matter of knowledge . . . the citizens are proud of that achievement of ignorance" (p. 266). The people do not think (p. 20), but remain peasants "so sunk in the mud" (p. 22). Carol is disgusted at the sight and smell of the farm folk who travel with her: "a soiled man and woman . . . a large brick-colored Norwegian . . . and an old woman whose toothless mouth shuts like a mud turtle's" (p. 21).

Kennicott defends them: "these farmers are mighty keen and up-and-coming" (p. 22), and they live in "good hustling burgs" (p. 23) -- but he will not allow them political power (p. 57). Gopher Prairie leaders agree with him: "the others nodded, solemnly and in tune, like a shop-window of flexible toys, comic mandarins and judges and ducks and clowns" (p. 50). Their voices are "monotonous, thick, emphatic . . . harshly pompous" (p. 52), and frighten Carol: "God help me if I were an outsider!" (p. 52)

The Gopher Prairie rich do not help the poor (p. 142), but become "horribly hypocritical" (p. 158). They are afraid to act on impulse: "It's the historical Anglo-Saxon way of making life miserable" (p. 158). Nature is tamed, so men "raise the devil just for pleasure" (p. 158), according to Guy Pollock. He does not try to wake up and reform Gopher Prairie, because he is timid (p. 202) and knows how impossible it is.

Had she actually believed that she could plant  
a seed of liberalism in the blank wall of mediocrity?  
How had she fallen into the folly of trying to plant  
anything whatever in a wall so smooth and sun-glazed,  
and so satisfying to the happy sleepers within? (p. 144)

Uncle Whittier and Aunt Bessie are representative of village notions. They are staggered to learn that Carol can believe "that men have drunk wine yet not died in the gutter; that the capitalistic system of distribution and the Baptist wedding-ceremony were not known in the Garden of Eden . . . that there are Ministers of the Gospel who accept evolution" (p. 245).

However, their bewilderment and interfering are a form of love. They want to do things for the Kennicotts. "Thus Carol hit upon the tragedy of old age. . . that it is not needed by youth; that its love and prosy sageness. . . are rejected with laughter" (p. 447).



Carol learns to understand Midwest people, to accept their lack of polish as a form of relaxation (p. 171), to feel "the secure quiet of Gopher Prairie" (p. 210).

Carol's active hatred of the town and its people runs out.

She recalled tenderly the young awkwardness of Main Street. . . she pitied their shabbiness and isolation; had compassion for their assertion of culture. . . for their pretense of greatness. She saw Main Street in the dusty prairie sunset, a line of frontier shanties with solemn lonely people waiting for her. (p. 442)

The happy ending is disturbing. If Gopher Prairie is so bad, why does Sinclair Lewis make Carol accept it? The material of the novel is prosaic but the underlying mood is romantic: "She was of some significance because she was commonplace, the ordinary life of the age made articulate and protesting" (p. 439). Lewis hates and loves the Midwest: "Why, the faults you find in this town are simply human nature, and never will be changed" (p. 284).

Miles Bjornstam, the socialist, would overhaul Gopher Prairie completely, but he admits his ideas are "half-baked" (p. 115). When he acquires a family and a farm, he tries to conform to Main Street standards, but is cruelly rejected, in the most moving incident in the novel, when people come too late to help his dying wife, Bea.

Vida Sherwin is a patient reformer, who believes in working from the inside (p. 138) to alter only details: "things-in-general were comely and kind and immutable" (p. 254). She is not a destructive "revolutionist" like Carol (p. 254), but she gives moderate advice: "think how much better you can criticize conventional customs if you yourself live up to them, scrupulously" (p. 373). They talk endlessly, "the eternal Mary

and Martha -- an immoralist Mary and a reformist Martha" (p. 271).

Is talk better than work? Carol wants "to be quiet and think" (p. 422). She admires the poets and thoughtful writers and relishes the discussions of Washington friends; but she can hear Kennicott grunting: "They're simply a bunch of wild impractical theorists sittin' round chewing the rag" (p. 428). Carol runs into the woods, "crying out for joy of freedom regained after Winter. . . 'I believe! The woodland gods still live!'" (p. 146) But at other times she turns to admiration for her practical doctor husband: "We're a pair of hypercritical loafers. . . while he quietly goes and does things" (p. 180). It is noteworthy that on her return to Gopher Prairie, Carol works (p. 445).

She has been busy in a Washington office. The routine is dull and unhealthy, but it gives freedom and a sense of world affairs. The war is "to bring a basic change in psychology, to purify and uplift everything from marital relations to national politics" (p. 275), but why should Prussians be hated and bayoneted? (p. 276) The war involves "common people":

The conception of millions of workman like Miles taking control frightened her, and she scuttled rapidly away from the thought of a time when she might no longer retain the position of Lady Bountiful to the Bjornstams and Beas and Oscarinas whom she loved -- and patronized. (p. 276)

Guy Pollock has similar doubts: "Democracy is all right theoretically, and I'll admit there are industrial injustices, but I'd rather have them than see the world reduced to a dead level of mediocrity" (p. 202).

The industrial leader, Perce Bresnahan, is "a good, decent, friendly, efficient man" (p. 279); but he is also "a spiritual bully",

an actor and a hypocrite (p. 278). He preaches his gospel -- "love of outdoors, Playing the Game, loyalty to friends" (p. 285) -- and answers the iconoclast Carol with "agility and confusing statistics" (p. 285). He tells her that there are thousands of women as dissatisfied as herself: "Women haven't any place in politics. They would lose their daintiness and charm if they became involved in . . . this awful political stuff" (p. 143). But Carol is conscious of a "discontent" in women. "What is it we want -- and need?" Not lots of children and hard work (p. 296), but "a more conscious life" (p. 201); "we want our Utopia now" (p. 202). From reading many modern books "she got the same confused desire which the million other women felt; the same determination to be class-conscious without discovering the class of which she was to be conscious" (p. 263).

"Confused desire" aptly describes Carol Kennicott, and Sinclair Lewis's intentions in using her as his protagonist: "the lines are broken and uncertain of direction" (p. 430). Carol is vitally alive (p. 2) yet a dreamer (p. 5). She wants to "do something with life" (p. 8) but she has no system (p. 73). One minute she is "drunk with health, mistress of life" (p. 84); the next she is brooding (p. 84). She yells "Yippee!" and jumps in the snow, then turns into the sedate Mrs. Dr. Kennicott (p. 86). She is distressed at Gopher Prairie criticism (p. 95), then takes Bjornstam's advice: "Kick 'em in the face! Say, if I were a seagull and all over silver, think I'd care what a pack of dirty seals thought about my flying?" (p. 118) She loves poetry, but is not transported to Camelot (p. 121). She loathes vulgar movies, but titters (p. 121).

When she discovers the civic organizations of Gopher Prairie, she is "a proud and patriotic citizen, all evening" (p. 128); and when she learns the town's history, she declares "the G.P. had the color of Algiers and the gaiety of Mardi Gras" (p. 136): but usually she insists that "this morass" is "not her home" (p. 139), and plans to run away. She is content at the lake (p. 149), but in town she laments: "I've failed at every positive thing I've tried. . . . I'm a tiny leashed hawk, pecked to death by these large, white, flabby, wormy hens" (p. 160).

Her husband criticises her for feeling so superior to folks, without cause (p. 173), and she is appalled at being a reformer like Widow Bogart (p. 186). Her play is "the worst defeat of all. I'm beaten" (p. 228), but she carries on. "Is all my life, always, an unresolved But?" (p. 410) To the casual eye she is not discontented, but inside she rages mutely against the indifferent gods: "I am I! . . . I'm not content. . . . Damn all of them!" (p. 273) Bresnahan says that she just likes being different (p. 284), Vida tells her, "You're not a sound reformer at all. You're an impossiblist. And you give up too easily" (p. 271). Kennicott complains that she had no passion (p. 307), and Carol sees herself as "that wedded spinster" (p. 354), a bloodless, moral, small-town woman.

