CHARACTERIZATION OF THE NONCONFORMIST

IN THE NOVELS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

APPROVED:

M. S. Shockey
Major Professor

J. A. Clifton
Minor Professor

E. D. Clifton
Director of the Department of English

Dean of the Graduate School
CHARACTERIZATION OF THE NONCONFORMIST

IN THE NOVELS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

by

Robert G. Cowser, B. A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1954
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. SINCLAIR LEWIS AS A SOCIAL REBEL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE WISTFUL REBEL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE INEFFECTUAL REBEL</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE REPENTANT REBEL</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE EFFECTIVE REBEL</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A cursory glance into the background of Sinclair Lewis reveals that he was an ardent nonconformist. In this study, however, it is pertinent to view more closely the conditions that caused his rebellious attitudes, not only those concerning social reform but also those concerning his personal quest for individuality. Note should be taken of those incidents in the author's life that demonstrate clearly his unwillingness to conform to the customs of conventional society. There are three famous occasions in the life of Sinclair Lewis when he exhibited best his rebellious spirit: first, when he refused to accept the Pulitzer prize awarded to *Arrowsmith* in 1926; second, when he dared God to strike him dead in a Kansas City church; third, when he was awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1930 and became critic for an hour. These incidents are illuminating, but there are others less famous which also indicate the social rebellion of Lewis. Even as a child in Sauk Center, Minnesota, where he was born on February 7, 1885, he clearly showed signs of resenting the discipline of his early environment.

---

Lewis was an imaginative youth, but he found little encouragement for independent thought in the village school of the little Minnesota town. Before the completion of his training there, he had already begun to despise the bleak environment. Housed in a gaunt brick building, the school was staffed by uninspired teachers, the majority of whom were young women who desired more than anything else to get married. One of the grade school teachers, however, favorably impressed the youthful Lewis. Her name was Rose Cooper:

When he was eleven years old he wrote a story for her and told her that when he grew up he was going to be a lawyer so that after he earned his living by the law he could write stories. To his great astonishment and gratification she said quite simply and encouragingly, "Why not?"2

Despite his dissatisfaction with most aspects of the school, Lewis must have realized later in his life how important was the training which he received there. It was in this school that he was introduced to Shakespeare, Trollope, Thackeray, and Dickens. According to papers discovered recently in an attic at Twin Farms, former home of the author, Sinclair Lewis had read a prodigious amount of the English classics by the time he had reached his fifteenth birthday.3

Probably the restless youth was not being educated according


3 Dorothy Thompson, "Do Our Schools Need an S.O.S.?," Ladies' Home Journal, LXX (February, 1933), p. 86.
to his center of interest, but he was receiving a background which was to prove useful in his later work as a writer. Through great literature he was exposed to the highest form of intelligent thought and its expression. The papers illustrated that he was extraordinarily familiar with the accepted classics.

Besides illustrating a knowledge of the classics, the themes showed meticulous training in grammar. Every paper was graded for spelling and penmanship. In the Sauk Center school Lewis was taught to be precise and to discipline his work. It is easy to assume that the young rebel was bored with the formality of such training.

The youthful Lewis failed to find an outlet in his home life for his discontent at school. He described his father, a physician, in the following terms: "very dignified, stern, rather soldierly, absolutely honest, and a fair to good country doctor." He always remembered his father with respect but not with affection. Despite the fact that Lewis himself had expressed the desire to continue his studies at Harvard, Dr. Lewis sent his son to Oberlin College preparatory to his entering Yale University. That the elder Lewis was a native of Connecticut may have had some bearing on his preference of Yale over Harvard. Thus the son had some basis for resenting his father's unyielding influence.

---

Further signs of a rebellious spirit were definitely exhibited at Yale by the red-haired Minnesotan. With a provincial sense of inferiority among the Easterners, Lewis made few close friends in New Haven. Late at night he might be seen strolling alone through the back quarters of the town. Writing sentimental verse served as a partial outlet for his emotions; and he read with the fervor of a true man of letters.\(^5\)

By his characteristic devotion to the socialist cause at Yale so early in his career, Sinclair Lewis exhibited an interest in socialism that he was to maintain throughout his literary career. Lewis was deeply concerned with what he considered the injustices and tyrannies of the economic order. He could become eloquent even then in criticism of the capitalistic system. The following excerpt from one of his early essays is indicative of his socialistic leaning:

You find quite amiable people who look forward with genuine satisfaction to the coming of a revolution which shall change everything. You find quite courageous souls who are perfectly satisfied with the manner in which things in general improve from year to year. But almost all of the people who do think are agreed that things are not as they should be; that education is either absurd or weightily inefficient; that under the present economic system—technically called 'capitalism'—products do not get distributed as they should.\(^6\)

Admiring the new Utopias of the economists, Lewis could easily

\(^5\)Van Doren, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35.

have become a political theorist instead of a writer.\textsuperscript{7} His socialist politics afford ample evidence of rebellion against the conventional American acceptance of capitalism.

Feeling an intense need for something more lively than classroom recitations, Lewis worked his way to Europe on a cattle boat the summer following his junior year. Later he was to draw on this experience in writing the novel \textit{Our Mr. Wrenn}.

Lewis left Yale at the beginning of his fourth year. Accompanied by a friend, Alan Updegraff, he signed up as a janitor in Upton Sinclair's socialist Helicon Hall, an experiment in co-operative living. Located in New Jersey, Helicon Hall had long been admired by Lewis. Before very many weeks had passed, however, he was dissatisfied with his new environment. The place was full of food faddists, anarchists, and socialists with the usual contingent of plain frauds and loafers.\textsuperscript{8} Lewis had signed with enthusiasm because he longed for intimate association with mature men and women who wrote. The working hours for janitors, however, were long, and he had no time to write. After two months at the Hall he came down with jaundice and was sent to the hospital. Another of his attempts at rebelling against society had proved to be a miserable disappointment.

\textsuperscript{7}Allen Cleaton and Irene Cleaton, \textit{Books and Battles}, p. 8.  
\textsuperscript{8}Stolberg, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 445.
Lewis's illness did little to dampen his aspirations. Voicing his rebellion against the stultifying and insidious influence of a small town had become an obsession with him. During a summer vacation from Yale which he spent at Sauk Center, he formulated the idea for a short story which he called "The Village Virus."9 It was not until the period of World War I, after he had published six novels and a number of short stories, that he felt ready to denounce the evils of his first environment, the typical American small town. The American village of popular fiction had been presented with peaceful, shaded streets, and neat, white churches. Citizens were jovial parents whose children romped in play and docile satisfaction. This is not true, however, of the citizens of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, in Main Street, Lewis's revolutionary novel. The people of Gopher Prairie were insipid and intolerant of change, incapable of imagining any improvement over existing conditions. In Main Street the small town of America was more realistically presented.

The writing of Main Street constitutes the first major act of Sinclair Lewis's literary rebellion. This novel, his first successful one, has been said to be one of the three most revolutionary books of its decade.10 Main Street blasted the cherished American idea that residents of small towns were

---

9Cleaton, op. cit., p. 15.

10Ibid., p. 6. This Side of Paradise and Jurgen were the other two.
more admirable than those in the metropolitan centers. It recognized the existence of a new and different reading public. Through satire of the Minnesota town, Sinclair Lewis encouraged people to revolt against the insipid shallowness in Gopher Prairies throughout America. Above all he was able to gratify his own desire for reform. Lewis was not alone in his opinions, but he was among the first to step boldly forward with so revolutionary a book as *Main Street*. Carl Van Doren writes of Lewis's attitude toward the American small town:

He was only one of millions of Americans who had come to think of their villages as dull in comparison with the much more colorful worlds spread before them by newspapers, motion pictures, excursions in train or automobile. He had left his village with more distaste than homesickness. Lewis' keen observations in *Main Street* reflect him as a humanitarian socialist. He was a loud-speaker which magnified into one dramatic voice the widespread mutterings of many isolated rebels.\(^{11}\)

Lewis followed his own personal convictions in the writing of *Main Street*. He conformed to no standard previously set up by other American writers in regard to village life.

In another two years Lewis was to slap at another sacred American institution, the businessman. The title character of the novel *Babbitt* became synonymous with the smug, narrow-minded, optimistic, back-slapping, small businessman.\(^{12}\) George F. Babbitt had no thorough-going character of his own. An

---

\(^{11}\) Van Doren, op. cit.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 25.
expert in protective coloration, he needed no distinction to survive. He had made few choices; even his wife had been selected by mere accident. Lewis sought social reform through Babbitt; Rotary and Kiwanis luncheon speakers denounced him as an ingrate and a foreigner. "Businessmen inveighed against Lewis, but secretly they realized that many of his shafts had struck home . . ."13

Again Lewis did not conform to the pattern in American fiction. The businessman had been generally displayed as a type, and his creator had usually moralized him, whether with a naive hero-worship or with a kind of monastic censure for his addiction to the world. Lewis did neither.

By the time that Babbitt was published in 1922 Sinclair Lewis had travelled extensively. He had, in fact, gone to Europe in 1921 to free himself from interferences at home while writing his novel of the American businessman. Previously he had given vent to his restless spirit by traveling steerage to Panama to search in vain for a job. He was to return to Panama late in 1922 to study tropic medicine with Paul DeKruif and to work on a plan for Arrowsmith.

Arrowsmith is cited as another example of the novelist's dissatisfaction with social customs. In Arrowsmith Lewis criticized the commercialism of medicine, and the superficial life of the modern medical research foundation. As a member of a medical family, Lewis might have placed himself in the

position of Martin Arrowsmith, the young physician. Had he followed the profession of his brother, his father, an uncle, and one of his grandfathers, Lewis would have been a physician instead of a novelist. Supporting the assumption that Arrowsmith represents personal convictions of the author, Carl Van Doren writes:

Arrowsmith . . . records the passion of a highly distinctive individual and measures all his society by his standards. The story had to come from within the novelist himself, . . . not from tremors in the social ground.\(^{14}\)

The importance of Arrowsmith as an example of Sinclair Lewis's nonconformity lies not so much in the actual content of the book itself as in another aspect of it which will be treated later.

The terms for the Pulitzer prize state that it shall be awarded to "the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood."\(^{15}\) The prize was nine years old in 1926. Realizing that the terms of the award were illusory, the awarding committees consulted the Pulitzer description only when they needed to support their own prejudices. Critics had found fault with the selection of the novel The Age of Innocence over Main Street. Later, One of Ours was awarded the prize the year of Babbitt's eligibility. Although Lewis was not the only one conscious of

\(^{14}\)Van Doren, op. cit., p. 44.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 17.
the possible fatuity of the Pulitzer prize, he was the first to do anything about it. When the prize was awarded to Arrowsmith in 1926, he rejected both the honor and the money. Lewis concluded his letter of refusal to the Pulitzer Prize Committee with the following comments:

Between the Pulitzer Prizes, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and its training-school the National Institute of Arts and Letters, amateur boards of censorship, and the inquisition of earnest literary ladies, every compulsion is put upon writers to become safe, polite, obedient, and sterile. In protest, I declined election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters some years ago, and now I must decline the Pulitzer Prize.

I invite other writers to consider the fact that by accepting the prizes and approval of these vague institutions, we are admitting their authority, publicly confirming them as the final judges of literary excellence, and I inquire whether any prize is worth that subservience.

Refusal to accept this award is significant evidence of Lewis's literary rebellion. Lewis gave serious reasons for his rejection of the prize, adding that he thought little of literary prizes in general and less than little of the Pulitzer prize in particular. Needless to say, his statement created excitement in the American press. Probably Lewis foresaw everything that might be said about his action and all the advantages which would come to him along with the misapprehensions and insults. But he was not to be denied the pleasure of such a rebellion, irregardless of the consequences. And certainly it was an act of courage. Lewis may have prided himself on being the first man who ever made a literary prize a nine-days' tempest in the American press.

While Lewis was in Kansas City at work on *Elmer Gantry*, he was invited to speak in a church. In the course of his talk he touched upon a legend which at the moment was ardently believed in by the more superstitious. The legend was that Luther Burbank had doubted the existence of God and had soon after died of God's wrath. Lewis logically pointed out that there was no scientific proof that Burbank's skepticism had caused his death. In order to prove that the penalty of doubt was not death, Lewis offered himself as an example. Before the startled witnesses in the church, he declared his disbelief, and placing his watch on the pulpit, gave God ten minutes in which to strike him dead. The newspapers reacted vigorously, but God did not accept the challenge.

By the time *Elmer Gantry* was published, the public had learned to expect nonconformity from Sinclair Lewis. This realistic indictment of a clergyman was not hysterically denounced. Prior to the appearance of *Elmer Gantry*, fictional clergymen had typically been held in romantic reverence. The clergyman was usually represented as a benevolent mystic who engaged in honorable rites. Lewis knew that such clergymen as Gantry did exist, and the clergy was not immune to his satire.17

17 Van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
Awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1930, Lewis extended his rebellion. In his acceptance speech before the Swedish Academy in December, 1930, he told his audience that the literature of the United States still lagged far behind the hopes of its friends and prophets. Lewis's iconoclastic criticism continued:

In America most of us—not readers alone but even writers—are still afraid of any literature which is not a glorification . . . of our faults as well as our virtues . . . We still most revere the writers . . . who chant that the America of a hundred and twenty million population is still as simple, as pastoral, as it was when it had but forty million; . . . that . . . America has gone through the revolutionary change from rustic colony to world-empire without having in the least altered the bucolic and Puritanic simplicity of Uncle Sam.18

Lewis stated that if the Swedish Academy had awarded the prize to Theodore Dreiser or to Eugene O'Neill, America would have been outraged. He praised the work of Dreiser, declaring that he "had cleared the trail from . . . timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life,"19 and he pointed out that Eugene O'Neill had transformed American drama from a world of artificiality into a world of reality and greatness.