Yet she is wonderful as the nurse to the Bjornstams (p. 321), and she wants to be herself, with "greatness of life" (p. 422). She runs away from Kennicott, but remembers his tenderness: "she had her freedom, and it was empty" (p. 423). One year later, when he visits her in Washington, she feels "nothing definite to agonize over" (p. 436). On her return to Gopher Prairie, she is "neither

glad nor sorry to be back" (p. 444). She expects to be "at once a heretic and a returned hero; she was very reasonable and merry about it; and it hurt just as much as ever" (p. 448). She is thoroughly beaten by Gopher Prairie; but she has fought a good fight and kept the faith (p. 451).

Carol's faith is a vague and changing thing, and Lewis's attitude to Carol keeps altering. Sometimes he admires, sometimes he mocks. The novel is primarily an exposure of American small town faults, with Carol as the viewer and sufferer, with Kennicott as the upholder of American and small town virtues. Will Kennicott is "a thick tall man of thirty-six or -seven, with stolid brown hair, lips used to giving orders, eyes which followed everything good-naturedly" (p. 12). He is kind and positive and virile (p. 15), and Carol likes and marries him. When he talks of home, she suddenly sees him as "a stranger," not of her kind, with "none of the magic of shared adventures and eagerness" (p. 26). However, he is comforting and strong, and she finds "in the courage and kindness of her man a shelter from the perplexing world" (p. 30).

He is awed by her beauty (p. 74), and clumsy in criticism (p. 80), but he gives up tobacco-chewing and other habits to please her (p. 104). He scorns the other doctors in the crudest terms (p. 164), but Bresnahan praises him: "It's the old doc that keeps a community well, mind and body. And strikes me that Will is one of the steadiest and clearest-headed country practitioners" (p. 283). Kennicott is mean about money, and when he criticises Carol for arguing, he rears up his thick shoulders, "in absurd pink and green flanellette pajamas. He sat straight, and irritatingly snapped his fingers, and growled" (p. 168).

However, he is courageous in making arduous night calls (p. 177) and admirable in his operation on Adolph Morgenroth (p. 192). On the other hand, Carol knows his anger and mockery, and despises "his gutter patois" (p. 199), his dreadful clothes (p. 289), and his table manners: "He violently chased fragments of fish about his plate with a knife and licked the knife after gobbling them" (p. 289). Sometimes he is the bullying American patriot:

"There's too much free speech and free gas and free beer and free love and all the rest of your damned mouthy freedom, and if I had my way I'd make you folks live up to the established rules of decency even if I had to take you --" (p. 420)

Kennicott has five hobbies: medicine, land-investment, Carol, motoring, and hunting. "It is not certain in what order he preferred them" (p. 195). He is "as fixed in routine as an isolated old man" (p. 291), and complains that "she's always trying to make me over from a perfectly good M.D. into a damn poet with a socialist neck-tie" (p. 306). He turns to Maud Dyer for comfort, but when Carol is foolish about Erik Valborg he is "mature and slow, yet beseeching" (p. 396), and asks: "Carrie, do you understand my work?" (p. 796). He is the scientist of Gopher Prairie, who works all hours to heal everybody, rich or poor, and all he needs is to have Carrie welcome him. She is his soul (p. 396). Carol does not realise that Will has "bewilderments and concealments as intricate as her own" (p. 439).

Main Street is, in some ways, a love story. The love-making of Carol and Will is ordinary: "They were biology and mystery; their speech was slang phrases and flares of poetry; their silences were contentment or shaky crises" (p. 15). They like each other honestly, and put off children until Will has more money: "perhaps he had made

all the mystery of love a mechanical cautiousness" (p. 85). Carol is not stirred by Will, but she depends on him (p. 161). She has to ask for money, and in the ensuing argument hates him (p. 173). Then she sees she has not been just, and "that December she was in love with her Husband" (p. 176).

She thinks of games and surprises to vary the days, refusing to listen to his theory that "all this romance stuff is simply moonshine" (p. 181). When her baby is born she first hates it then loves "with all the devotion and instinct at which she had scoffed" (p. 241). Kennicott will give Hugh discipline, but Carol will give him the rights of a human being (p. 448).

Kennicott's relatives are unbearable to Carol; she discovers "that the one thing that can be more disconcerting than intelligent hatred is demanding love" (p. 244). She babbles her troubles to Mrs. Westlake, doctor's wife and gossip, who approves of her having a separate bedroom:

"Why, child, every woman ought to get off by herself and turn over her thoughts -- about children, and God, and how bad her complexion is. . . and how much patience it takes to endure some things in a man's love." (p. 295)

Carol, "snarled with lies and foggy analyses and desires" (p. 366), is not as loving to Will as he wishes. She cannot put on an act, though she wants to love him: "Am I too honest -- a funny topsyturvy honesty -- the faithfulness of unfaith?" (p. 367) She wants to be let alone, but "marriage weaves people together" (p. 398).

The marriage story of Carol and Will Kennicott is full of twists and changes. Sometimes Lewis preaches the virtues of loyalty and obedience, at other times he advocates freedom and open mindedness. Sometimes he is on the side of Will; at other times he sympathises

with Carol. He praises Will for being steady and blames him for being fixed in his ways; he approves Carol's adventurous ideas and criticises her flightiness. The novel differs from an ordinary love-story because of the Lewisian contradictions and questionings with respect to the values which are embedded in the characters and their situations.

However, there is no ambivalence in the references to religion in Main Street: Sinclair Lewis constantly attacks the church and its teachings and its people. The girls who ask God to guide their feet are the "bulbous-browed and pop-eyed maidens" (p. 3). Vida prays to Jesus, "offering him the terrible power of her adoration, addressing him as the eternal lover, growing passionate, exalted, large. . . . Thus she mounted to endurance and surcease" (p. 251). Carol prays to the "dear nebulous Lord" (p. 32) when she is scared, and admits, "My religion is so foggy" (p. 65); but she will not allow an ignorant young man in a frock coat to sanction Hugh by christening: "I refuse to subject him to any devilchasing rites!" (p. 241) She is "an uneasy and dodging agnostic" (p. 328), while Kennicott, whose faith is his Buick,

believed in the Christian religion, and never thought about it; he believed in the church, and seldom went near it; he was shocked by Carol's lack of faith, and wasn't quite sure what was the nature of the faith that she lacked. (p. 328)

The Perrys are completely sure: "The Baptist Church is the perfect, the divinely ordained standard in music, oratory, philanthropy, and ethics. . . . What we need is to get back to the true Word of God, and a good sound belief in hell" (p. 152). This Prairie Puritanism is added on the New England Puritanism (p. 441), which is slightly less crude and unthinking, so that Carol is "dismayed to find the Christian religion, in America, in the twentieth century, as abnormal as Zoroastrianism -- without the splendor" (p. 328). It is full of primitive erotic symbols and gory Chaldean phrases -- a "sanguinary and alien theology" (p. 328) compelling respectability.



All the courageous intelligent people are fighting Main Street's god, the god of Mrs. Bogart who spake in doggerel hymms (p. 384): "I went to a denominational college and learned that since dictating the Bible, and hiring a perfect race of ministers to explain it, God has never done much but creep around and try to catch us disobeying it" (p. 156). Mrs. Bogart also creeps around, her large face "wrinkled cunningly. She showed the decayed teeth in a reproving smile, and in the confidential voice of one who scents stale bathroom scandal she breathed: 'You don't know the things that go on under cover'." (p. 185) She is the only person in town not living in shame, but folks can be cured by kneeling at Wednesday Prayer-meeting with her and saying, "O God, I would be a miserable sinner except for thy grace" (p. 186).

This dreadful woman's son causes a scandal involving his teacher, Fern Mullins, and the board discusses the case. On the board is the Reverend Zitterel -- "Sister Bogart about half runs his church, so of course he'll take her say-so" (p. 386). Reverend Zitterel, "a thin, swart, intense young man" (p. 329) with a "holy leer" (p. 387), does as Mrs. Bogart tells him. They both believe that the great trouble with this nation is lack of spiritual faith (p. 70); he is given one hundred dollars by Perce Bresnahan "for Americanization work" (p. 282).

Miles Bjornstam contends that "the dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map" (p. 115). When Carol asks the Thanatopsis to help the poor of the town, Mrs. Warren, the clergyman's wife, agrees that charity is "the chief adornment of the true Christian and the Church" (p. 142), but "these shiftless folks" must realise it is charity, not a right, and be much more grateful. Mrs. Warren will rebuild Gopher Prairie when all the evangelical churches are united, "opposing Catholicism and Christian Science,

and properly guiding all movements that make for morality and prohibition" (p. 132). Even though church suppers are friendly and human (p. 328), the church people will not welcome a "pious" Miles Bjornstam (p. 318), and Washington church members make Carol "very unhappy and lonely" (p. 427). Sinclair Lewis damns the churches, their beliefs, and practices.

In Arrowsmith (1925), scepticism is a characteristic of the hero, Martin Arrowsmith, who argues that "truth is a skeptical attitude to life" (p. 284). The positive elements of Lewis's beliefs are expressed in this novel, originally named The Gods of Martin Arrowsmith.<sup>180</sup> The book shows Arrowsmith's spiritual and selfless dedication to truth. It is a "moralistic allegory,"<sup>181</sup> a Pilgrim's Progress with the Twentieth Century man of piety in pursuit of the Twentieth Century deity, scientific truth. He is the new Red Cross Knight, saving lives. On one side is Vice (Pickerbaugh), on the other Virtue (Gottlieb).

Gottlieb's name means 'love of God', and he is the Christ of the new religion, Science. Gottlieb has intellect and integrity, understanding, and love. He believes that man is not divine or immortal, but a machine designed by God the mathematician. He prays: "God give me a quiet and relentless anger at pretence and all pretentious work and all work left slack or unfinished. . . . God give me strength not to trust to God!" (p. 139).

The scientist advances mankind, but rejects respectability. He is sincerely altruistic, yet people consider him a crank. So he isolates

himself from a society which merely wants to keep things as they are. He is concerned with his scientific work, not its meta-physical or philosophical meanings.

Arrowsmith works with a fine intelligence and disinterested motives, facing issues of life and death with integrity, even in defeat. Lewis's standards and loyalties are clear; we know where he stands, appreciate his frame of reference. Just as religion is repeatedly ridiculed by Lewis, science is one kind of truth he consistently recognizes; he possessed "a humanistic faith in science and a concern with the possibilities of man's perfectibility through his own efforts."<sup>182</sup> Science can make a paradise on earth, can abolish "war, poverty, caste, uncouthness, clumsiness."<sup>183</sup>

Lewis's sincerity about science makes the book positive in its idealism. It is a philosophical novel, concerned with fate and free will, and man's search for life's secrets. A great part of what Sinclair Lewis believed in is expressed in Arrowsmith.

There is ambivalence in Arrowsmith concerning wealth, power, social behaviour, culture, beauty, love, nature, the West, public health, war, "lie-hunters", surgeons and scientists: "Oh, curse it, isn't anything in the world simple?" (p. 266) The characters are changeable -- though Leora retorts: "I don't have to be consistent. I'm a mere woman." (p. 227) There is an important conflict between science (letting half the natives be 'controls,' and maybe die) and humanity (giving the phage to every islander). Martin preaches to himself:

the loyalty of dissent, the faith of being very doubtful, the gospel of not bawling gospels, the wisdom of admitting the probable ignorance of one's self and of everybody else. (p. 237)

References to religion in Arrowsmith are nearly always adverse.

Dealing with a cadaver damages Martin's "already feeble belief in man's divinity and immortality" (p. 16). "No steer ever bellowed more enormously" than Ira Hinkley, the "bright and Happy Christian" (p. 15) who "reverentially accepted everything" (p. 38), who hates killing but loves singing hymns about blood (p. 38), and who is a "maniac" about the damned souls of the natives (p. 380). Gottlieb mocks preachers who talk meaninglessly about Sin and Truth and Honesty (p. 144), and he will not "stoop in fear before their God of Wrath" (p. 145).

To win patients, a doctor should attend church, "whether he believes the stuff or not" (p. 184); and, once distrusted, Martin is attacked by "all the fashionable churches" (p. 274). Sondelius, the dying agnostic, criticises God for laughingly putting disease into the beautiful tropics (p. 394). The book ends with a hypocrite Christian enjoying the minister's gloating:

"The righteous, even the Children of Light, they shall be rewarded with a great reward and their feet shall walk in gladness, saith the Lord of Hosts; but the mockers, the Sons of Belial, they shall be slain betimes and cast down into darkness and failure, and in the busy marts shall they be forgot." (p. 464)

The first part of Elmer Gantry (1927) describes Elmer's Baptist education, his ordination, his first pulpit, and his escape from Lulu; the second describes his career as an evangelist with the fantastic Sharon Falconer; the third describes 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: "We shall yet make these United States a moral nation." (p. 432)

There is some ambivalence in Elmer Gantry, but it is completely overshadowed by Lewis's constant dislike of religion. He aimed to give religious charlatanry a fatal blow in a "dragon-killing exhibition," "St. George and the Parson."<sup>184</sup> The battle is belligerently one-sided -- "a pauseless series of knockdowns."<sup>185</sup> With "the bigotry of the anti-religious,"<sup>186</sup> Lewis portrays a series of wicked clergymen and confused, ignorant, narrow-minded, and dull churches; then he bashes them with rough and tumble anger, and expects a tornado of boos and applause.

Lewis does not base his criticism on a deep understanding of Christian philosophy, but his criticisms of American religious practices, even the distortions of Gantry's church, are based on Christian ideals, such as: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."<sup>187</sup> His highest praise of the church occurs when McGarry answers the question: "Why have a church at all?"

It has the unique personality and teachings of Jesus Christ, and there is something in Jesus, there is something in the way he spoke, there is something in the feeling of a man when he suddenly has that inexpressible experience of knowing the Master and his presence, which makes the church of Jesus different from any other merely human institution or instrument whatsoever! Jesus is not simply greater and wiser than Socrates or Voltaire; he is entirely different. Anybody can interpret and teach Socrates or Voltaire -- in schools or books or conversation. But to interpret the personality and teachings of Jesus requires an especially called, chosen, trained, consecrated body of men, united in an especial institution -- the church. (p. 376)

Elmer Gantry is a formidable warning against hypocrisy, skin-deep conversion, and a narrow superficial Christian culture. The pious humbugs succeed, and the good ministers fail; Elmer's church is not interested in rational, honest, humble, tolerant, humane ideas or persons. The book is an account of morbid symptoms of religion in a land where the religious spirit is dead. No fraud, quackery, hypocrisy, or iniquity is omitted -- "nothing is missing but religion."<sup>188</sup> For Elmer Gantry is not a symbol of the death of religion; his essence is swinishness.<sup>189</sup> In his essay "Sinclair Lewis and the Method of Half-Truths," Schorer says Elmer is "total death."<sup>190</sup> He represents a decayed, dehumanized, barren religion; and he has no genuine human values to fight against. On the fringes of the narrative, Lewis permits a few shadowy figures of good, such as Shallard and Pengilly, to appear, but they do not impede Elmer's "barbarous rise from country boob to influential preacher."<sup>191</sup>