On a sadder note, Lewis revealed the discouragement which he had sometimes felt as a part of the sacrifice of a reformer:

The American novelist or poet or dramatist or sculptor or painter must work alone, in confusion,

18 Ibid., p. 8.
19 Ibid.
unassisted save by his integrity . . . He is oppressed ever . . . by the feeling that what he creates does not matter, that he is expected by his readers to be only a decorator or a clown, or that he is good-naturedly accepted as a scoffer whose bark probably is worse than his bite and who probably is a good fellow at heart, who in any case certainly does not count in a land that produces eighty-story buildings, motors by the million, and wheat by the billions of bushels. And he has no institution, no group, to which he can turn for inspiration, whose criticism he can accept and whose praise will be precious to him.  

Lewis lamented the fact that there was in America no great critic or school of criticism helpful to creative writers. He stated that the Erasmuses of America had been village school-mistresses. The American standard of literary excellence had been set by William Dean Howells, "one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men," but "who had the code of a pious old maid . . ." Lewis charged that the influence of Howells had subdued Mark Twain and Hamlin Garland.

Concluding on a note of optimism, Lewis said that he believed strongly in the future of American literature. "... There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see that I am a little too old to be one of them." He named Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Thornton Wilder, John Dos Passos, Stephen Benét, Michael Gold, and William Faulkner.

---

There were those who said that Lewis had used this speech to gain notoriety for himself. Possibly he was glad of such a strategic occasion to voice his rebellion. It might have been more accurate to say that he gained publicity mainly because of his apparent indifference to it. This is best exemplified by his unwillingness to ingratiate himself with reporters and columnists who were friends of his second wife, Dorothy Thompson. Once he remarked to a guest whom his wife had invited to lunch, "I don't like a lot of Dorothy's friends—except big John Gunther—but I think I am going to like you."23

Lewis wanted people around him all the time. New and different people were like a tonic to him, but he soon grew bored with them. Once when a journalist happened to visit in the Lewis home in Bronxville, Lewis came home in a taxi thoroughly intoxicated, and invited the cab driver into the house. Although he did not get to bed until late, Lewis was out of bed the next morning by daylight, suggesting that the journalist hire a car to take them to the Catskill Mountains for a day's outing. The journalist was astounded at Lewis's alertness of mind.

Lewis's pleasure in discovering and exposing anyone whom he thought a phony is indicative of his rebellion against conformity and conventionality. In a letter to a friend, Lewis described his conversation with an author and her husband at

---

a Hollywood party:

. . . I thought No they can’t be here, they must be in England loving the war away from those beleaguered shores . . . it was X and Y loving me and loving God and loving America and loving Houghton Mifflin and loving Adler and loving refugees . . . and loving Dorothy and loving Truth and Beauty and loving the Jews, the Jutes, and the Jukes, and being so clear and persistent about it that I got sourer and sourer . . . 24

Lewis’s criticisms were not limited to Americans; he delighted in ridiculing European stereotypes. European students at the University of Leiden were shocked at some of his remarks when he spoke there. Lewis challenged the European assumption that all American artists wanted to escape to Europe. He insisted that, since Americans had all brought with them the civilization of Europe when they settled their country, their culture was as old as any European’s. He admitted that Americans had been known to behave foolishly on the continent, but blamed the Europeans for the antics of American tourists. He concluded with the statement that since Europeans expected Americans to act like wild Indians, the Americans felt obliged to carry out the tradition. 25 Again Lewis spoke contrary to pattern which demanded that he speak as the American expatriate, unappreciated and misunderstood in his native land.

Following his speech at the University of Leiden, Lewis went to a dinner party in his honor. Seated at the table with him were a Dutch merchant and his wife who intimated their

24 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

unfavorable attitudes toward Indonesia and its citizens. Upon hearing the comments, Lewis launched into a patriotic tirade, the sort of which he had voluminously burlesqued in his novels, in which he upheld the cause of the embattled Indonesians. To Lewis they became synonymous with American patriots at Valley Forge, and his Dutch hosts became supercilious Tories in the London of 1776. Possibly Lewis took this radical stand for no other reason than to appear a non-conformist among the Dutch merchants; however, he may have been voicing his personal opinions. He was prone to be in sympathy with the revolutionary characters in his novels.

Lewis nursed an aversion to restrictive, suffocating respectability. He gave firm allegiance to a nihilistic freedom. His great American heroes were men who came before the time of respectability. Kit Carson was a spirit he often invoked.

As further proof of Lewis's aversion to restrictions of any sort, the following story is told. When Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime took control of the German government, Klaus Mann, who was in exile in Holland, started publishing an émigré monthly. Mann wrote Lewis describing the paper as a vehicle for young exiled German writers and asked the novelist to allow his name to be used on the masthead as "contributing

———

26Ibid.

editor." Lewis refused on the grounds that he was not "a young German writer," and that he was unwilling to sponsor a publication which he would be unable to follow. He added that he believed such publications should stand honestly on their own feet. Before waiting for a reply from Lewis, however, Klaus Mann came out with the first issue with the name of Sinclair Lewis on the masthead. Lewis's German publisher, Ernst Rowoht, cabled in protest that Mann's emigre' sheet was disgusting and that Lewis's continued association with it would lead to the suppression of his books in Germany.

Lewis could have simply and truthfully replied to his German publisher that Mann had used his name without his consent, but his immediate reaction was that his relations with young Mann and his publication were none of Rowoht's (or the Third Reich's) affair. He cabled Rowoht:

DEAR ERNST HAVE YOU GONE CRAZY QUESTION MARK DO YOU HONESTLY THINK I WILL LET YOU OR YOUR GOVERNMENT TELL ME WHAT I SHOULD WRITE OR WHERE I SHOULD PUBLISH?

Thus Lewis exhibited again his characteristic individuality by refusing to conform to the wishes of the Third Reich, even if it meant that his novels, which had previously been held in high acclaim in Germany, would be banned. Lewis's retort to his German publisher meant that he would receive no more

dividends from the sale of his books in Germany. It was not the first or the last occasion, however, when he showed utter disregard for money.

Until his death in 1951 Lewis waged a private war against convention. Singularly devoted to the cause of reform, he availed himself of every opportunity to demonstrate his criticism of American culture, and on certain occasions, of European culture. He had the idea that if the faults of people were called to their attention, they would subsequently correct them. Lewis requested that his body be cremated at his death. His wishes were carried out, and his ashes were interred in Sauk Center, Minnesota, beside the grave of his father. Carrying his rebellion against convention to the end, Lewis also left instructions that nothing of a religious nature was to occur in connection with his funeral.

Thus from his youth in the provincial environment of Sauk Center, Minnesota, until his death, Sinclair Lewis expressed an unwillingness to conform to the customs of conventional society. In his youth he rebelled against the formal severity of his father. He resented the bleak environment of the village school room. At Yale he considered himself an uncouth Westerner and avoided intimate association with other students. He gained national notoriety as an iconoclast of American tradition in literature. In rejecting the

29Ibid.
Pulitzer prize, Lewis created an unprecedented tempest in American letters. The first American to win the Nobel prize in literature, Lewis took the opportunity to criticize harshly the traditions of American literature. In his travels over Europe he expressed disregard for convention in various ways. He was a true nonconformist who had the courage to voice his convictions whether at the Swedish Academy or an American club. This personal nonconformity is the basis of many of his best characterizations throughout his literary career.
CHAPTER II

THE WISTFUL REBEL

Characters in the novels of Sinclair Lewis who passively rebel against conventional society are classified as wistful rebels. As a rule, these characters exert no effort to rebel, but only dream of becoming individualistic. Whether or not it is Lewis's intent, it is noteworthy that many of these people appear pathetic and ridiculous in their aspirations. In considering the classification of these wistful rebels one should keep in mind the difficulty of judging human behavior. For various reasons classification of some marginal characters may appear doubtful. Other characters, however, appear definitely to have the characteristics which classify them as dreamers. In this chapter the doubtful examples will be considered first, then the more definite examples of the character type which I have named the wistful rebel.

Doubtfully but probably a wistful rebel is Gene Linderbeck whose ambitions cause his fellow students at Plato College to regard him with disdain. He yearns to become a teacher of English at Harvard or Yale. The truthful rumor that he reads a great deal and is apparently eager to learn adds to Linderbeck's unpopularity. Indicative of his personality is the following excerpt:
Everyone said that 'Genie Linderbeck was queer.' A precocious boy of fifteen, yet the head of his class in scholarship; reported to be interested in Greek books quite outside of the course, fond of drinking tea, and devoid of merit in the three manly arts—athletics, flirting, and breaking rules by smoking.

Whether Gene Linderbeck has a particular aversion to social mores is doubtful. He fails to mention his political affiliations, if any. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that he upholds the teachings of Professor Henry Frazer. Frazer is discharged from his position on the grounds that he taught anarchy in the defense of George Bernard Shaw. Linderbeck and one other student express their loyalty to Frazer. Because Lewis does not clearly define the character of Gene Linderbeck, his classification may be doubtful. He seems, however, to possess definite characteristics of the wistful rebel.

Another probable member of this group is Eino Roskinen of Cass Timberlane. Roskinen is also one who fails to carry out vague, idealistic plans for social reform; yet that may be because he dies before he has full opportunity to realize his ambitions.

Roskinen is a dark, serious-minded young man. An expert in buttermaking at a local dairy, he is really interested in drama. His ambition is to become a director. He is also interested in politics, and one of his theories is indicative of his leaning towards nonconformity. He believes that the

\[1\text{Sinclair Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk, p. 65.}\]
new America is made up of the Italians, Poles, Icelanders, Hungarians, and Slovaks. He explains to Judge Timberlane:

'We may allow full citizenship to some of the Yankee tribesmen if they learn the principles of co-operation and give up their medicine-men--pastors, they call 'em, I believe. But judges, now--I don't know about them. I don't know whether they can learn to speak the American language.'

The last remark is obviously directed at Judge Timberlane himself. Had not Roskinen been killed in a plane crash during World War II, perhaps his rebellion would have taken on a more active color.

There is also the possibility that Mercie Hargue might have become a more active social rebel had her physical condition permitted. The wife of a missionary to the Sioux Indians in the Minnesota territory of the mid-nineteenth century, Mercie is slowly dying of consumption. She tolerates the fervor of the missionaries to convert the Indians to Congregational Christianity; yet she can see no real cause for alarm in the fact that the Indians continue to hunt on Sunday.

Confiding her inner feelings, she tells a friend:

'I know this is childish. But ever since I was married, I've been so highly grown-up. I've done my best to groan and holler over my sins, to please Hargue, even when I couldn't figure out what they were . . .'

The element of romanticism in the characterization of Mercie Hargue stamps her more definitely as a wistful rebel. The reader gets the impression that she is an habitual dreamer.

---

2Sinclair Lewis, *Cass Timberlane*, p. 45.

After confessing that perhaps she had rather return to her New England home than to go anywhere else, she adds:

'But maybe there's some kind of personal immor-
tality all these preachers say there is, . . . and maybe I'll look down and see the lilacs in May—or be so seraphic I don't care whether I do or not.'

Perhaps too active to be classified as a true wistful rebel is Cecile Jessup of *It Can't Happen Here*. Nevertheless, she goes no farther than to express vigorously her de-
sire to be a nonconformist. Cecile is quite sophisticated for her eighteen years. She is intelligent and attempts to adopt what she considers an ultra-modern point of view. She talks vigorously of going off to study architecture so that she can supervise the erection of small homes for the low-in-
come bracket. Despite the fact that Cecile Jessup is pre-
sented sympathetically by Lewis, one cannot help from doub-
ing the sincerity of her ambitions.

Keenly interested in politics, Cecile sees through the pseudo-Americanism of Berzelius Windrip, presidential can-
didate. She satirizes the demagoguery of his campaign. In school the few unconventional teachers whose political views she adopts appeal to her much more than the host of conform-
ists. This is evidence of her rebellious attitudes. Yet her nonconformity remains merely verbal.

Edith Cortright in *Dodsworth* is presented as another pas-
sive rebel. She comes from an aristocratic Michigan family,
her father having once been Secretary of the Treasury of
the United States. The widow of a British ambassador, she
makes her home in Venice. She is a world traveler who is
not content in her native land.

A social misfit, Edith Cortright is unsuited to the po-
sition in society she feels obligated to assume. A critic of
her acquaintances, she remarks to Dodsworth:

"... there's an international Anglo-American-French
set--smart women, just a little ambiguous, and men with
titles and tailors and nothing much else, and sharp
couples that play bridge too well, and three-necked mil-
lionaires--well, they seem to me like a menagerie."

The inward restlessness that Edith Cortright feels is in-
dicative of her yearning to be distinctive. Feeling insecure
in America, she prefers the privacy of Venice. She has a
sense of guilt when she is in the United States, feeling that
she should be busy winning bridge championships or uplifting
the motion picture industry. She confesses, "All the compli-
cations are inside myself away from me. I'm so afraid of do-
ing the wrong thing that it's easier to do nothing." This
statement seems to illuminate the character of Edith Cortright
as a wistful rebel.

Hatch Hewitt, who appears in Gideon Planish, expresses
a definite desire to rebel actively against his society. The
victim of circumstances he does not overcome, he is denied

5Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 333.
6Tbid., p. 345.
active rebellion. More resentful than the other rebels in this category, he embraces the ideals of socialism while in college. Forced to begin work as a Western Union messenger at the age of twelve, he has earned his living for years. Perhaps in order to gain the sympathy of the reader Lewis presents Hewitt as a victim of the defects of his society.