Lewis shares Shallard's belief in individual freedom and Pengilly's sense of righteousness, but he is more interested in a clergyman who can reject such ideals. Lewis implies facets of human behaviour that he admires by satirizing facets of human behaviour that he hates in Elmer Gantry, that brutal, sensual, lying, sneaking bully, without honour, decency or aspiration. He is monster, a grotesque hobgoblin, a caricature, "too satanic to be real."<sup>192</sup> His sexuality is inhuman, without fulfilment. He is incapable of feeling ("Elmer could not consider the converts human" p. 119) or thought ("he had never been sure but that there might be something to the doctrines he had preached" (p. 229), though he has shrewdness and animal cunning. To him, preaching is an easy job, with "no back-talk or cross-examination allowed." (p. 51)

"I may not," Elmer meditated, "be as swell a scholar as old Toomis, but I can invent a lot of stunts and everything to wake the church up and attract the crowds, and that's worth a whole lot more than all this yowling about the prophets and theology!" (p. 278)

Elmer Gantry is "a mendacious wolf in pastoral clothing",<sup>193</sup> a melodramatic figure capable of forceful influence. He is frightening because he represents the "sinister forces of righteousness",<sup>194</sup> the self-interest of some church leaders. He is part of the "religious vaudeville",<sup>195</sup> and carries the religion of success into the church, making a deal with Mammon.<sup>196</sup> He is "Mr. Opportunist"<sup>197</sup> insisting that a "Soul Saver" must "sell the goods." (p. 208)

Elmer resembles "the vulgarest contemporary type of pulpit-thumping materialist."<sup>198</sup> He is of the same clay as his people, not set apart by learning or integrity or spirituality: "Mr. Gantry, why don't you believe in God?" (p. 367) He is incapable of deep self-examination. In this connection, D. Aaron has written:

The weight of the satire falls on an educational system that permits an ignorant boor to pass as educated, and a cunning animal, too thickheaded to be sceptical, to profess a theology that he does not understand and teach a Christianity which he understands only in its formulas and its profitable fruits.<sup>199</sup>

Elmer Gantry "had, in fact, got everything from the church and Sunday School, except, perhaps, any longing whatever for decency and kindness and reason." (p. 28) His failings promote him in the churches described in the novel. An egotist without any calling, self-knowledge, or ideas, he somehow believes (like Sharon Falconer) that God will turn his sins to glory. (p. 174) He will be "the most powerful man since the beginning of history . . . ."

"I'm going to be the emperor of America -- maybe of the world."

(p. 410) We do not believe in Elmer as a person; he is an effigy without human likeness designed for a public witchburning: "The preacher fried in oil."<sup>200</sup> Sinclair Lewis, the revolted puritan, attacks the whole church at Elmer's level. He is not being novelist but prosecuting attorney.<sup>201</sup> There are moments when he hints at opposing notions -- the joy of church Christmas, the happiness of Elmer's mother at his conversion, and the tenderness of old preachers who believe they are saving the world. Even Sharon Falconer recognises the need to help the world's "poor troubled souls" (p. 226). Among Christians are honest thinkers like Bruno Zechlin and sincere searchers like Frank Shallard; and the church has elements of poetry and power. Elmer is moved by the beauty of land and sea; he rejoices in his work of preaching God's word and abolishing social evils. Nevertheless, the book is primarily a caricature of American religious practices which Lewis sees as being brutal and hateful.

His attack is in line with a long tradition of religious criticism. The Protestantism of Lewis's upbringing grew finally out of Luther's and Calvin's dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic Church. Their doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and man's need of Grace were brought to America by the Pilgrims and Puritans, who had rejected the established churches in Europe. From the first, there were disputes over church and Bible authority -- by what right could a church force doctrine and conduct on a believer with "inner light?" The second generation Puritans were "gospel-glutted, sermon-proof,"<sup>202</sup> and interested in living well in America. Acquiring of riches was accepted as a sign of grace by the Puritans, even in the sinful world. Killing of Indians ("limbs of Satan")<sup>203</sup> and exploiting their land demonstrated man's courage, ingenuity, and self-reliance,



rather than God's plan.

"Where do the missionaries come into your picture?"  
"They don't!"<sup>204</sup>

The Puritan soul-searching led both to overweening self-righteousness and to neuroticism in fear of an arbitrary inhumane God: "My heart is filth and pollution, contaminated with loathsome softness and decay!"<sup>205</sup> Preachers exaggerated man's helplessness and sin, and Scottish Presbyterians took Calvinist doctrine to the Appalachian Hills, where the Book of Genesis was held to be the only possible account of man's origins, and to the Mid-West plains, where developed the Prairie Protestantism that Lewis knew.

The American Colonies became more worldly and commercial -- "the man of business is not only nobility but judge and priest"<sup>206</sup> -- and the gap between their practical life and their symbolic aura increased, though ministers insisted the more strongly that New England was "an emblem of God's thought."<sup>207</sup> God's Word was the Bible, and the Puritans were deeply concerned with words, but not always with the ideas behind the words. "Does all that mean anything? Or is it just a rash of words?"<sup>208</sup> Their juggled terms of dialectic diverged from real experience, and Paine mocked "the Christian system of arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three."<sup>209</sup> Jefferson wrote:

The religious builders have so distorted  
and deformed the doctrines of Jesus, so muffled  
them in mysticisms, fancies, and falsehoods, have  
caricatured them into forms so monstrous and inconceivable, as to shock reasonable thinkers.<sup>210</sup>

Even though there were changes and developments in American churches throughout the nineteenth century, Sinclair Lewis is shocked by their lack of reason and their undue influence: "It is thinkers like Dr. Elmer Gantry . . . who finally determine our philosophy,

our ideals, our judgment in literary and artistic matters, and our ethics in business."<sup>211</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Lewis rejects the churches and their dogma, but remains aware of the force of Christian ideals.

In the moral confusion of a character such as George F. Babbitt we see something of the dilemma of modern man -- eager to give himself over to complete enjoyment of them because of vague scruples of conscience; believing in the American ideals of Work and Progress, without any real object in life to make them worthwhile; deprived of the possibility of religious conviction, yet full of indefinite longings and dissatisfactions; stumbling into the relationships of husband and father, only to be caught in a dull and petty routine of domestic bickering and vulgarity. Truly, to paraphrase the brilliant words of Matthew Arnold, Babbitt is lost between two worlds, the one dead to him forever, and the other powerless to be born.<sup>212</sup>

One of Sinclair Lewis's prime gifts was his skill in catching the temper of his times. He understood the moral confusion and the dislike of religion in Babbitt and many modern Americans. He was "the conscience of his generation,"<sup>213</sup> describing the secular pilgrimage of the twentieth century;<sup>214</sup> but in one novel he describes America in the 1840's.

Because of its historical setting, The God Seeker (1949) is different from Lewis's other novels, but the usual ambiguities are evident. The early settlers of Minnesota are portrayed as

vulgar, ignorant, and bigoted: "When any of these outlaw breeds -- niggers or Indians or Jews or the Ytalianians or the wild Irish or any of them -- seem like they're bright and decent and even religious they're just imitating us, like monkeys!" (p. 217) They often are bad farmers: "Six out of ten breakers of land are no good -- otherwise they wouldn't have fled to the wilderness" (p. 299). They are full of Chuzzlewit "oratorical rambunctiousness" (p. 109): but

this gang of farmers and fur traders, surveyers and storekeepers, with a blacksmith, a country school teacher, a tailor, a doctor-druggist, and the missionary Gideon Pond, founded a just, orderly, and enduring commonwealth. (p. 368)

The white settlers are blessed (p. 131), but they steal the Indians' land (p. 128) in exchange for "fine kettle, fine gun, fine blanket, the big pox, the small pox and religion" (p. 128). The cunning trader, Caesar Lanark, tells Aaron: "We have given the Indians consumption, influenza, measles, syphilis, and the hymns of Charles Wesley" (p. 177).

In the novel, Lewis usually sympathises with the Indians. They are "grave and erect" and dignified: "these tall and softly stepping men did not seem inferior to God's own chosen people -- the Yankees" (p. 128). Maybe they are of the elect and go to heaven? The Indian rite of 'hambeday' is a form of God-seeking, a consciousness of divine power (p. 176); Medicine Spider is the eternal Church Mother (p. 210). However, there is much criticism of the "Sioux or Dakota savage Indians, hell-flamed, gorge-raising, murdering, adulterous, sabbath-breaking sons of Belial" (p. 45). The ones who live behind the agency are "dirty beggars" (p. 118) to Aaron, "ineradicably damned" (p. 119) to the minister. When Black Wolf is murdered by the Ojibway,

Aaron hated all Indians and was terrified of them while he yet loved Black Wolf and was dismayed that his revolt had been ended by outlaw murder. Nothing seemed clear. . . . (p. 321)

Aaron Gadd, the God Seeker, is full of uncertainties; he is as changeable as Sinclair Lewis: "He was the immemorial rebel who hated the King but loved the crown" (p. 22). One minute he sees the Christian Captain Pipman as "a splendid fellow and no prig. Ought I to be a soldier?" (p. 295): the next minute, Aaron thinks, "Pipman is a clodhopper! No, I'll never be a soldier!" (p. 296). When he reads Black Wolf's analysis of Christianity, "the subtleties of treason bedeviled him for days" (p. 275). "Sometimes he was heartily for Black Wolf, sometimes he complained to Selene" (p. 318). He is confused about his love for Huldah and his love for Selene: "his plans for her changed every hour" (p. 318). After they are married, Selene says to him: "I don't change coaches like you -- you heretic!" (p. 372) He replies: "There are many things I

don't ever expect to know, and I'm not going to devote myself to preaching about them but to building wood sheds so true and tight. . . ." (p. 380)

Selene Lanark is "half gypsy and half snob" (p. 202).

She describes herself:

The elegant Say-lay-nay, the fine lady, with her fair jeweled hand holding the sparkling beaker!  
A miserable brulée -- a squaw that ought to be toting wood! That's me! (p. 78)

"I'm clean flummuxed about it. Sometimes I love the whites . . . sometimes I love the Dakota." (p. 78)

Her father, Caesar Lanark, "tall and slender, with a Marcus Aurelius brow" (p. 167) seems to be "hundreds of years old: amiable, learned, sharp-eyed" (p. 167); but he cheats the Indians, drives out his daughter, and is "a fairly competent atheist" (p. 185). He is the spokesman of the secular view -- but Lewis seems by 1949 to have lost part of his faith in worldly wisdom. Aaron reflects: "When I know them enough, I think I'll laugh at the Squire, and love him; and I'll admire Mr. Lanark, and hate him" (p. 185).

Squire Harge, whose first mission was a cave, is a thresher against life's current: "Religion is not peace in a valley but fighting on the windy hilltops" (p. 185). He is courageous and earnestly sincere: "I do love the Lord God with my whole soul, and I want to make a savory sacrifice to him, but Satan comes and makes me botch it" (p. 183). He invites admiration (p. 45) and mockery (p. 61). "In humility and irate cheerfulness" (p. 190), he fails to convert the Indians: but he is "circled round with the glory of the Lord" (p. 222). "Impatiently patient" (p. 191), his preaching is wrong: "the pulpit is where you tear off the

garments of iniquity and pride, and show the black, clotted evil beneath the shining raiment" (p. 147).

Aaron is embarrassed by the nakedness of the missionaries' piety (p. 145). When he goes hunting with the Indians, he keeps "telling himself that he ought to be giving them a holy message, but every hour he was less certain what that message might be" (p. 241). The Indians think that if Aaron learns humbly to share their life, and listen to the spirits of animals and streams and wind, "he might yet become a saved soul and a Man" (p. 241). The fresh air is a sacrament. The land is beautiful:

There was the soft gold of the prairie autumn, bathing him, washing out all the careful meannesses of the tight-folded hills; soft gold, radiant gold in waves, and the high cumulus clouds overhead. (p. 126)

But there is also fear -- "over the drab immensity of the land comes the prairie fear, the fear of solitude" (p. 127). There is danger -- "the snow was thicker, harder driven against their faces by a vicious wind" (p. 328).

Running from the mission, Aaron and Selene are caught in a snowstorm. "The steady wail of the blizzard slackened, and he thought he heard . . . the voice of a woman reading from the Bible. He caught some of the words. . . ." (p. 333) The Bible words are a blessing to him. Religion is communicated by words, and he can get drunk on words (p. 185); yet he is troubled by words: "Can't I get a philosophy that isn't built of uncemented words?" (p. 222) His brother, the just but impatient Elijah, says that "such words as Charity, Ideals, Democracy, Freedom, Faith, Loyalty, Patriotism, Industry, Responsibility" are "like the caresses of a prostitute, warm but vomitable" (p. 386).

In this sentence, Sinclair Lewis seems to be undercutting everything that he has said and written in forty years. Of course it is only a quotation from a fictional character, but doubts about Lewis's beliefs persist. In spite of the title, there is a great deal of anti-religious sentiment in the novel, beginning with the bleak and vicious Christian, Uriel Gadd.

He seemed to Aaron like the God of Wrath as he blared, "Salvation is the only important thing in this world! And I see my own sons and my daughter wallowing in sin and ignorance, too muddleheaded to realize they already scorched by the flames of hell, which is the reward of them that resist the tender invitation of the Lord Jesus, and now git out and curry them hosses!" (p. 7)

Aaron Gadd is sometimes filled with unnatural fears because of religion -- "doom is doom" (p. 205) -- and he cannot reason himself into religious passion (p. 94): "Oh do you have to be a prig to be a good Christian" (p. 229). Christian sects are seen as "viciously belligerent tribes" (p. 99), and the Reverend Noah Cudway curses them all (p. 91). Religious talk is a fashion (p. 232). Missionaries are full of lust and hatred: "Look! If they really try to imitate Jesus, why do they hate the sinful heathen?" (p. 245). Christians, "so self-satisfied", love to read about the "Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable" (p. 257). The "pure in meanness" (p. 345) make everything shameful. Black Wolf describes Christianity as "an idolatrous religion with many gods" (p. 266), a "borrowed and fable-crammed religion (or rather, set of religions)" (p. 271), and Christians as "moral dwarfs" (p. 268) full of corruption.

The God Seeker is clearly anti-religious, but, unlike Elmer Gantry, Lewis's ambivalence had crept into this aspect of his thinking and feeling, and the novel is oddly pro-religious at times:

"Most ministers are such nice folks -- dreadfully simple, but friendly and good" (p. 391). Aaron has a notion "that the Church was not merely a fortress against the yelping hosts of hell, but also a pleasant and even mannerly collection of people" (p. 15). Aaron's soul is like a lonely little dog, seeking the warmth and shelter of the mission (p. 57). He longs to be a part of the missionary family all over the world (p. 68), the "Good People" (p. 323).