In college Hewitt originates the idea of forming a club to provide an agency for the expression of his radical ideas.7 Nothing ever comes of the proposed society, however. In defense of Hewitt one might say that the club fails to materialize because its leadership is wrested from Hewitt by other frustrated students. Yet this itself is evidence that he is lacking in some of the qualities essential to an effective organizer.

In The Prodigal Parents Annabel Staybridge approaches the status of a true wistful rebel. She is a critic of her own generation. She laughs inwardly at the helplessness of her friend, Howard Cornplow, and at his dependency upon his father. A college junior, young Cornplow does not attempt a solution for any of his problems; instead, he leaves them to his father. In her own home Annabel resents the wealth of her father and despises his attempts to establish a tradition for the family. When Annabel consents to marry Howard Cornplow, she reveals her longing for independence from her father and his money. She says to Howard:

7Sinclair Lewis, Gideon Planish, p. 13.
"But I want us to economize. I'm crazy to. Honestly, honey, I'd get more kick out of having the nerve to do without things than I ever would getting them. Live in one room, if necessary. And I really am a pretty good cook..."

Freeing herself of the restraint that she feels that wealth has placed on her has almost become an obsession. However, Annabel Staybridge may very well belong to the type of character who is miserable in poverty or in wealth. At any rate, she is definitely dissatisfied with her status.

Although he is unhamppered by wealth in his quest for individuality, Harry Morton expresses dissatisfaction with the social order. Illiterate of Karl Marx, Morton has heard of socialism from his fellow workers at the Pennsylvania Railroad terminal in New York where he is a clerk. He reveals that he is impressed when he remarks, "Great Stuff. Not working for some lazy ass that's inherited the right to boss you. And international brotherhood, not just neighborhood."

When Morton earns a three-month vacation, he ships to England on a cattle boat. He hopes to see a great deal of Europe before his return home. He shocks William Wrenn, a conservative companion, by his remarks concerning a sunset at sea:

"I don't see how anybody could believe in religion after looking at that... Everything's so peaceful

---

8 Sinclair Lewis, The Prodigal Parents, p. 133.

9 Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 46.
and natural. Just is. Gives the imagination enough to do ... without having to have religion.  

At times it is hard to follow the logic, or sentiment, of Morton's observations. They do reveal, however, that within him there is an element of uncertainty typical of the potential rebel. It is ironic, and indicative of his indecision, that Harry Morton never leaves the English port city where his ship is docked until he is ready to return to America. Instead of venturing farther into Europe as he had planned, he takes a job in a restaurant.

The Reverend Andrew Pengilly of the Methodist church can apparently be classified as a wistful rebel. He spends much time in solitary thought and calls himself an idle dreamer. Especially fond of fishing, he is indifferent to the catching of actual fish. A Civil War veteran, he has had little formal education; yet he thoroughly knows the Bible. Art is one of his hobbies, and he likes to keep his study littered with portraits and sketches. His church board members disapprove of the statuettes of the madonna, of St. Francis of Assisi, and of the Sacred Heart.

Pengilly has a sense of humor. He can joke with the village atheist; he can smile at the people in his congregation who constantly find fault with his sermons. His complacency is noteworthy since it is a paradoxical characteristic of the rebel.

---

10 Ibid., p. 45.
Pengilly is indifferent towards evangelists; yet when Elmer Gantry schedules a sermon in his town, he invites the famous preacher to his home. Pengilly has read that Gantry is a courageous fighter of sin. To illustrate the former's wistfulness the following excerpt is noted:

Mr. Pengilly sighed. Himself, somehow, he had never been able to find so very much Sin about. His fault. A silly old dreamer. He rejoiced that he, the mousy village cure, was about to have here . . . a St. Michael in dazzling armor. 11

A character who realizes more nearly the full status of a wistful nonconformist than the previous ones discussed is Dr. Ash Davis of Kingsblood Royal. A Negro chemist, he associates with the other intellectuals of his race; yet he finds the constant bickerings of the race crusaders an ordeal. He confesses his personal ambition to an intimate friend:

'I'd like to live in an ivory tower, play Bach, read Yeats, and Melville, be an authority on the history of chemistry and alchemy instead of a plodding laboratory hack. But the white scholars won't accept me, so I try to become an ardent race crusader.' 12

Instead of inciting him to rebel actively, the feeling that he is not accepted by the white scholars tends to add to the inertia of Davis. He seems to accept his plight as inevitable; yet he maintains an impractical personal ambition.

11Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry, p. 366.
12Sinclair Lewis, Kingsblood Royal, p. 154.
Because of a campaign put into action by northern businessmen, Ash Davis loses his position at the chemical plant. The purpose of the campaign is to force the Negroes back to the South by discharging them and refusing to re-employ them. Other firms in the North which Davis contacts reject his application for employment. Finally, he is forced by circumstances to accept a low-salaried professorship at a small Southern Negro college. Davis apparently accepts racial discrimination without extreme bitterness. He takes the attitude of a defeatist, preserving his anemic desire to rebel against the demands of his society.

The boredom of a prosperous middle-class existence as a housewife is conducive to Rose Penloss's passive rebellion. Rose considers the conversation of her husband extremely boring and his taste common. The heavy monotone of his voice is almost unbearable to her. She finds release for her emotions by planning careers for her teen-age daughter. Frequently she expects her to become an actress; occasionally, a newspaperwoman.

The character of Rose Penloss is an excellent example of Sinclair Lewis's ability to present realistically the utter helplessness of an individual against conventional society. Rose Penloss is intelligent; yet her behavior is sometimes ridiculous. The careers that she plans for her daughter merely reveal her escape from reality; actually they come to nothing.
Usually the seldom-expressed ambitions reveal best the personality of a character. This is especially true of Rose when she confides to her brother, Cass Timberlane:

'I want to live in New York and get to know all the intellectuals. But what is a woman who is still good-looking at thirty-six but not beautiful enough to make a career of it ... yet contemptuous of amateur charities ... untrained in anything worth fifteen dollars a week on the labor market and not even, after years of marriage, a competent nurse or cook, no longer in love with her husband and bored by everything he does—liking other men but not lecherous nor fond of taking risks, possessing a successful daughter and too interested in her to desert her—just what is this typical upper-middle-middle-class American Wife to do?''

Another effective characterization of a wistful rebel occurs in *Main Street*. Guy Pollock is impressive as the restless lawyer of Gopher Prairie. In the small town he misses the symphony concerts which he attended twice a week when he was a law student in New York. Upon arriving in Gopher Prairie to practice law, he swears that he will maintain his cultural interests. He soon finds, however, that he is reading four copies of cheap fiction magazines to one poem. Postponing trips to the theater in Minneapolis, Pollock feels that he is becoming as provincial as the other citizens. He sees no possible way to reform the narrowness of the small town. In his pessimism he is similar to other characters of Lewis's creation who are defeatists.

---

Guy Pollock diagnoses his dissatisfaction in the following manner:

'The Village Virus is the germ which . . . infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces. You'll find it epidemic among lawyers and doctors and ministers and college-bred merchants—all these people who have had a glimpse of the world . . . but who have returned to their swamp.'

Though he is often depressed, Pollock finds little outlet for his brooding emotions. He spends a considerable amount of his time in solitude. He freely divulges his inhibited feelings to Carol Kennicott:

'... our subjects, watch us every minute. We can't get wholesomely drunk and relax. We have to be so correct about sex morals, and inconspicuous clothes, and doing our commercial trickery only in the traditional ways, that none of us can live up to it, and we become horribly hypocritical.'

Thus the character of Guy Pollock embodies the essential emotions of a pensive rebel. Though Pollock expresses utter disgust with social customs, the reader knows that he will continue accepting them with the proper amount of self-pity.

Obviously indifferent to social advancement is Leora of Arrowsmith, another excellent example of the wistful rebel. She is frank and unassuming whether on duty as a student nurse or at a party. Leora is presented by Lewis as the type of person in whose presence pretentious people feel ill at ease.

14Sinclair Lewis, Main Street, pp. 155-156.
15Ibid., p. 158.
Revealing a lack of genuine desire to impress socially prominent people, Leora is sometimes careless about her appearance. Once she attends a banquet with a spot of soot on her nose, much to her husband's embarrassment. At another social function she appears with a button missing from her blouse. She promises her husband to be more careful in dress and speech, but she consistently slips back into her carefree attitude.

In New York Leora does not radically denounce the superficial social life of the medical foundation staff members; nor does she eagerly look forward to the talkative banquets in elaborate dining rooms. Her attitude is one of acceptance but not necessarily one of approval. Her aversion to conformity is partly due to the attitude of her father who is a solemn personification of respectability; in his daughter's youth he had never liked anything to happen for which he had not planned a solution in advance.

Neither is Verona Babbitt encouraged by her father in her quest for self-expression as a social welfare worker. Immediately upon her graduation from Bryn Mawr, Verona feels that she should be carrying out some of her ideas toward social reform. On one occasion she comments to her disinterested family, "I want to--contribute--I wish I were working in a settlement house. I wonder if I could get one of the
department stores to put in a nice rest room with chintzes and wicker chairs . . ."16

In her political discussions with Kenneth Scott, the young reporter, Verona discovers that she is a radical. Yet she feels that she is completely sensible. She agrees with the reporter that all communists are criminal. As a culmination of their discussions the couple usually predict that there will someday be a third party competing against the Democrats and the Republicans. The favorite recreation of the two theorists is attending lectures on various subjects from New Thought to Feminism. When Verona marries the reporter, her father is glad that he will no longer be forced to listen to the cultured chatter of the two.

In Verona Babbitt Lewis has created an excellent example of the wistful rebel. In her pathetically disorganized remarks about reform one recognizes her inability to rebel successfully. She is an example of the idealistic college graduate who cannot apply herself to the life she encounters after leaving school. The characteristics of Verona are found in a large majority of the other pensive rebels. Because of her obvious wistfulness toward reform, she is an ineffectual idealist.

In this group of individuals Lewis has demonstrated his ability to characterize effectively the passive rebel. These

16Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, pp. 16-17.
rebels are not, as a rule, vehement in their denunciations of their social order. Frequent revelations of discontent exhibit their longing for a change. Some are unconcerned with social conformity. All long to be nonconformists, yet no one does anything about it. All deplore conventionality, yet remain passively conventional. In their dreams they see themselves perhaps as social rebels, but their rebellion remains an idle dream. It is this idleness, this inability to take any action to achieve personal nonconformity, which characterizes the wistful rebel and distinguishes him as a character from a similar character, the ineffectual rebel.
CHAPTER III

THE INEFFECTUAL REBEL

In a large number of Sinclair Lewis's novels there is at least one character who may be classified as an ineffectual rebel. As opposed to the wistful rebel, this character actually breaks away from conventional behavior instead of only yearning to rebel. Usually, however, his behavior is inconsistent. He acts impulsively with no definite objective in mind, and he generally fails to realize his vague and impractical ambitions. In many instances, he is too emotional to be effective as a reformer. Nevertheless, in some of the ideals of the ineffectual rebel one sees the aspirations of Sinclair Lewis himself. It is probably because of his sympathy for the more admirable of these characters that Lewis is able to present vividly their ideals. Some of the characters in this group, however, seem to use their personal rebellion as an excuse for their own weaknesses and their inability to face the problems of their life. The characters whom I have elected to classify as ineffectual rebels are presented chronologically in the order of the appearance of the novels. This method of presentation helps to illustrate
the consistency of Lewis in characterizing the ineffectual rebel throughout his literary career.

Our Mr. Wrenn, one of Sinclair Lewis's first novels, affords an example of the ineffectual rebel in the character of Glynpia Johns. Olympia is the leader of a group of artists, writers, and loafers in the London of pre-World War days. In describing Olympia, Lewis remarks, "She was as small and active and excitedly energetic as an ant trying to get around a match."1

In her disorganized attempts at social reform Olympia realizes none of her ambitions. In lectures she deplores the working conditions of the laborers, and she points out the exorbitant water rates in the city. She courageously attempts to impress upon educators her belief that there is a definite lack of emphasis on individuality in the public school system. She believes that children are crushed into a mold. Her efforts to socialize the various utilities and to reform the public school system are all in vain, however; perhaps because she acts impulsively and illogically. In her eagerness she lacks the patience to wait for a convenient time for action but strikes according to her whims. It is this lack of clear judgment that characterizes Olympia as an ineffectual rebel.

1Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 118.
Perhaps one of the most purposeless nonconformists in this category is Istra Nash, who also appears in Our Mr. Wrenn. An attractive young woman, Istra studies art at brief intervals in Paris. She spends more of her time, however, among a group of Bohemian friends in London.

Istra is in rebellion against the tourists (tripper, she calls them) who come to Europe to visit the tower of London and return to address their local Chambers of Commerce with boring lectures.

Yielding often to impulse, Istra once suggests to William Wrenn that they tramp all night to an artists' colony north of London. It is indicative of her inability to be consistent when she decides to give up the hike and continue their journey by train.

Though apparently unable to resist the company of her artist friends, Istra also makes a point to criticize them. She shows evidence of resenting her own group when she remarks:

"... these Interesting People—you find 'em in London and New York and San Francisco just the same. They're convinced they're the wisest people on earth. There's a few artist and a bum novelist or two always, and some social workers. The particular bunch that it amuses me to hate right now—and that I apparently can't do without."

Istra Nash actually accomplishes nothing in her flighty rebellion against convention and seems unable to be consistent, even in her rebellious viewpoints.

2Ibid., p. 98.
Ruth Winslow in The Trail of the Hawk typifies the ineffectual rebel. A prefiguration of some of Lewis's finest characterizations, Ruth is the daughter of a wealthy New York manufacturer. She is bored by what she terms as a 'useless existence,' seeking an outlet for her discontent in various ways. Longing for the excitement of a Bohemian atmosphere, she visits often the home of a woman who entertains would-be artists, writers, and persons who have set standards for their nonconformity.