Conversion is a miraculous cleansing (p. 49), and there is joy in prayer and talking about "heavenly matters and the glorious prospects of the faithful" (p. 16). To Deacon Popplewood, "the deepest happiness that a man could have would be to interpret the will of God to all the poor ignorant folks" (p. 16). A missionary's life is noble (p. 54), and Aaron is moved by the missionaries' enduring patience: "years, decades, generations, waiting and laboring" (p. 191) so that people may feel the need for religion: "Brother, you can't know how thirsty I get for the sparkling waters of the eternal word" (p. 97).

Aaron Gadd sees Jesus Christ as a man, like a brother, but still God. "God was fire, and as unapproachable as fire must be" (p. 95). Even though Aaron considers Samuel William Pond's words unreal and mesmerizing, they are moving:

"The true religious experience is, first, an unmistakable perception of God, through the reason and through all the senses. . . . Then, second, it is a wondering realization that God is so much greater than anything else that we know or can know -- brighter than light, vaster than the universe yet smaller than the bee, and more tender than all human love together since time was; and third, it is a surrender to God so complete that you simply can not remember what it was like to have been outside the rapture of its majestic power" (p. 343).



Aaron feels awed and afraid under the spell of Samuel William Pond's address, but he thinks: "These words of his, even if they're poetic and noble, are still only words. . . . I'm going to keep Selene from being mesmerized" (p. 343). Like Huldah, he believes, "The Ponds are wonderfully devout, but. . . they're wrong" (p. 343). Always Aaron returns to the problem of words and the expression of truth. In this connection, the words of Sinclair Lewis will be analysed to see if his style changes in kind and intensity when dealing with religion.

Footnotes to Chapter III

- 175Edener, p. 30.
- 176Warren Beck, "How good is Sinclair Lewis?" College English. IX (January 1948), 173.
- 177Dooley, Art, p. 130.
- 178Mencken, Prejudices: Fifth, p. 110.
- 179Elmer Gantry, p. 381.
- 180G.H. Lewis, p. 256.
- 181Grebstein, p. 87.
- 182Ibid., p. 100.
- 183The Job, p. 130.
- 184Carl Van Doren, Saturday Review of Literature, 3 (March 12, 1927), 639.
- 185Littrell, New Republic, 50 (March 16, 1927), 108.
- 186Lippmann, "S.L.", Essays, p. 93.
- 187Matthew vi. 24.
- 188Whipple, "S.L.", Essays, p. 74.
- 189Grebstein, p. 102.
- 190Mark Schorer, "Sinclair Lewis and the Method of Half-Truths" (1956), Essays, p. 52.
- 191Schorer, "Half-Truths," Essays, p. 54.
- 192Edener, p. 129.
- 193Griffin, p. 39.
- 195Griffin, Nobel Winners, p. 42.
- 196L.H.U.S., p. 1228.
- 197Geoffrey Moore, "Lost Romantic," Essays, p. 159.
- 198Joseph Wood Krutch, "Mr. Babbitt's Spiritual Guide" (1927) Essays, p. 36.
- 199Daniel Aaron, "Sinclair Lewis: Main Street," The American Novel, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 637.

<sup>200</sup>Littrell, p. 108.

<sup>201</sup>Aaron, p. 637.

<sup>202</sup>R.W. Horton and W.H. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (New York: Appleton - Century - Crofts, 1952), p. 41.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>204</sup>God Seeker, p. 299.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>207</sup>Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), p. 80.

<sup>208</sup>God Seeker, p. 391.

<sup>209</sup>Feidelson, p. 97.

<sup>210</sup>Thomas Jefferson, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (Washington: Taylor and Maury, 1854), Vol. 7, p. 210.

<sup>211</sup>Sinclair Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), p. 253.

<sup>212</sup>Horton and Edwards, p. 48.

<sup>213</sup>Grebstein, Preface.

<sup>214</sup>Dooley, Art, p. 267.

## CHAPTER IV

Lewis's style is a significant part of his religious criticism, as Wilfried Edener demonstrates in Die Religionskritik in den Romanen von Sinclair Lewis. Lewis's aim is to make the reader share his feelings and point of view, and sometimes his writing becomes crude propaganda. There is a "coarsening of style" in Elmer Gantry, "The most braying, guffawing, belching novel" in American literature.<sup>215</sup> Lewis selects and publicizes American faults, but his values except for the most basic ones involving honesty, integrity, justice, and kindness are inconsistent and his understanding is not profound.

The key to Lewis's style is diction, especially the pivotal adjective ("pop-eyed maidens"<sup>216</sup>), the adverb, and the verb:

Wrenn's mustache is "unsuccessful." He approaches a theater "primly." His landlady eats enormous heaps of food "slowly and resentfully." His room is "abjectly respectable." He plans "coily improbable trips." Wrenn "trots" to the theater, "peers" at the ticket-taker, and "trembles" into the doorway.<sup>217</sup>

Lewis describes Christians with a tone of amused superiority: a churchgoer is presented as "a bleached man, with goatish whiskers and a sanctimonious white neck-cloth, who was puritanically, ethically, gloomily, religiously atheistic."<sup>218</sup> The conscience of Gopher Prairie, Mrs. Bogart, "was not the acid type of Good Influence. She was the soft, damp, fat, sighing, indigestive, clinging, melancholy, depressingly hopeful kind."<sup>219</sup> The clergyman in Babbitt,

Dr. Drew, "had already flopped down beside his desk-chair . . . .  
Babbitt also knelt, while Drew gloated."<sup>220</sup>

Sometimes Lewis uses word-play: "I am Episcopalian --  
not so much High Church as highly infrequent church."<sup>221</sup> Some-  
times the syntax of his sentences is marked by incongruity: "He  
kept stammering the most absurd platitudes about how happy his  
mother must be in heaven regarding which he did not seem to have  
very recent or very definite knowledge."<sup>222</sup> Lewis's gas-bag  
preachers use meaningless phrases in their sermons: "I hope that  
in the devotion to the ideals of the Baptist Church we shall strive  
ever onward and upward. . . ."<sup>223</sup> Their congregations mix slang  
and doctrine:

Prices is all going up so, Ah declare, Ah was just  
saying to Lee Theresa Ah dunno what we're all going  
to do if the dear Lord don't look out for us.<sup>224</sup>

Characters made fun of by Lewis are given peculiar names  
(Mudge, Smeeth, Zitterel, Pickerbaugh, Speezer) and odd speech  
mannerisms in the tradition of Dickens. (Lewis's people are the  
grandchildren of the Americans in Martin Chuzzlewit.<sup>225</sup>) Mrs.  
Mudge's voice "flowed on relentlessly, without one comma, till Babbitt  
was hypnotized. Her favorite word was 'always', which she pronounced  
olllllllways . . . ."<sup>226</sup> Characters are put in external settings which  
accentuate Lewis's attitudes. The Baptist church where the Reverend  
Mr. Zitterel delivers "a prayer informing Almighty God of the news  
of the past week" is "half barn and half Golpher Prairie parlor.  
The streaky brown wallpaper was broken in its dismal sweep only  
by framed texts."<sup>227</sup>

Colours give tone to religious settings: "the walls were painted cheerily in three strata -- green, watery blue, and khaki;"<sup>228</sup> Elmer Gantry's city church is "a hideous gray-stone hulk with gravy-colored windows . . . and alternate layers of tiles in distressing red and green."<sup>229</sup> The evangelical temple is flamboyant -- "an immense structure, built of cheap knotty pine, painted a hectic red with gold stripes."

Sharon christened it "The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle," added more and redder paint, more golden gold, and erected an enormous revolving cross, lighted at night with yellow and ruby electric bulbs.<sup>230</sup>

Another basic technique is Lewis's employment of figurative language, including a wide range of types and varieties: metaphor, personification, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, zeugma, and others. "With one of his damp hands Smeeth imprisoned Babbitt's large paw while he chanted."<sup>231</sup> Arrowsmith was received "by the pastor and a committee of three, wearing morning clothes and a manner of Christian intellectuality."<sup>232</sup> "Like all ardent agnostics, Martin was a religious man."<sup>233</sup>

Lewis's use of language predetermines the reader's reaction to characters and situations. We are forced to share Lewis's feeling, tone, and intention; and it is almost impossible to escape from the fictional world of the novel to make separate critical judgements.<sup>234</sup> In reading, we find no enigmas, no mysteries, no complexity of personality. We do not notice ambivalence, but we are swept along on the flood of rhetoric, Lewis's refuge from intellectual analysis: "Lewis's prime rule for the handling of ideas: be brisk with them and count on the flow of words to sweep the reader right past their implications."<sup>235</sup>

Lewis's books are amusing pictures of dullness. He is most characteristic as a fine folksy commentator pointing out examples of American smugness, provincialism, ignorance, bigotry, and hypocrisy.<sup>236</sup> His satire is broad, vulgar, good-natured, and exaggerated -- what James Branch Cabell called "a minim of reality exaggerated into Brobdingnagian incredibility."<sup>237</sup> In fact, "his Mid-West humor gave him a delight in portraying extreme, overdrawn, excessive, grotesquely absurd events and characters."<sup>238</sup>

His works are like movies, or advertisements, crudely coloured and obvious enough for any fourteen year old to understand,<sup>239</sup> and the cases for and against are stated, proved, documented, and hammered home. Lewis is "outrageously, persistently, brain-splittingly noisy."<sup>240</sup>

His loosely episodic chronicles have no sustained pressure of plot, no primary conflict, to achieve a complex definition of value. Characters are not forced into new self-awareness, and there are no "dynamics of social action."<sup>241</sup> His typical approach (learned from H.G. Wells) was to choose an institution, or class of people, decide the point of view,<sup>242</sup> then with tireless curiosity and energy, the "conscientious thoroughness of Zola,"<sup>243</sup> to collect masses of data. The gathering together of facts, notations, and sordid details is characteristic of Naturalistic writing. Naturalism is based on the theory of "scientific determinism,"<sup>244</sup> which states that man is the product of biological, social, and economic forces over which he has no control. He is a puppet, without autonomy or moral responsibility. Naturalism makes man an animal without choice and without sin. Romanticism on the other hand, makes man "infinitely good, infinitely perfectible, and potentially,

when not actually, God."<sup>245</sup>

Lewis did not really believe in the environmental theory underlying Naturalism but rather in the triumph of the individual spirit. His characters tower above their surroundings: Carol, despite her foolishness and impracticality, is entitled to our respect; Arrowsmith is genuinely heroic, accomplishing great things against enormous odds; Dodsworth achieves spiritual independence over the American vice of keeping up with the Joneses. It would seem that Lewis was a Naturalistic writer only in his collecting of data.

From out of his mass of information, he prepared an orderly structure for each novel, with precise and copious outlines of characters, professions, and places. His characters, whether rebels or conformists, cannot escape from their environment; they are fixed in the traditions, history, and values of Middle Western America. Their creator is more interested in outward behavior than in inner life, and they are shells, self-satisfied, intolerant, believing in the standards of the herd. They cannot find the "bread of life;" they are the "galvanized dead."<sup>246</sup>

"With his typical inconsistency, Lewis sometimes hides the monstrousness of his figures and portrays them as likeable human beings."<sup>247</sup> The characters shift in size, sometimes large and frightening, sometimes small and silly, as different characteristics are stressed. Will Kennicott can be sensitive and considerate, or he can be vulgar and bigoted. Squire Harge is noble at the revival meeting, crude in his home, and pathetic in his prayers. To point his indecisive moral views, Lewis manipulates his characters, making them change oddly: Carol felt "young and dissipated" then "old and rustic and plain."<sup>248</sup> Lewis's conflicts of allegiance con-



tribute to the ambivalent quality of his novels.

However, in writing Elmer Gantry, Lewis's hostile attitude to religion made his work crudely one-sided. In preparing his book on religion, Lewis took pains to gather a huge mass of data, an "amazingly complete account of the shades of religious controversy."<sup>249</sup> He read over 90 books and histories; he studied the periodicals read by Methodist and Baptist preachers, he collected newspaper reports (particularly items about errant clergymen and religious fanatics). He went to Kansas City seeking clergymen as they really are,<sup>250</sup> and cross-examined the "cyclopoedia of data,"<sup>251</sup> Rev. Dr. Birkhead. He studied every aspect of religious life in Kansas City, even posing as a Bible salesman to interview rural clergy. He held a weekly Sunday School Class of Ministers, to whom he boasted: "I know more about religion than you'll ever know."<sup>252</sup>

However, Lewis's energetic search for knowledge was based on impatience and hostility. Reading only supplied details for his old grudge, as he dishonestly selected materials to prove that much of American church life is corrupt. Writing to his publishers about the need to attend Kansas City churches regularly, he stated: "Gawd how I dread it."<sup>253</sup> From out of the mass of data he selected one-sided details -- half-truths. He preferred damning details to matters of truth and dignity. The work is marked by irrational prejudice and propaganda.

You always answer opponents by representing them as having obviously absurd notions which they do not possess, then with tremendous vigor showing that these non-existent traits are obviously absurd, and ignoring any explanation.<sup>254</sup>

Dr. Kennicott warned Lewis not to "kid me into saying the things you've

already made up your mind you're going to make me say."<sup>255</sup>

Lewis is unfair in describing preachers. His clergymen are merely characterized by human failings, and he makes an arbitrary connection between their faults and their beliefs, just to support his antagonistic claims.<sup>256</sup> He hates fundamentalists and describes them as villains. Unscrupulously, he sets out to stereotype the fundamentalist, as an Elmer Gantry. "His method was his old device of assembling details, but in his choice of details he was interested only in those which were utterly damning." This is the method of the propagandist, but it is without truth or dignity: "A novelist who pretends to be writing in behalf of a civilized life ought not himself to behave like a barbarian."<sup>257</sup> A novelist does not necessarily have to be objective, but in Elmer Gantry Lewis over-employs his method, exaggerating in order to satirize.

He is not aware of the deeper problems of a mature man. He cannot find spiritual insight, or express his own spirit; he cannot, for example, share Arrowsmith's faith in the religion of science. Lewis knows the external details of religious activities, but has no true understanding of the religious needs and feelings which make men worship; yet a successful satirist must have at least a good sense of the quality whose lack he mocks in others: "the general aim and end of satire is to show the incompatibility between the traditional moral standards and the actual ways of living."<sup>258</sup> In three respects, Lewis fulfils the requirements of a satirist: first, the satirist strips the object satirized of the film of familiarity which normally reconciles us

to it, and makes us see it as it really is. Sinclair Lewis's novels make people look as if for the first time at many facets of American life -- small towns, Eastern sophistication, medicine, travel, prisons, boosting, hotels, office-work, racial prejudice, marriage, and women's rights. Second, the satirist must miss the truth which most people accept, and must ignore the explanation of the thing satirized.<sup>259</sup> Sinclair Lewis describes the situation but does not explain how it came to be that way. For example, he gives a picture of business life in Babbitt, but does not analyse the economics of American capitalism. Third, the satirist declines to understand, and be constructive except by implication. Sinclair Lewis is not trying to educate, to reform or to evangelize, merely to show what is wrong.

"True satire implies the condemnation of society by reference to an ideal. The satirist is engaged in measuring the monstrous aberration from the ideal."<sup>260</sup> For Swift, Pope, and Voltaire, the ideal was Reason and Nature and the values of Plato and Cicero. The great satirists believed intellectually in the Beautiful Order, but were painfully aware, in actual living, of what a depravity man had made of himself. Swift is not sure that the Christian religion is the equivalent of Reason and Nature, but he upholds the standards of the Church of England. For him, man the Yahoo is hateful for failing to adhere to Houyhnhnm principles of sense and order.