At one of the parties Ruth meets a young aviator, a glamorous adventurer for 1915. Although Hawk Ericson is famous as a pilot, he comes from a Norwegian immigrant family and is therefore not accepted socially by the Winslows of Eastside New York. To the annoyance of her family Ruth continues seeing Ericson. Together they take week-end hikes and go skiing in New England. When the couple decide to get married, she theorizes vaguely about an ideal marriage. This is evidence of her desire for individualism:

... Ruth was, in her rebellion against the canonical marriage of slipper-warming and obedience, emphatic but vague. She was of precise opinion regarding certain details of marriage, but in general as inconsistent as her library. 3

It is this inconsistency in Ruth's personal rebellion that classifies her as an ineffectual rebel.

Even after her marriage Ruth is dissatisfied in the tenement district. Her theories about an ideal marriage are not so appealing as she muses in her cheap flat:

3Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk, p. 379.
... Ruth observed foreign-looking, idle women, not very clean, who had nothing to do after they had completed half an hour of slovenly housework in the morning. They watched their neighbors breathlessly... yet to Ruth they seemed to be in the room with her, claiming her as one of their sisterhood.... She raged with the thought that she might grow to be like them in every respect.4

Thus marriage fails to end Ruth's restlessness. Impulsively deciding to accompany her husband on a South American voyage, she yields to a vague ideal of self-realization. Ruth shows no promise of ever becoming effective as a nonconformist.

In The Job Esther Lawrence appears to have the characteristics of an ineffectual rebel. The reader feels that Esther defies social convention merely for the sake of drawing attention to herself rather than for any worthy purpose. Separated from her husband, she lives in the Women's Temperance and Protestant Home. She frequently dates men whom she has met in her business position, despite the fact that she is legally married. This flagrant defiance of the social mores of the early 1900's is shocking to the other residents of the home.

Esther is apparently pleased when her actions are frowned upon by the other women, and she delights in telling them that she is a Catholic living in a Protestant home. She disobeys the rules of the house by smoking in her room. She hopes that Mrs. Fike, the counselor, will discover her in the act someday and be profoundly shocked.

Actually Esther accomplishes nothing in her disregard for social convention. It is doubtful that she herself has any

4Ibid., p. 390.
particular objective in mind. Since her rebellion lacks depth and any appearance of insight, she may be considered as a typical ineffectual rebel.

Perhaps the most fully realized of all the ineffectual rebels is Carol Kennicott. In a number of ways she tries to reform the town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, into an idealistic Utopia. Facing disappointment after disappointment, she is forced to admit to herself that she is a failure as a reformer.

When Carol Milford, librarian of St. Paul, becomes the bride of Dr. Will Kennicott, and goes to make her home in Gopher Prairie, she erroneously predicts her future. She visions a suburban bungalow surrounded by a lush carpet of grass; instead she finds a frame house in a small parched lawn. This discovery is but the beginning of many disappointments. She finds the citizens of Gopher Prairie garrulous and bigoted. Through the characterization of Carol Kennicott, Lewis is able to present his caustic opinions of the citizens of a small town clearly patterned after his birthplace, Sauk Center, Minnesota. Carol is soon established by the town gossips as an outsider full of criticism for their cherished traditions.

After her arrival in the town Carol places herself up for criticism by defying social convention. Tiring of the constant chatter of the women at her first social event, Carol ventures into another room to converse with the men. Since a respectable woman in 1912 had no place in politics, she is
subjecting herself to criticism when she mentions union labor, profit sharing, and old-age pensions. Later that night Carol shocks her husband by not condemning a small group of farmers in the county who advocate socialized medicine.

It is a custom in Gopher Prairie for the hostess to serve coffee at afternoon club meetings. A major test of Carol's strength as a reformer comes when she suggests to her maid, "Let's make Gopher Prairie rock to its foundations: let's have afternoon tea instead of afternoon coffee." Carol's deviation from the accepted pattern fails to dent the tradition, however.

Carol also tries to revive the Gopher Prairie parties by substituting entertainment more original than the repetition of Dave Dyer's yarn of the Norwegian who caught a hen and Miss Ella Stowbody's nasal vocalizing of "An Old Sweetheart of Mine." Carol's first party is on an Oriental theme; she shocks the older Victorian-bred ladies by appearing in short Chinese trousers and a coat of green brocade edged with gold. Although many of the guests apparently enjoy the unusual entertainment, Carol enjoys only briefly the success of social reform. Guests at a party the following week hear a reiteration of Dyer's skit and Miss Stowbody's song.

5Lewis, Main Street, p. 66.
At a meeting of the afternoon ladies' club Carol shocks the town librarian by expressing what she believes is the duty of a librarian. She appears to the reader as the spokesman of Sinclair Lewis when she comments that the chief task of a librarian is to encourage people to read. The Gopher Prairie librarian is appalled at such a reflection since she is of the firm conviction that her primary duty is to preserve the books entrusted to her care.

As a member of the Thanatopsis Club Carol hopes to lead the organization in helping the poor of the town. She explains that she does not want charity for them, but a chance for them to help themselves. She suggests an employment bureau and a municipal fund for home building. The other members are unimpressed by Carol's aspirations, and one of them expresses the general opinion when she remarks that there is no real poverty in the town, adding that there are only people too lazy to find a decent position. Realizing her inability to work without the co-operation of the club, Carol is forced to discontinue her plans for aid to the poor.

Later, in a conversation with Guy Pollock, Carol expresses her pessimism about social reform:

'We're all together, the industrial workers and the women and the farmers and the Negro race and the Asiatic colonies, and even a few of the Respectables. . . . We're tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We have plans for a Utopia already made . . . We sha'n't get it. So we sha'n't ever be content--'"
Carol's discontent leads her to trace maps with a restless longing. She casually hints to her husband of the possible need for doctors in Montana and Oregon. When he does not respond, she begins to find fault with his manners and general appearance.

When Carol feels that she has withstood the dull complacency of Gopher Prairie as long as she can, she goes to Washington, taking her young son with her. She finds a job easily enough because of the concentrated war effort in the capital in 1918. In her attempt to escape from the influence of her environment, Carol is disappointed once again. She finds that the church which she attends is made of Main Street citizens from all over the United States. She discovers that their opinions are very similar to the dull, orthodox opinions of the Gopher Prairie townspeople. Unable to achieve a realization of her ambitions, she returns to village life, admitting her defeat.

Back at home Carol places all her hopes for social reform in the generation of her new-born daughter. Depending on the future, she remarks to her husband:

'Do you see that object on the pillow? Do you know what it is? It's a bomb to blow up smugness . . . Think what that baby will see and meddle with before she dies in the year 2000! She may see an industrial union of the whole world . . . '7

That Carol is aware of her failure as a reformer is evident

7Ibid., p. 451.
when she remarks, "I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith." This is a characteristic attitude among the ineffectual rebels.

The uneventful life of a middle-aged widow is sometimes conducive to a defiance of social convention. This is true in the case of Tanis Judique, an ineffectual rebel in *Babbitt*. An attractive, slender woman in her early forties, she prides herself in being associated with a group of Bohemian nonconformists. She listens to classical music, and is of the opinion that the average person has no reaction to poetry or to beauty.

Perhaps Tanis Judique is one of the characters who uses her social rebellion as a rationalization of her own weaknesses. She says to George F. Babbitt, whom she has invited to her apartment:

"Don't you think it's awfully nice when two people have so much—as shall I call it?—so much analysis that they can discard all these stupid conventions and understand each other and become acquainted right away . . . ."  

Mrs. Judique apparently has no specific motive for defying social conventions. She is impulsive and constantly bickers with the other members of her clan. Her whole life is centered around the activities of the group. They enjoy dancing, drinking illicit gin, and acting as unconventional as they know how. To illustrate that Mrs. Judique desires to

---

8Ibid.  
be free from all conventional restraint the following remark is quoted:

'And Mother wants to come and stay with me for a whole month, and of course I do love her, I suppose, but honestly, she'll cramp my style something dreadful—she never can learn not to comment and she always wants to know where I'm going when I go out evenings, and if I lie to her she always spies around and ferrets around, and then she looks like Patience on a Monument till I could just scream.'\(^{10}\)

Another character in *Babbitt* who may be classed as an ineffectual rebel is Paul Riesling. He is a resentful, disillusioned person. In his youth he had planned to become a concert violinist, but his marriage to Zilla and subsequent responsibilities kept him from studying in Europe. Paul complains, "I ought to have been a fiddler, and I'm a pedler of tar-roofing! And Zilla—oh, I don't want to squeal, but you know as well as I do about how she is . . ."\(^{11}\)

Paul quarrels often with his wife and seeks consolation in the company of other women. His companions are not usually impressive. Once he taunts his wife with the idea that he has been unfaithful:

'There hasn't been a time in the last ten years when I haven't found some nice little girl to comfort me, and as long as you continue your amiability I shall probably continue to deceive you. It isn't hard.'\(^{12}\)

Paul is moody and temperamental. Unable to restrain himself from violence in a bitter quarrel with his wife, he attempts to murder her. However, Zilla recovers from the gunshot

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 364.  
\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 61.  
\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 135.
wound. Serving three years in prison, Paul has time to re-
view his failures.

Alverna Easter of Mantrap rebels against the stifling
conventionality of Mrs. McGavity, the only other woman in the
isolated fur-trading village. Yet Alverna is spasmodic and
ineffectual in her rebellion. It appears that hers is a self-
centered type of revolt, one that she uses as an excuse for
her weaknesses.

A former manicurist in Minneapolis, Alverna manages to
endure the social isolation of the village by dancing, cook-
ing, and housekeeping. Her attraction to the young detective
of the Royal Mounted Police arouses quarrels with her husband.
When her husband calls her the 'lightweight flirting champion,'
Alverna launches into a tirade of words in protest:

"Because I try to be jolly, and have a little con-
versation besides just dirty stories and swearing and . . .
shooting and fishing, and because I like to have folks
act like educated ladies and gentlemen . . . and maybe
ask you to take a little time off from your hard work at
sitting . . . and clean up . . . Just because a girl is
nice to people, you all got such nasty minds that--"

Alverna is not particularly admirable as a rebel against
the discipline of her environment. Her emotional outbursts
are common characteristics of the ineffectual rebels. Too,
she seems completely devoted to self and is only interested
in reforming that part of society that says she must be a
faithful and devoted wife.

13Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, p. 138.
Continuing his characterization of the ineffectual rebel into the height of his career, Sinclair Lewis includes another in the novel *Elmer Gantry*. Frank Shallard is the son of a Baptist minister. For years he doubts the doctrines of his church before he actively defies them. That Shallard would follow in his father's footsteps had been always assumed, and when he is graduated from high school he enrolls in the Mizpah Theological Seminary. While there he exhibits his inclination to rebel:

'I do wonder sometimes if we aren't rather impious, we Baptists, to set ourselves up as the keepers of the gates of God, deciding just who is righteous and who is worthy to commune.'

Shallard's observations may perhaps express the attitude of his creator, Sinclair Lewis.

A sensitive youth, Shallard feels a sense of guilt because of his doubts. Dr. Zechlin, an extraordinary member of the faculty, praises him for his doubting certain accepted beliefs. Shallard toys with the idea of leaving the church, but decides against it.

After supervising his first Sunday School class, Shallard is accused of being too liberal because he does not condemn the omission of family prayers. There is some difficulty over his ordination, for when he appears before the examining committee, he seems to doubt the virgin birth. Shallard had never

---

actively rebelled against the fundamentalist doctrines of the church because he was afraid of hurting his father.

When Shallard marries and soon acquires a family, his leaving the ministry seems all the more preposterous. Accepting the pastorate of a church in the Midwest, he takes a step toward nonconformity by associating himself with the Preachers’ Liberal Club.

Upon America’s entrance into World War I, Shallard resigns his ministerial position to enlist in the army. He does not enter as a chaplain, but as a private soldier, hoping to free himself from inhibitions. He despises the regimentation of the army, however, feeling less individualistic than when he was a minister. Upon his return from war Shallard leaves the Baptist church to become a minister in the Congregational church, hoping that the latter will be more liberal regarding Bible interpretation.

One night, after a weekly prayer meeting, Shallard’s resentment seems to reach a climax. He confides to his unsympathetic wife, "Oh, I am going to get out of the church! Think of it! A preacher getting religion, getting saved getting honest, getting out." In less than a week he makes his rebellion more public by asserting in the pulpit that, though he is in favor of temperance, he is not for Prohibition. At a dinner given by his disgruntled deacons, Shallard

---

15 Ibid., p. 370.
is provoked to exclaim that he does not accept Jesus Christ as divine; that he is not sure of a future life; that he is not entirely certain of a personal God. Charges of infidelity are brought against him, and he is forced to resign his pastorate. His lack of emotional control is one cause for his ineffectiveness as a rebel.

Beginning work for the Zenith Charity Organization Society, Shallard is asked to make a lecture tour in opposition to fundamentalist doctrines in public education. He accepts his charge heartily. Arriving in a Southern town, he is threatened by a political group and is ordered not to speak. His rebellion ends on a tragic note when he is taken from the rostrum and is brutally beaten by a group of hired gangsters. Shallard loses the sight of his right eye as a result of the beating and is forced to look forward to the life of a semi-invalid.

In the succeeding novel, Dodsworth, the hero appears to be another example of the ineffectual rebel. After amassing a sizeable fortune in the automobile industry, Sam Dodsworth begins to harbor a feeling of discontent. He and his wife decide to tour Europe. Compared with the opinions of liberal-minded journalists and other world-travelers whom he encounters on the tour, Dodsworth's conservative viewpoint becomes repulsive to him. He begins to doubt the values upheld by the country club set.
Bored by the social life of the wealthy tourist in London, Dodsworth longs to escape to the quiet of a Cornish village. He is another rebel who seems to represent the viewpoint of Sinclair Lewis when he disagrees with an English hostess's criticism of America:

"Maybe because we have got so many faults. Shows we're growing. Sorry if it's bad manners not to be ashamed of being an American, but then I'll just have to be bad-mannered." 16

Although Lewis had satirized American traditions, it has been pointed out previously that he was not above criticizing the European customs, also.

Dodsworth speaks again for Lewis when he compares the conservatism of the American expatriate to the strictness of the Puritan:

"... the Puritan says if you drink anything at all, he'll disapprove of you, and the expatriate here says that if you drink anything but Chateau Haut Something-or-other at just the right temperature, he'll disapprove of you ..." 17

Tiring of his wife's flirtations with European counts, Dodsworth turns elsewhere for companionship. When he meets Edith Cortright, the widow of a British diplomat, he is attracted to her naturalness. He admires her composure and her knowledge of European customs. In his association with her, he feels that he is free from conformity to his wife's standards. Actually, however, the reader feels that Dodsworth is transferring his inhibitions, rather than freeing himself.

16 Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 84. 17 Ibid., p. 134.
of them. Because of his need for dependence upon a stronger will the reader feels that Dodsworth cannot be classed as an effective social rebel.

Lafayette Resnick is unable to be consistent as a rebel. A captain in the army, he questions the cause for which his country is fighting in World War I. He realizes his inability to act moderately when he says, "I'm just the sort that would go into the trenches, and over the top. I'll either get shot for cowardice—and bawling in battle—or I'll get the Congressional Medal." Resnick is proud that he is an acquaintance of Victor Berger, a man whom he classifies as the St. Paul of the Socialist party. He considers Karl Marx as the Messiah of the party.

Resnick considers himself a hypersensitive person who is ready to explode at the slightest provocation. Regarding the incident that cost him his job writing criticisms of motion pictures, he comments, "Got fired for saying what I thought—bad habit of neurotics . . ." Since he is unreliable and since his beliefs are subject to a rapid change, Resnick may be considered as a person with the characteristics of the ineffectual rebel.

Another ineffectual character in *Ann Vickers* is Dr. Arthur Sorella. He is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, and rumor has it that he was once a city surgeon with two


19 Ibid., p. 164.
Packards. Because his wife left him, he began to drink.
He drinks excessively while acting as prison physician at
Copperhead Gap.

Dr. Sorella is not in agreement with the other prison of-

ficials when he reveals his attitude toward capital punishment:

In fact, if there is going to be any capital punish-

ment at all, I'd give the poor devils a chance to commit
suicide . . . hand 'em some poison they could take when
they wanted to . . . I don't dare even give them morphia.'

However, he does give a hysterical Negro woman who is about to
be executed a strong sedative. Sorella explains his actions
to Ann Vickers when he discovers that she is sympathetic:

'I always slip them something. If I didn't I'd have to
kill my own self . . . Get out of this place. Either it
will kill you or, worse, it'll get you, so you'll be . . .
sadistic, in a polite way . . . No human being that ever
lived is kind enough or wise enough to stand year after
year having the power to torture people. . . . My God,
how I need a drink.'

Sorella's extreme disillusionment seems to be a prefigura-
tion of his tragic end. Whether he rebels because he is unable
to face the problems confronting him is debatable. At any rate,
he achieves little in his spasmodic attempts. His rebellion
ends when he drinks poison in his bedroom.

Mary Greenhill of It Can't Happen Here is another char-
acter who commits suicide. Because she acts hastily and with-
out forethought, she is not an effective social rebel. Her re-
bellion is one of revenge. Mary is a colorless conformist un-
til her husband is murdered by storm troops of the American

---

20Ibid., p. 339.  
21Ibid.
Fascist regime. Then her whole purpose in life is to gain re-
venge for the death of her husband.

Enlisting in the Women’s Flying Corps, Mary takes lessons
in aviation. After learning to fly she takes her plane into
the air at the same time that a plane carrying a group of Fasc-
cist officials leaves the ground. When her attempts to bomb
the other plane have failed, she dives her plane into it, caus-
ing them both to crash. Though her death makes a romantic con-
clusion to her rebellion, it fails to convince us that she
acted wisely. Neither do we feel that Sinclair Lewis meant to
approve her action.

Pete Chew of Bethel Merriday is a self-styled rebel. He
comes from one of the socially prominent families of Bronxville,
New York. Among the members of his set the accepted pattern
of behavior is a mode of unconventionality.

Pete is quick to explain his reason for leaving Amherst
college. He feels that the school is too provincial. However,
he fails to mention having a dispute with the dramatic club.

Ostensibly interested in the theater, Pete is too incon-
sistent to learn even a bit part. He considers himself some-
what liberal because he has lowered his position in society to
act in a summer stock company.

Pete seems to use his self-avowed rebellion as a basis
for philandering. This is characteristic of others who may be
classed as ineffectual rebels. When Bethel Merriday, a young
actress of the company, excuses herself to memorize a part. Pete exclaims, "That kind of junk is all right in college, but we're artists. We can do anything we like and get away with it." This remark seems to sum up Pete's whole attitude toward nonconformity and indicates that he will never achieve true individuality.

One of the most pathetic of the ineffectual rebels to appear in the works of Sinclair Lewis comes in one of his later novels. Carlyle Vesper, a bookkeeper, has always dreamed of reforming the church. He visualizes a church in which the director will not be a pope or an archbishop or a paid minister of any kind, but Jesus Christ himself. He explains his proposed organization:

"—it will do nothing but suggest to every man and woman and child that God really did make him a priest as they understood so well among the early Christians, and that he can pray by himself or in company with others just as he is moved. I want to call it the Every Man a Priest Fraternity."

As director of a newly-organized philanthropic organization Vesper finally has a chance to put some of his theories into practice. However, he is not forceful as a leader; he is too easily swayed from his purposes. Leadership of the organization is assumed by more willful men, and Vesper becomes errand boy, typist, and emergency accountant. To add to his misfortune Vesper discovers that his wife has been unfaithful.

\[\text{Sinclair Lewis, Bethel Merriday, p. 63.}\]
\[\text{Lewis, Gideon Planish, p. 240.}\]
He plans to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills; however, at the appointed hour he cannot carry out his plan. Vesper’s lack of forcefulness and his timidity place him in the category of the ineffectual rebel. Though he feebly attempts reform, he has not the will to overcome the obstacles.

Rarely do we find husband and wife in Sinclair Lewis’s novels appearing in the same classification of rebels. However it appears to me that both Cass Timberlane and his wife belong to the group of ineffectual rebels. Though their attitudes toward a defiance of social conventions may conflict, neither accomplishes anything as a rebel.

Bored with dull lawsuits, Judge Cass Timberlane resents what he considers the ‘drabness of his existence.’ He begins to attend Farmer-Laborite meetings, an act considered shocking for a man in his profession. Timberlane finds himself uninterested in the small talk of companions. Occasionally, he finds himself thinking about Blanche, who had divorced him because she had refused to leave Washington when he had not been re-elected to congress. Then, when Timberlane meets Virginia Marshland, he seems to see a purpose in his rejection of the standards of his society.

Ignoring the advice of his lifelong friends, Timberlane continues seeing Virginia. In his association with her he realizes an awakening of new interests. He admits, “Know what I’d like to do, soon as the war between Great Britain and
Germany is over? ... Sail for Norway and Sweden, which are the source of so much of the life around here ... ."24

After his marriage to Virginia, Timberlane obeys her whims to the letter. He tries to bridge the gap between their ages; she is in her twenties, he in his early forties. Ignoring as much as possible her intimate associations with other men, he tries to liberalize his viewpoints concerning the sanctity of marriage. Apparently Timberlane is ineffectual as a rebel because he bases all his ideals on the superficial ones of his wife. Sinclair Lewis seems to voice this opinion when he writes:

In the fresh air that Jinny always bore about her, he [Timberlane] wanted to defy his own ancestral cautions. She did not know, possibly he did not know, how much he enjoyed cutting loose and being more of an outlaw than he was. Later he was to believe that he might really have become the rebel whom in those bonied months he enjoyed impersonating, if Jinny had really been the bold economic Amazon she considered herself.25

Before her marriage Virginia Marshland lived among people who are regarded as misfits by the citizens of Grand Republic, Minnesota. She shared the modern ideas of the political theorists, intellectuals, aspiring dramatists, and others in a Bohemian boarding house. Most of Virginia's rebellious attitudes were superficial. She was flighty and emotional, acting impulsively as opposed to the levelheaded action of the effective rebel.

After her marriage to Judge Timberlane, Virginia takes advantage of his weakness for nonconformists. She is extravagant as a housewife, and she blames the stuffiness of her husband's Puritanical friends for her misconduct with another man. To Timberlane she fumes:

'Sometimes you're just as priggish as the Prutts. I much prefer a roughneck realist... By golly, if there were one in town, I'd get me a nice sympathetic obstetrician who would prescribe hell-raising!' 26

Later, in another quarrel with her husband, Virginia exclaims:

'Very few women care a hang about the laws or the social rules... What people like you detest about the heels, the outlaws, is that they don't give a hoot for the idiotic rules that you've set up to protect your own awkwardness...' 27

Thus Virginia is ineffectual as a rebel because her theories are self-centered and inconsistent. She uses her rebellion as pretense for a realization of her own personal desires.

In one of his last novels, The God-Seeker, Sinclair Lewis characterizes another ineffectual rebel. He is David Queenslace, a religious zealot who leaves his father's plantation and travels to the Minnesota territory in 1849. As a child of ten David had secretly heard an abolitionist tell a group of neighborhood slaves over what route to escape. The speech of the abolitionist had singularly impressed the boy, and he developed a strong sense of guilt because his ancestors had kept slaves. However, he dared not confess his

26 Ibid., p. 258. 27 Ibid., p. 335.
feelings to his father, who was a firm believer in 'common sense' and in the traditions of 'the Old South.' This is another example of the recurrent conflict between child and parent in Lewis's novels.

Dissatisfied with life in a church school in Wisconsin, David becomes restless again. The superiors of the school disapprove of his wearing a monk's habit and of his fasting. Leaving the school, he wanders into the Minnesota territory. Because he walks as if in a trance and because he carries a spiked cross, the Indians believe that he is a true holy man. They befriend him when he collapses from illness.

David lacks the ability to act in a calm, deliberate manner. He is impulsive and takes risks that are seemingly unnecessary and out of proportion to the vague objectives he seeks. Therefore he may be considered an ineffectual rebel. In the end, his impulsive decision to leave the lodge during a snowstorm is the cause of his death. He dies, after losing his way, and in his hand is clutched a crucifix.

Thus from his earliest novels to his later ones Sinclair Lewis has consistently portrayed a group of characters whom we have classified as ineffectual rebels. As a rule, these characters are highly impractical in their nonconformity. In many cases they seem to have no definite purpose in their rebellion against society. Some of the ineffectual rebels make use of their rebellion to excuse a flaw in their character.
Though these rebels are unsuccessful in their rebellion, they do not return to conformity. This cannot be said of the third class of rebels to be treated in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE REPENTANT REBEL

The small group of characters in Sinclair Lewis's novels who return to conventional behavior after a defiance of social customs are classified as the repentant rebels. In some cases the characters in this group are pathetically ineffective in their brief rebellion; on the other hand, one or two of the characters seem to realize their ideals before they return to conformity. It seems that, in most instances, Sinclair Lewis loses sympathy for the characters when they renounce their rebellion. Their return to conventional behavior is usually treated satirically. The most fully developed characterization of a repentant rebel is George F. Babbitt.

Babbitt first seriously contemplates breaking away from the conventional pattern of his life the night after his wife and younger daughter have gone east for a visit. Alone in the house, Babbitt is overwhelmed by a feeling of discontent. He is reminded of his friend, Paul, who is serving a term in prison for attempting to murder his wife. Babbitt also thinks of the fairy-girl about whom he has often dreamed:

If there had been a woman whom he loved, he would have fled to her, humbled his forehead on her knees ... As he fell asleep on the davenport he felt that ... he
had made a terrifying, thrilling break with everything that was decent and normal.  

Later that week when Babbitt is invited to the Swanson's party, he has a chance to test his new ideas. His thoughts at the party reveal his rebellion against his upper middle-class environment:

He wanted—Oh, he wanted to be one of those Bohemians you read about. Studio parties. Wild lovely girls who were independent. Not necessarily bad. Certainly not! But not tame, like Floral Heights . . . .

Babbitt, however, is too inhibited to surge fully into rebellion. After dancing with Louetta Swanson, he holds her hand for a brief instant on the porch. Suffering from a guilt complex after the incident, he avoids Louetta for a month.

One day during his wife's Eastern visit, Tanis Judique comes to Babbitt's real estate office to inquire about renting an apartment. Babbitt is at once attracted to Mrs. Judique's charming appearance and neat attire. And Mrs. Judique confides to him that she admires industrious businessmen who devote a great deal of their time to public service.

A few days later Babbitt dates Ida Putiak, Polish manicurist in a hotel barber shop. Still cautious about his rebellion, he suggests that they go to an inconspicuous tavern on the outskirts of the city. Because his car fails to start, they are forced to go by taxi. Ida is unimpressed by Babbitt's

---

1Lewis, Babbitt, p. 273.  
2Ibid., p. 276.
awkwardness as a lover. Consequently she bores him by re-
counting her experiences at the barber shop.