Lewis fails as a satirist because he does not have a consistent ideal by which to measure American society. The artist must be finer, more complex than his subjects," with enhanced sensitiveness of life."<sup>261</sup>

Pseudo-satirists, lacking personal integration and urbane judgment, oppose the aberrations of other men with their own caprice, and largely out of their own frustrations or vanities.<sup>262</sup>

Lewis's treatment of issues is capricious. He attacks some beliefs, and writes sympathetically of others, so that he is difficult to classify.<sup>263</sup> A writer of fiction is permitted to change his point of view freely, but a satirist or publicist demonstrating what he sees as wrong or unreasonable should see life more steadily. Lewis is capable of praising or blaming opposite views in the same terms: "Friends who heard him arguing any point which at the moment took his fancy" observed "the hyperbole made convincing, the staggering general knowledge, the annoying facility for bending that knowledge to his uses, the intolerance (for the moment) of any contrary voice; and at the end, so often, a dizzying reversal of position in which he knocked out all his own arguments and left his hearers gasping."<sup>264</sup>

Lewis's mind was capable of speed and extraordinary virtuosity, but it was not capable of dealing with ideas in any profound way. His novels are characterized by uncertain beliefs and attitudes, though expressed in forthright language. One of the few subjects on which he was not generally ambivalent was religion (although some aspects of The God Seeker show a change of heart), and in dealing with dogma, clergy and Christians, he wrote with steady hostility.

The two qualities of Lewis's writing which have been examined in this study have been his ambivalence with respect to the values embedded in his world, and his general dislike of religion. Both these characteristics stem from a lack of profundity in Lewis's thought and feeling. He had a vast knowledge of American life, and

his quick intelligence flashed upon many institutions and beliefs and types, but there was no deep understanding of what makes America the way it is. In the same way, he knew a lot about the externals of religious life, and though he disliked what he saw, he was not able to comprehend the deeper mysteries of religious experience.

Lewis's thinking was shallow and unoriginal,<sup>265</sup> he learned little in the course of a madly active life. He was "the Eternal Amateur of national letters,"<sup>266</sup> displaying wit and vitality in an intellectual vacuum. Even his own character, Dr. Will Kennicott, reproached him with -- "If only you did some real hard thinking,"<sup>269</sup> echoing Rebecca West:

If he would sit still so that life could make any deep impression on him, if he would attach himself to the human tradition by occasionally reading a book which would set him a standard of profundity, he could give his genius a chance.<sup>268</sup>

He admired Sam Dodsworth who stopped bustling -- "I would like to visit with myself, and get acquainted,"<sup>269</sup> and Martin Arrowsmith who said, like Thoreau, "thinking about life is the most important part of living;"<sup>270</sup> but he did not imitate them. He did not "find the Why, the underneath principle."<sup>271</sup> He pointed out the necessity of taking thought, but showed little disposition to take it himself: "The process of taking thought seems largely critical, destructive, and negative; it also seems to mean the flippant evasion of complexities rather than their serious discussion."<sup>272</sup> "Why is it that you lads who defend the church are so facetious when you really get down to discussing the roots of religion?"<sup>273</sup>

A novelist should explore the profoundest possibilities of the human spirit,<sup>274</sup> but Lewis did not look inside his characters: "he never really penetrated the soul."<sup>275</sup> Most of his characters,

whether satirized or not, have no "innerness";<sup>276</sup> they lack cultural intelligence, human graciousness, charm, dignity, and an elevated sense of life<sup>277</sup> -- probably because Lewis also lacked these qualities. He saw the externals of things, and the literary gift that he developed to an extraordinary degree was the gift of mimicry,<sup>278</sup> but he did not create more than observed fact. He saw the object, not ~~what~~ qualified it; he did not understand the history behind the situation, nor the future consequences. He is significant for the amplitude of his evaluation, not its profundity: he makes people aware of many different aspects of American life, and still pricks part of the American conscience, but he is not gifted or sensitive enough to perceive and explain the deeper causes of such situations and attitudes. Though he is able to "lodge a piece of a continent in our imagination,"<sup>279</sup> it is vague, and its deeper strata are completely uncharted.<sup>280</sup> "His America slipped out of hand."<sup>281</sup>

Footnotes to Chapter IV

- 215 Schorer, "Half-Truths," Essays, p. 57.
- 216 Main Street, p. 3.
- 217 Grebstein, p. 42.
- 218 Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 110.
- 219 Main Street, p. 69.
- 220 Babbitt, p. 394.
- 221 Trail of the Hawk, p. 290.
- 222 The Job, p. 103.
- 223 Trail of the Hawk, p. 116.
- 224 Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 151.
- 225 Grebstein, p. 33.
- 226 Babbitt, p. 357.
- 227 Main Street, p. 329.
- 228 Elmer Gantry, p. 43.
- 229 Ibid., p. 321.
- 230 Ibid., p. 225.
- 231 Babbitt, p. 379.
- 232 Arrowsmith, p. 214.
- 233 Ibid., p. 177.
- 234 Edener, p. 15.
- 235 Dooley, Art, p. 107.
- 236 Alfred Kazin, "The New Realism: Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis" (1942), Essays, p. 123.
- 237 Dooley, Art, p. xi.
- 238 Schorer, Life, p. 289.
- 239 Whipple, "S.L.", Essays, p. 81.
- 240 Dooley, Art, p. 72.

- 241 Schorer, "Half-Truths", Essays, p. 58.
- 242 Moore, "Lost Romantic", Essays, p. 161.
- 243 Lovett, "Interpreter", Essays, p. 33.
- 244 Randall Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine  
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 107.
- 245 Ibid., p. 124.
- 246 Whipple, "S.L.", Essays, p. 74.
- 247 Dooley, Art, p. 69.
- 248 Main Street, p. 431.
- 249 Lewis, Letters, p. 230.
- 250 Schorer, Life, p. 440.
- 251 Lewis, Letters, p. 202.
- 252 Schorer, Life, p. 762.
- 253 Lewis, Letters, p. 204.
- 254 Man from Main Street, p. 319.
- 255 Ibid., p. 315.
- 256 Edener, p. 217.
- 257 Lippmann, "S.L.", Essays, p. 93.
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- 259 Ibid., p. 104.
- 260 J. Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style. (London: Oxford  
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- 261 Rebecca West, "Sinclair Lewis Introduces Elmer Gantry"  
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- 262 Beck, College English, xi (January 1948), 180.
- 263 Schorer, Life, p. 415.
- 264 Harry E. Maule, Man From Main Street, p. 301.



- 265 Grebstein, p. 154.
- 266 Maxwell Geismar, "The Land of Faery" (1947), Essays, p. 136.
- 267 Man from Main Street, p. 316.
- 268 West, "Introduces Elmer Gantry," Essays, p. 45.
- 269 Dodsworth, p. 168.
- 270 Arrowsmith, p. 37.
- 271 Ibid., p. 54.
- 272 Dooley, Art, p. 251.
- 273 Elmer Gantry, p. 375.
- 274 Moore, "Lost Romantic," Essays, p. 151.
- 275 Dorothy Thompson, quoted by Sheean, p. 352.
- 276 Moore, "Lost Romantic," Essays, p. 161.
- 277 Beck, College English, p. 173.
- 278 Krutch, "S.L." Essays, p. 150.
- 279 E.M. Forster, "Our Photography: Sinclair Lewis" (1929),  
Essays, p. 95.
- 280 Becker, American Scholar, p. 425.
- 281 Dodsworth, p. 170.

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