The following morning Babbitt awakens with less enthu-
siasm about his rebellion. He feels ashamed and miserable;
yet he does not want to give up the thought of an ideal woman:
"He was haunted by the ancient thought that somewhere must
exist the not impossible she who would understand him, value
him, make him happy." 3

Yielding to his restlessness, Babbitt decides to vaca-
tion alone in Maine. He feels that perhaps he can form defi-
nite conclusions about his rebellion. On his return trip to
Zenith, Babbitt finds himself seated beside Seneca Doane on
the train. Doane is the lawyer who is scorned by the city's
businessmen's clubs because of his fraternization with social-
ists. Although Babbitt is still in a rebellious frame of
mind, the idea of a conversation with a radical does not par-
ticularly appeal to him. However, since there is the chance
that Doane has become decent, Babbitt engages him in conver-
sation. To his surprise he finds that Doane is not so repul-
sive after all. The lawyer's liberal viewpoints cause Babbitt
to reconsider his own. In his mind he condemns the narrow-
mindedness of the Athletic Club members, men whom he had al-
ways counted as his best friends.

When the union of dairy products workers calls a strike,
Babbitt listens uneasily to his pastor and his friends denounce

3 Ibid., p. 293.
the move. The Athletic Club members shake their heads in amazement when he upholds the rights of the laborers. Even his wife brands him a socialist.

When Babbitt's disillusionment is almost unbearable, Tanis Judique reappears in his life. She calls him one day to complain about a leaky roof in her apartment. Deciding to inspect the roof personally, Babbitt feels that he is about to take the most serious step in his career as a rebel. He is overjoyed to think that he has found someone who is in sympathy with his rebellion. The assurance of Tanis Judique's sympathy leads him to praise Seneca Doane to the astonished members of his club, most of whom term him a 'crank' and soon forget his change of heart. Vergil Gunch, however, is seriously disturbed over Babbitt's attitude.

Babbitt's decision regarding the newly-organized Good Citizens' League is an excellent example of his refusal to accept the social standards of his associates. He tells the three men who represent the League that he does not care to join their organization. Because he has not acted according to the pattern of his clan, Babbitt is ignored by many of his business associates. His wife cannot understand why he has turned down an opportunity to join the League.

Results of Babbitt's rebellion are not long in forming. People who have done business with his firm for years turn elsewhere; his secretary resigns and soon goes to work for a rival firm. Startled by such moves, Babbitt suspects that
his employees are whispering behind his back. The suspicion is not good for his morale:

He could not stand the strain. Before long he admitted that he would like to flee back to the security of conformity, provided there was a decent and creditable way to return. But, stubbornly, he would not be forced back...

Babbitt's rebellion seems to have reached a climax. For the most part, his behavior afterwards represents a trend to conformity.

Mrs. Babbitt's sudden attack of appendicitis provides the opportunity for Babbitt's return to conformity. During her convalescence in the hospital several Athletic Club members ask Babbitt about her condition. Wives of the members visit her in the hospital. As cautiously as he had rebelled, Babbitt begins to return to the fold. At Vergil Gunch's repeated request he becomes a member of the Good Citizens' League. He starts attending once more the Chatham Presbyterian Church, and he confesses his experience as a 'strayed soul' to the busy Reverend Drew. Lewis's treatment of Babbitt's return to social acceptability is satiric.

None of the other characters in this group embodies so fully the characteristics of a repentant rebel as does Babbitt. Although Gideon Planish occasionally desires to break away from the confinement of his environment, he never whole-heartedly rebels. It is the absence of any desire to rebel in his later life that leads us to classify him as a repentant rebel.

4Ibid., p. 378.
As a young professor in a small denominational school, Gideon Planish tires of following a strict pattern of behavior. He is disgusted with trying to please influential people for the sake of social advancement. Then when he marries Peony, an ambitious young woman, his attitude begins to change. Under her encouragement, Planish learns to ingratiate himself with politicians and other influential men.

Because his wife is dissatisfied in the small college town, Planish gives up his professorship to live in New York. He has begun to lose any hopes he may have had of becoming individualistic. The Planishes learn to cater to the celebrities of New York. They exert themselves so much to be different that they achieve only complete conformity to their provincial 'hobohemian' concepts.

The end of Planish's rebellious attitude comes when he refuses the presidency of a small Middle Western college. He loses all pretense of individuality and self-assertion to serve as campaign manager for a cheap but wealthy politician. Planish especially enjoys the cheering crowds at platform appearances. This helps to illustrate that he has adapted himself to social conformity.

Ann Vickers is another repentant rebel. She exerts her rebellion against society in a more forceful manner than Planish or Babbitt. From her youth she questions convention. In Sunday school she exasperates her teacher by questioning
the Biblical miracles. In college she is very ambitious. She expresses her goal to the other girls: "I want to be something that affects people . . . Maybe a lady doc? Maybe work in a settlement house? I don't know. But I want to get my hands on the world."5

While in college Ann becomes interested in socialism as well as Feminism. In a shocking speech to the Young Women's Christian Association, she confesses that she cannot accept the Bible or any Christian creed as anything more than a brave fable. Later, she helps to organize a socialist group.

After her graduation in 1912, Ann associates herself with a woman's suffrage group. She works untiringly in doing even the meanest tasks of the organization, feeling that she is doing her part to reform society.

Passing a civil service examination, Ann goes to a Southern state to accept a position in Copperhead Gap State Prison. She is horrified to find the attendants brutal, the prison very unsanitary, and the warden politically ingratiating. Attempting a single-handed reform to clean the prison and to provide medical services for the many ill prisoners, she is opposed by the prison officials. Later she becomes manager of the Stuyvesant Industrial Home, a modern type of

5Lewis, Ann Vickers, p. 49.
reformatory for minor offenders located in New York. She confesses to a new friend, Barney Dolphin:

"My secret as a prison keeper . . . is that I find myself liking, and even admiring the prisoners more than most keepers and guards. Some of the prisoners are really bad . . . But so many have just been adventurous—not willing to sink into dressmaking and cashiering all their lives."6

Ann is always honest in her relationship with her husband, Russel Spaulding. When she learns that she is expecting the baby of another man, she tells her husband the truth. Ann seems to advocate the extreme in social rebellion when she confides to Dolphin, "You know . . . it doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether we are married or not."7

In her association with Barney Dolphin, however, Ann begins to give up her attempts at social reform. She scorns the aspirations that she has cherished for years, thus becoming a repentant rebel. Giving up her position at the reformatory, Ann looks forward to devoting her time to housekeeping and caring for her young son. A comment that she makes to Dolphin helps to illustrate her change of attitude. She remarks to him, "You, you and Mat [the baby] have brought me out of the prison of . . . ambition, the prison of desire for praise, the prison of myself."8 It is difficult to understand how such an ardent reformer as Ann Vickers can turn her back on her former ideals.

6Ibid., p. 459. 7Ibid., p. 495. 8Ibid., p. 562.
Fred Cornplow in *The Prodigal Parents* is also a repentant rebel. A conservative business executive, Cornplow becomes tired of his responsibilities. He is supporting two adult children who he feels should be making lives of their own. Cornplow shocks his wife by exclaiming:

"I'm sick of hearing about duty. Duty of husbands to come to their wives every night, when it might be better for everybody's temper if they stayed downtown and had a little poker and liquor with the boys . . . . I figure life would be a lot better for everybody if more folks did things because it was fun and not because it was their dumb duty."9

Cornplow has difficulty in retiring from his business duties in order to travel. His daughter tries to convince him that he would be bored with Europe and that he does not have the proper background to appreciate Roman villas or murals. Cornplow also has difficulty in persuading his wife to accompany him to Europe. When she consents to go, he warns her not to tell their son and daughter of the proposed trip. He fears that his children will prove a hindrance as they have in the past.

When Cornplow returns from his European voyage, he seems ready to settle back into his routine life. His complacency in returning to conformity makes him a repentant rebel. Cornplow seems to sum up his attitude when he says, "It seems to me now that it isn't going where you want to go that's freedom, but knowing that you can go."10

---

10 Ibid., p. 299.
Sara Cornplow, Fred's daughter, is another example of the repentant rebel. A graduate of Vassar, she is interested in social reform, and upon leaving college takes a charity job in New York. Within six months she has returned to her parents' home.

Sara never acts convincingly as a social rebel. Yet she does discuss labor conditions, and she seems to idolize Russia. Unable to impress her family with her radical ideas, Sara often quarrels with her father who feels that his daughter's talk about reform is nothing more than a desire to be different. In characterizing Sara, Lewis writes: "... Sara did love humanity. Whether ... [she] loved a single individual human being was less certain."

After her father secretly arranges for her to begin work as a designer for a friend's company, Sara begins to lose her rebellious attitudes. When Cornplow wants to retire and make a European tour, she is nonplussed. Sara remarks about her father's proposed trip: "... he can never be anything except a completely unimaginative small-city merchant; and with all affection, we ought to keep him from making himself ridiculous." In her attempt to quell the mounting restlessness of her father, she tricks him into visiting a New York psychologist for an interview.

While her parents are in Europe, Sara marries Walter Lindbeck, one of her employers, and slips even more into a

\[11\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 49. \quad 12\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 232.\]
conventional mode of behavior. Lewis's treatment of Sara's return to conformity is satiric. She loses interest in her interior decorating, and plans tennis matches and bridge parties, about which she talks incessantly. Taking an interest in managing her house, Sara is usually harsh with her servants. When Cornplow returns from his tour, she confides, "Oh, I've settled down, and I hope I've acquired some sense, since I married . . . Cheer up, Father dear. You have one child who's quit boiling and begun to set!"13 Ironically, Sara is willing to admit a contentment she would have bitterly denounced as smugness less than a year before.

Another repentant rebel is William Wrenn of Our Mr. Wrenn. Wrenn is a timid clerk employed by the Souvenir Novelty Company of New York. When he unexpectedly inherits $900 from the sale of his family's estate, he announces to his employer that he is leaving his job. Wrenn expresses vaguely his objective: "Why, first I'm going to just kind of wander round generally. Lots of things I'd like to do. I think I'll get away real soon now . . ."14 He does not leave the city for several weeks, however; instead he wanders aimlessly.

Wrenn impulsively decides to ship to Europe on a cattle boat. In London he meets Istra Nash, an impetuous art student. He is fascinated by her intelligence and by her apparent disregard for social convention. Fearing that she and

---

her friends will think him provincial, Wrenn becomes pathetic in his attempt to become a Bohemian rebel:

... he purchased the first pair of unrespectable unankle-concealing trousers he had owned since small boyhood, and a jacket of rough serge, with a gaudy buckle on the belt. Also, he actually dared an orange tie.¹⁵

In the company of Istra, Wrenn feels that for once in his life he is living daringly. When Istra leaves unexpectedly for Paris, he is thoroughly disillusioned. His almost immediate decision to return to America marks the turning point in his life.

Back in New York, Wrenn returns to work for his former employers. At his boarding house he meets Nelly Croubel, a dependable salesgirl. Almost unconsciously, Wrenn begins to compare her with Istra: "And Istra was always so discontented. What'd she do if she had to be on the job like Nelly? ... Oh Istra is wonderful. But--gee!--I dunno ..."¹⁶

Then when Istra suddenly arrives in New York and comes to live at the same boarding house, Wrenn has the opportunity to compare her in person with Nelly. Even this fails to help him reach a decision between the two. Istra makes the decision easier for him by moving unexpectedly to an art studio, leaving Wrenn a brief note. He is now free to admire Nelly without the disconcerting presence of Istra.

Soon Wrenn has returned to an acceptance of traditional social standards. After receiving a promotion with his

¹⁵Ibid., p. 139. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 301.
company, he marries Nelly. Content with his ordinary life, he wonders why he ever rebelled against it:

... his plans for spending the evening playing pinochle with Nelly, and reading the evening paper aloud, set him chuckling softly to himself as he hurried home through the brisk autumn breeze with seven cents' worth of potato salad. In his evident complacency Wrenn reveals that he has denounced any attempt at social rebellion and has returned to conventional behavior.

Although George F. Babbitt best exemplifies the repentant rebel, other characters in Sinclair Lewis's novels belong to the same type. Like Babbitt, some of the characters appear almost ridiculous in their defiance of social convention. Others, however, appear to have achieved ideals which they ultimately renounce. In his characterizations of Babbitt and the other repentant rebels, Lewis portrays another class of social rebel. As one might expect Lewis becomes more critical of the characters and his satire becomes more pronounced when they return to conformity. As a rule, he has more sympathy for the next group of characters, the effective rebels.
CHAPTER V

THE EFFECTIVE REBEL

Of major importance among the social rebels in Sinclair Lewis's novels are the characters who seem to realize their objectives. As a rule, these rebels accomplish no significant reform; characteristically they do well some small but fruitful task. These characters act with definite purpose, and are firmly convinced of the worthiness of that purpose. The ideals of the effective rebels seem to reflect Lewis's own aspirations, and in the success of these characters Lewis probably achieved self-gratification. Many of the rebels in this group are intellectuals with varied backgrounds; some are devoted to scientific or legal knowledge; others are connected with socialist organizations. Men are predominant among the effective rebels, suggesting Lewis's belief that women are less purposeful or less effective as reformers.

An excellent example of the effective rebel is Dr. Max Gottlieb. A brilliant Jewish scientist who took his medical degree at Heidelberg, he is not interested in practicing medicine. Instead, he prefers biological research. An extremely careful worker, Gottlieb detests slackness and pomposity.

Serving as professor of bacteriology at the University of Winnemac, Gottlieb is not respected by his colleagues.
Privately they call him such names as intellectual snob, pacifist, Jew, flippant cynic, and scientific bounder. However, Sinclair Lewis seems to idealize Gottlieb:

He had never dined with a duchess, never received a prize, never been interviewed, never produced anything which the public could understand, nor experienced anything which nice people could regard as romantic. He was, in fact, an authentic scientist.\(^1\)

Dr. Gottlieb distinguishes himself as a reformer by advocating a medical school which would be completely scientific and ruled by quantitative biology and chemistry. His ideal school would ignore optometry and most of surgery.

Leaving the University, Gottlieb accepts a position with a pharmaceutical company. He is pleased with the change because he will have a private laboratory and assistants. Moreover, he will not be required to lecture to inattentive students.

In a conversation with Martin Arrowsmith, Gottlieb expresses an interpretation of the scientist's creed:

'The normal man, he does not care much what he does except that he should eat and sleep and make love. But the scientist is intensely religious—he is so religious that he will not accept quarter-truths because they are an insult to his faith . . . he hates the men that are allowed in a clean kingdom like biology but know only one textbook and how to lecture to nincompoops . . . He is the only real revolutionary, the authentic scientist because he alone knows how little he knows.'\(^2\)

This extreme devotion to an ideal is characteristic of the effective rebels. A majority of the other characters in

---

\(^1\)Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith*, p. 125.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 279.
this group have a similar doctrine, modified to fit their various objectives.

Another rebel scientist is Terry Wickert who derides the social life connected with the medical foundation where he works. Greeting Martin Arrowsmith for the first time, Terry reveals his critical attitude:

"... which kind are you going to be? One of the polite birds that uses the Institute for social climbing and catches him a rich wife, or one of the roughnecks like me and Gottlieb?"3

Terry expands his criticism to include scientists in general:

"Science is supposed to mean Knowledge ... and the way most of the science boys resent having to stop writing little jeweled papers or giving teas and sweat at getting some knowledge certainly does make me a good booster for the human race."4

When the United States becomes involved in World War I, Terry volunteers for active duty. He unexpectedly asks for leave from the institute and is soon on his way to France. Lewis seems to admire the several rebels who impulsively decide to go into military service.

After his return from France, Terry builds a private laboratory in the peaceful Vermont hills. In his retreat he feels that he has at last achieved true individuality. When he is asked to be the best man at the wedding of Arrowsmith and Joyce Lanyon, Terry declines the offer. He adds that only with misgivings will he attend the wedding at all. This seems to imply that Terry is completely unwilling to sacrifice his rebellion for social acceptance.

3Ibid., pp. 235-237. 4Ibid., p. 299.
Still another effective rebel in *Arrowsmith* is Gustaf Sondelius. A Swedish doctor, Sondelius accompanies *Arrowsmith* to the island of St. Hubert to combat the plague epidemic. Sondelius is frank and unassuming and apparently indifferent to conventional restraint.

When Sondelius is especially boisterous on board ship, he is gently reproved by a New Jersey spinster. He reveals that he is slightly offended when he discusses the incident with *Arrowsmith*:

"I think you and Gottlieb are right. There is no use saving fools. It's a great mistake to be natural. One should always be a stuffed shirt... How strange is conceit! ... Ah, smugness! That is the enemy!"

Upon reaching the diseased island, Sondelius undertakes his task with great enthusiasm. His forcefulness as a rebel is revealed in his treatment of the members of the Board of Health. Sondelius bullies them into agreeing that a strict quarantine should be placed on the island. Beginning a campaign to kill all the rats in the city, he disregards the complaints of businessmen. Sondelius arbitrarily drags bookkeepers and porters from their work to pursue the rats with poisons and traps.

To Sondelius there is no social stratification. Cobblers and dukes are the same to him; he would disagree with one as quickly as he would with the other. Drinking with the natives in the island saloon is one of Sondelius's diversions.

---

5Ibid., p. 357.
The raiding of stores when vaccination supplies are needed is further evidence of his disregard for social laws.

In the process of destroying the worst-infected village, Sondelius is stricken with the disease. The words spoken just before his death help to reveal his personality:

'... but yoost once more I would like to see Stockholm... and Holy Week at Sevilla. And one good last drunk!... I am a pious agnostic. Oh, Martin, give my people the phage! Save all of them—God, I did not think they could hurt me so!'\(^6\)

Although Martin Arrowsmith fails in many projects of reform, he is considered here as an effective rebel because of his ultimate decision to renounce conformity. One of the most difficult of Lewis's rebels to classify, Arrowsmith at one time in his life accepts social conformity only to change his attitude later.

Even as a youth Martin Arrowsmith seems to have a profound reverence for scientific knowledge. He fails to respect his grandfather, who is a country doctor, because he criticizes unduly the rival physicians in the small town. Martin longs to become more than a doctor who treats chills and sets broken limbs.

In medical school Martin reveals a rebellious attitude by questioning certain statements of his professors. To the irritation of some of the lecturers he questions long-standing methods of treatment of various diseases. In the bacteriology laboratory Martin enjoys preparing slides and

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 381.
experimenting with immunology. His idol is Dr. Max Gottlieb, a German Jew, who has accomplished much in the science of immunology.

Upon his graduation from medical school, Arrowsmith begins his practice in a small Dakota town, the home of his bride, Leora Tozer. Later, he becomes public health officer at Nautilus, Iowa. Because his superior, Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, is too eager to please the business officials of the town, Arrowsmith begins to resent all leaders of society:

Gradually Martin's contemplation moved beyond Almus Pickerbaugh to all leaders, of armies or empires, of universities or churches, and he saw that most of them were Pickerbaughs.  

While in Nautilus, Arrowsmith manages to effect certain reforms. Once he collects volunteer workers to raze a disease-breeding tenement house before the city political machine can issue a restraining order. Arrowsmith is criticized by some of the other physicians when he adds young medics to the clinical staff, enabling more of the poor in the city to receive free medical attention.

As Arrowsmith becomes more and more successful as a scientist, he is called upon to address women's clubs and church gatherings. These social obligations he characteristically avoids as much as possible.

Accepting a position with the scientific research organization which employs Dr. Gottlieb, Arrowsmith is given a free

---

7 Ibid., p. 28.
hand to do research in immunology. When he is sent to combat the bubonic plague on St. Hubert, an island in the West Indies, he has a chance to try one of his theories. In order to test the potency of his vaccine, Arrowsmith requests that he be allowed to vaccinate half the islanders and quarantine the other half, giving them the best of care should they contract the disease. However, the island officials fail to accept the plan; they accuse Arrowsmith of inhumanity. Burdened with his failure and the deaths of his wife and Sondelius, a co-worker, he is forced to return to New York.

Back at the foundation, Arrowsmith is ordered to do research on the cause of influenza. He longs to resume his work on the vaccine for the plague.

Arrowsmith begins to seek social conformity in his association with Joyce Lanyon, wealthy society girl. For a time he does not resent her friends who spy on him while he is at work in the laboratory. He patiently answers Joyce’s inane questions about his work, only to find that she is bored before he finishes. His decision to marry Joyce marks the climax of his return to conformity.

Sinclair Lewis seems particularly to admire Arrowsmith when he leaves his wife’s smart social set. When he is offered the directorship of the Institute, his wife is particularly pleased; however, after long deliberation, he refuses to accept the position, much to her dismay. In an argument with her, he exclaims:
"I'm not going to do it, even if I have to leave the Institute... I will not get buried in this pompous fakery of giving orders and being a stuffed shirt, a sideshow barker"

Characteristically Arrowsmith decides to join Terry Wickert in his retreat to the New England woods. There he will be free to continue his scientific research away from the stifling social duties of the Institute. Although Arrowsmith returned to conformity, he rebels at last. Lewis implies that this last rebellion is final; hence Arrowsmith merits the classification of effective rebel.

Dr. Willy Schmidt is another rebel scientist of European descent. Appearing in It Can't Happen Here, Schmidt is a biologist who was born in Vienna. In personal appearance he is described as having a doughnut mustache, a beer belly, and black button boots which he usually wears. A former professor at Leland Stanford University, Schmidt is associated with Rockefeller Institute when he is apprehended by the police of the new Fascist regime. In the Fascist program to eliminate all people of standing who openly denounce their doctrines, Schmidt is killed. Although he does not make an organized effort to quell Fascism, Schmidt does not try to hide his opposition to the regime. He performs well a small and seemingly unimportant task to further his rebellion.

Gottlieb, Terry Wickert, Martin Arrowsmith, Sondelius, and Willy Schmidt comprise a group of scientific rebels, all

_Said., p. 442._
of whom are in some degree successful in achieving nonconformity. Another group of effective rebels consists of those who rebel against social conformity. Among these is Jessica Van Tuyl.

Appearing in the novel *Ann Vickers* as a suffragist leader, Jessica is serving a three-year prison sentence for actively taking part in a strike of miners and tenant farmers. Unofficially branded as a Communist and an anarchist, she is criticized severely.

Even in prison Jessica is successful as a reformer. She demands just treatment of the prisoners, especially the ones who are mentally ill. She courageously slips to sympathetic journalists notes describing the deplorable conditions in the prison. Her remarks to a visitor indicate her dauntless spirit as a reformer:

"And a beastly fight . . . every time I try to slip some of my food to a starving girl. This is what they did to me for saying that the workers have a right to unite! Now tell me the news . . . on our recognizing Russia? How I want to get out into that beautiful world again, and just stand and breathe fresh air and look at a birch tree for five minutes, then jump into the first glorious fight that's handy."

Even though she is forced to do penance for her rebellion, Jessica Van Tuyl is not bitter. Nor does she give up attempting to better social conditions after she is imprisoned. She wields her influence in a deliberate manner to provide care for the needy prisoners. Avoiding notoriety, she does well

small tasks which lead to social reform. These tasks are
good examples of Jessica's success as a rebel.

In The Job Lewis presents another effective rebel, Mamie
Magen. A lame Jewish girl, Mamie is no erratic social cru-
sader. She calmly attempts to improve the working conditions
of the girls in the offices and shops of New York during the
first decade of the twentieth century. When Esther Lawrence
describes Mamie, she uses the following terms:

'There's Mamie Magen--she's living here ... You'll
meet her and be crazy about her. She's a lame Jewess,
and awfully plain except she's got lovely eyes, but she's
got a mind like a tack ... She'll be mayor of New York,
or executive secretary of the Young Women's Atheist As-
sociation or something. But still ... she doesn't
plug hard because she's scared, but because she's got
ambition.'

Mamie is a socialist, but she believes that capitalists
with their profit-sharing and their search for improved meth-
ods of production are just as sincere in desiring the scient-
tific era. In the opinion of Mamie, the world and all its
wisdom is but a blundering school boy who needs management.
She believes that the world could be managed effectively if
men and women would be human beings instead of only being busi-
nessmen or army officers or commuters or educators. Mamie
Magen is effective as a social rebel because she is willing
to wait for opportune moments to further her rebellion. She
uses clear judgment, never sacrificing what reform she has
gained to obey a whim.

Carrie Planish is another character who acts purposefully to achieve true individuality. Carrie is reminiscent of Verona Babbitt; yet Carrie is a much more forceful personality. Even as a child she prefers the quiet of a suburban neighborhood to the confusion of her parents' New York apartment. She is in direct contrast to her mother who is obsessed with the idea of being accepted into the set of wealthy philanthropists. When Carrie makes no efforts to impress the friends of her parents, her mother is dismayed.

Absolutely refusing to attend the private school which her parents suggest, Carrie chooses instead the public school. She embarrasses her parents by showing an interest in biology, mechanical drawing, and the writings of Ernest Hemingway. In college Carrie maintains her interest in drawing, and studies ethnology. To the bewilderment of her parents she pays no particular attention to the suitors who call.

When Carrie satirizes one of her father's trite slogans for national defense, Planish accuses her of being flighty. Defending her generation, Carrie remarks:

'We're not frivolous! Maybe we know all the horrors, the creeping plague and the old churches smashed and the starving babies and the cynicism of men like Goebbels, better than you do, because our imaginations are younger. And we're going to do something.'

Rebellion against parental authority seems to be a common characteristic of many of Lewis's rebels. In 1942 Carrie

\[11\] Lewis, Gideon Planish, p. 384.
accepts a job as draftsman in a Hartford airplane factory, apparently eager to get away from the influence of her home life. In achieving her position as a defense worker with a sincere purpose and as a culmination of her rebellion against the customs and values of her parents, Carrie becomes a successful rebel.

Pat Saxinar of *Kingsblood Royal* also rebels against parental authority. Unlike the remaining members of her family, Pat is not particularly dismayed when she learns that she has Negro blood. Pat reproves her relatives, "All of you are assuming that you are superior to the 'colored people,' which isn't obvious to me at all." The Saxinars are ashamed of Pat's attitude. They feel that her service in the W. A. V. E. S. is the cause of her unconventional ideas.

When Pat leaves her home to live in a settlement house in the city, she effectively breaks away from the restraining influence of her family. Working with a social welfare group, she realizes success in her rebellion against family and society.

Dr. Phillip McGarry is also apparently free from social restraint. As a Methodist pastor in Zenith, McGarry is a severe critic of his own church. He criticizes the bishops for their ambition and for their denunciation of strikes. At a

---

12 Lewis, *Kingsblood Royal*, p. 213.
meeting of Methodist clergymen, he singles out a colleague for criticism:

"You hand out rations to the dear pee-pul and keep 'em obedient. You talk about socialism and pacifism, and say a lot of nice things . . . but you always explain that social reforms must come in due time, which means never . . .".

The group of ministers is shocked when McGarry accuses Rev. Hickenlooper of constantly luring his listeners into Methodism. McGarry continues:

"You see, Otto, your reforms couldn't mean anything, or you wouldn't be able to hold onto as many prosperous money-grabbing parishioners as you do. Thank heaven, I haven't got a respectable person in my whole bloomin' flock."

Although McGarry is capable of advancing to a larger and more prosperous church, he is not willing to sacrifice his social work among the lower classes. As pastor of a church in the slum section of the city, McGarry feels that he can be more useful in counseling pickpockets and scrub-women than in advising idle society matrons. On Friday evenings he gives a series of lectures which especially appeal to Jewish students and radical workmen. The lectures also attract wistful young ladies who come down in limousines. Since McGarry remains steadfast in his purpose of reform, he is an effective rebel, a successful nonconformist.

Seneca Doane, radical lawyer and corporation counsel in Babbitt, is an effective social worker. Advocating labor

union, Doane is regarded as a fanatical socialist by the townspeople. His varied background includes studying in Germany and lobbying for single tax in Washington. He can number among his friends army men, college professors, and English noblemen.

Doane takes an active part in reform. He especially enjoys defending arrested strikers who are brought to trial. Once when telephone girls and linemen strike in protest of a wage reduction, Doane marches in the picket line.

Sinclair Lewis seems to admire Seneca Doane and his stand against the smug conservatism of the city of Zenith. Although Doane accomplishes no significant reform, his unswerving devotion to his purpose convinces us that he is effective as a rebel. He takes advantage of every opportunity to demonstrate his rebellion, even in undignified and thankless tasks.

Sweeney Fishberg of Cass Timberlane is a rebel who has characteristics similar to those of Seneca Doane. A Minnesota attorney, Fishberg is as apt to take a labor-union case for no fee as he is to take the most fraudulent of damage suits for an exorbitant fee. In open sympathy with the Communist Party, he often donates money to a fund for strikers.

Fishberg has tried his hand in other fields besides law. At one time he acted in a summer stock company. He also taught Greek for a year in a West Virginia college. Of German and Irish extraction, Fishberg is a Roman Catholic in religious belief. A mystic, he bothers the priest with metaphysical questions.
Fishberg is an effective rebel because of his constant devotion to reform. He attempts to improve the welfare of the oppressed minority groups in the city. Sinclair Lewis emphasizes Fishberg’s consistency when he writes: "For twenty years, ever since he had come to Grand Republic from his natal Massachusetts, he had been fighting all that was rich and proud and stuffy in the town . . ."15

Perhaps one of the most outstanding of Lewis’s effective rebels is Doremus Jessup of It Can’t Happen Here. As editor of a small New England paper, Jessup is an intelligent writer of editorials; yet he is considered the foremost eccentric of the town. A small man, he wears a controversial beard

... in a community where to sport a beard was to confess one’s self ... a Civil War veteran, or a Seventh Day Adventist. Doremus’s detractors said that he maintained the beard just to be "highbrow" and "different," to try to appear "artistic."16

Jessup’s independence as a social rebel is reflected in his admiration of certain Americans:

"But Stephen A. Douglas and Thad Stevens and Brigham Young . . . I wonder if we’re breeding any paladins like those stout, grouchy old devils? . . . They had guts. Independence. Did what they wanted to and thought what they liked and everybody could go to hell."17

Jessup is married to Emma, a woman who has no interest in politics. Therefore, he shares his political beliefs with

15Lewis, Cass Timberlane, p. 52.
16Sinclair Lewis, It Can’t Happen Here, p. 11.
17Ibid.
Lorinda Pike, a widow. Indicating his defiance of social convention, Jessup apparently suffers no guilt complex as a result of his relationship with Mrs. Pike.

Jessup is a clear-thinking political critic who sees through the demagoguery of Berzelius Windrip and his autocratic followers. One of Jessup's acts as a rebel is his refusal to donate $200 to the League of Forgotten Men, a Fascist front organization. Then after Windrip is elected president, Jessup figures importantly in writing pamphlets for the underground resistance. He performs well a necessary task with no attempt to gain recognition for himself. His unyielding devotion to a worthy cause is a common characteristic of the effective rebel.

Lorinda Pike is also considered as an example of the effective rebel. A sarcastic reformer, she manages a boarding house in the New England town. Lewis describes her in the following manner:

She was the village scold, the village crank. She was constantly poking into things that were none of her business . . . she criticized every substantial interest in the whole county: the electric company's rates, the salaries of the school teachers, the Ministerial Association's high-minded censorship of books for the public library.18

Mrs. Pike voices her rebellion in a town meeting when she denounces the Fascist trend in her community and in the nation. Later, when the Fascists seize control of the federal government, she daringly distributes subversive pamphlets and writes a series of articles in the underground paper Vermont Vigilante under the alias of Anthony B. Susan.

18 Ibid., p. 7.
Another effective rebel in *It Can’t Happen Here* is Buck Titus. After spending ten years on a ranch in Montana, Titus returns to his father’s farm in Vermont to grow apples and breed horses. He is intellectual and devotes much of his time to the reading of Voltaire, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky. Serving in World War I as a private, Titus had refused a commission because he had detested his officers. In order to illustrate Titus’s cynicism, Lewis writes:

He called himself an ‘agnostic’ instead of an ‘atheist’ only because he detested the street-bawling, tract-peddling evangelicism of the professional atheists. He was cynical . . .

Titus is especially successful in his work with the underground organization. Because he is not erratic and emotional as a rebel, he is not suspected by the Fascist police. Among other courageous deeds, Titus helps many American refugees escape across the border into Canada.

Zed Wintergeist of Bethel Merriday is the one actor in the touring troupe to defy his director. Wintergeist seems to achieve individuality by playing the part of Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* as he feels it should be played.

Wintergeist has a varied background, a common characteristic of the effective rebel:

He came from a Montana ranch to Broadway via a country newspaper in Minnesota and a medicine show and a year in Dartmouth College and a few months in the New York School for Design and six months playing Shakespeare in the Old Vic in London!  

19Tbid., p. 45.  
20Lewis, *Bethel Merriday*, p. 130.
Lewis seems to emphasize varied experience as a definite aid in achieving individuality.

Wintergeist is forceful and determined as a rebel. He plays his part well, he does not become over-emotional in his rebellion, nor does he assume a defeatist attitude when he is severely criticized. Eager to present his viewpoint to a sympathetic listener, Wintergeist confides:

"I want to emphasize the poetry . . . but the real poetry, with biology and individuality in it, and use the fine, juicy words . . . not drool them out long and lingering, like a poetic congressman quoting Tennyson." 21

Wintergeist reads not only drama but the novels of Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck.

Sinclair Lewis seems to take a great deal of pride in Neil Kingsblood's rebellion against the racial prejudices in his society. Although Kingsblood does not realize many of his objectives, his stand against prejudice is so daring and so constant that he must be considered an effective rebel.

When Neil Kingsblood, bank employee of Grand Republic, Minnesota, accidentally discovers that he is descended from a full-blooded Negro frontiersman, he begins to reformulate his ideas about the Negro race. Formerly, he had thought that all Negroes were slothful. He had believed that Negro women were content to be domestic servants and that Negro men were totally uninterested in cultural achievement. When he discovers that he is of Negro ancestry, Kingsblood becomes vitally interested in the problems of the race.

21 Ibid., p. 363.
At first, Kingsblood advises only his immediate family of their Negro ancestor. Later, however, he is provoked to make a public announcement. When a speaker at the Federal Club denounces all minority groups, Negroes in particular, Kingsblood feels that he must speak in protest. He announces to the shocked audience that, according to the laws of several states, he is a Negro. Kingsblood continues:

"Well, according to the general Southern myth . . . that makes me one hundred per cent Negro. All right I accept it! . . . I'm very cheerful about being a Negro, gentlemen, and about the future of our race . . ." 22

As a result of his startling announcement, Kingsblood loses his job at the bank. He becomes a pariah, seeking consolation from new-found Negro friends. In an attempt to bring the racial question to a climax, he subjects himself and his family to all kinds of humiliation.

Kingsblood exhibits the determination of an effective rebel when he refuses to exchange his home for a smaller home in the Negro, Italian, and Jewish section of the city. He ignores anonymous threats by telephone and by mail.

Through the characterization of Kingsblood, Sinclair Lewis attacked deep-seated racial prejudice. Lewis probably took great pleasure in Kingsblood's steadfast determination, once he has taken a stand against racial discrimination.

Another effective rebel in Kingsblood Royal is Clement Brazenstar, an intellectual Negro. The son of a Mississippi

22 Lewis, Kingsblood Royal, p. 229.
sharecropper, Brazenstar is employed by the Urban League. His duty as field agent for the League is to improve working conditions of Negro laborers. In carrying out the commission of his office, Brazenstar criticizes harshly the Negro farmers who make no efforts to study the operation of farm machinery or to learn about co-operative buying.

Brazenstar has had no college training; yet he is well-read. He is able to speak French remarkably well, having been in Marseilles during World War I. In describing Brazenstar, Lewis remarks:

To most people he seemed unbelievable, because he was a perfectly natural and normal man who had never been fettered by an ambitious family, a busy school, or any kind of a bank-book.  

Brazenstar is effective as a reformer. He looks at the race question fairly and realizes that not only the white man but the Negro as well is responsible for racial discrimination. He summarizes the consensus of his rebellion:

"The old Uncle Toms lifted up their voices in hallelujahs if they got treated as well as the livestock, but not the young tribesmen. They've read a book. Get it clear—the New Negro demands every right of the New White Man, every one, and he doesn't whine for them now; he'll fight for them."

As a group, the effective rebels of Sinclair Lewis's novels share a sincere desire to reform society. Their ideals are, in most instances, admirable, and they seem to represent Lewis's own attitudes toward reform. Firmly convinced of the

---

23 Ibid., p. 137.  
24 Ibid., p. 140.  

worthiness of their objectives, these characters do not accept social convention. As a rule, they sacrifice a great deal for the sake of personal nonconformity and social idealism: their friends, their families, their freedom, and, rarely, their lives. Generally, the effective rebels are not famous as reformers; yet they achieve distinction as individuals. Among them one finds several of Lewis's clearest and most completely drawn characterizations. And, significantly, those characters treated most sympathetically by Lewis are successful nonconformists and rebels.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As an imaginative child in Sauk Center, Minnesota, Sinclair Lewis resented the bleak environment of the prairie town. He grew to despise the strict formality of the public school. At home he rebelled against parental authority, resenting the discipline of his physician father. Becoming interested in socialism at Yale, Lewis enrolled in Helicon Hall, an experiment in co-operative living. Later, he wrote Main Street, a satiric treatment of the American small town. When Lewis refused the Pulitzer prize for Arrowsmith in 1926, he expressed his disrespect for literary awards. Accepting the Nobel prize in literature in 1930, he criticized the literary standards of America. Throughout his life he waged a private crusade for reform. His request that there be no religious rites at his funeral evidences Lewis's sustained nonconformity.

Since Lewis consistently rebelled against the conventions of his society, it is natural that the most outstanding characters of his creation are also social rebels. In the characterization of these rebels Lewis vicariously sought individuality as a reformer. Dissatisfied with current social values, he found emotional release by voicing his criticism through the creation of various types of nonconformists.
Not all of the rebels in Lewis's novels are successful in their crusade for social reform. This seems to indicate that Lewis was realistic in his attitude toward rebellion. Some of the characters are hesitant about defying social customs; they yearn toward nonconformity, yet never break away from conventional behavior. Verona Babbitt is an excellent example of the wistful rebel. The recurrent character who never accomplishes anything as a reformer, but who maintains a rebellious attitude, is classified as an ineffectual rebel, exemplified by Carol Kennicott of Main Street. The repentant rebel is one who, after rebelling against conventional society, ultimately returns to an acceptance of conventional values. George F. Babbitt is the character most fully developed as a repentant rebel. The characters with whom Lewis seems to have been most sympathetic are the effective rebels. Although these characters accomplish no significant reform, they do achieve distinction as individuals. As opposed to the wistful rebels, they are active in their rebellion. In contrast with the vague ideals of the ineffectual rebels, the objectives of the effective rebels are more purposeful. Instead of renouncing his rebellion, a characteristic act of the repentant rebel, the effective rebel does not yield. Dr. Max Gottlieb of Arrowsmith is a significant example of the successful nonconformist.

Generally, Sinclair Lewis is in sympathy with the rebellious characters. He recognizes the admirable ambitions of the wistful rebels. In many instances, the ineffectual rebels
are the victims of circumstance, and they are usually not blamed for their failure as reformers. The repentant rebels, too, are often forced by society to renounce their rebellion. But Lewis especially sympathizes with the effective rebels. The ideals and aspirations of these characters are his own. Through their speech and actions Lewis voiced his own criticism of conventional society, his own ideals of social reform, his personal conviction that "whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." Probably he delighted in creating all of the many rebels in his novels, and realized greatest self-gratification in his characterization of effective rebels. Among the nonconformists are to be found Lewis's keenest portrayals of individual character, as well as his strongest social satire. By far the greater number of Lewis's characters are portrayed satirically; yet Lewis did not scorn mankind. He created many characters for whom his affection, admiration, respect are evident. His sympathies are clearly on the side of the rebels, the nonconformists, especially those who are scientists and social reformers. The relationship between his personal life and the characterizations in his novels shows clearly that Lewis counted himself among the nonconformists. Characters who achieve and maintain nonconformity, the effective rebels, are his most sympathetically treated characters.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books by Sinclair Lewis

Our Mr. Wrenn, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1914.
The Trail of the Hawk, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1915.
The Innocents, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1917.
Free Air, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919.
Arrowsmith, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1925.
It Can't Happen Here, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935.

Books


Articles


Stolberg, Benjamin, "Sinclair Lewis," American Mercury, LII (1941), 450-60.

Thompson, Dorothy, "Do Our Schools Need an S.O.S.?," Ladies' Home Journal, LXX (February, 1953), 11, 14, 86.