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INFLUENCE OF THE "INTERNATIONAL THEME" IN THE NOVELS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

BY

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A THESIS
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Influence of the "International Theme" In the Novels of Sinclair Lewis

Approved: Thesis Committee



Director



Reader

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D. T.

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CHAPTER I

Development of the "International Theme" and Its Expression in Sinclair Lewis Novels

The "International Theme" in literature arose as a result of real-life confrontations between Americans and Europeans. Conflict was inevitable as the feudal tradition of England with its emphasis on social caste met head-on with the democratic traditions of a new nation. By definition the "International theme" focused on the conflict of manners between two citizens of different nations who disagree on the correct way of behaving in a given situation. For example, the titled nobility of Europe feel that some deference should be shown to them due to their rank and not because they have accomplished something of merit. Particularly, in the early history of the American nation, ordinary folk felt that to show homage to European nobility was incorrect. To be obsequious to decadent Europe was unthinkable to many of the common people of the United States.

Although many Americans felt that Europe was corrupt, there still was much curiosity about England, and some interest in France and Italy.

Prior to the Civil War there were only a few travelers to England and other European countries--mostly students, scholars, and artists. With cessation of hostilities and improved steamship transportation, more travelers began to cross the Atlantic. They differed from the first group of people in that they were mainly tourists seeking some diversion from Reconstruction and some escape from the bustling nature of the American

nation. For many from the prosperous North, it was as Mark Twain called it, the "Gilded Age." It was a time when the wealthy spent their money in a conspicuous way. One way was to tour Europe and flaunt their untaxed wealth on the natives.

The extent of the pilgrimage to Europe can be seen in the statistics compiled by Christof Wegelin.

[F]rom 1860 on corresponding figures for the four major Atlantic ports alone (Boston and Charlestown, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore) are as follows:

1860	19,387
1870	25,202
1880	36,097
1890	81,092
1900	108,068
1901	144,112

Tourism had begun....So that, as the decades progressed, the students, the scholars, were more and more outnumbered by the vacationers, the sightseers, the socialites.¹

Besides the need to escape from the commonplace and curiosity, other reasons for the exodus from America to Europe included getting away from the rawness of a new nation to the refinement of an older culture, exposing oneself to the artistic heritage of Europe and escaping the thinness of artistic tradition at home, the eclectic leaning of Americans in wanting to absorb the best of every culture into themselves, and bringing home an aura of sophistication which was useful in an age of pretentiousness among the nouveaux riches.

As confrontations between Europeans and Americans increased, so did the literary output dealing with this subject. The history of the literary treatment probably began with Herman Melville's Redburn in 1849 and became attenuated by the time Hemingway began publishing his inter-

¹ Christof Wegelin, "The Rise of the International Novel," PMLA, 77 (June, 1962), 307.

national novels in which war and love were more important than any conflict of manners.

As a much-read popular novelist of the modern age, Sinclair Lewis treated the theme of conflict among citizens of different nations. Beginning in 1914 with his first novel Our Mr. Wrenn and concluding in 1951 with World So Wide, Lewis dealt intermittently with the "international theme" throughout his life.

Lewis' own life reflected his character's yearning for the Old World culture of Europe in contrast to the crass materialism of America. After the successful Main Street in 1920 Lewis began his periodical visits to Europe. During the twenties and thirties he took nearly a dozen trips to various countries, and finally died on foreign soil--Italy--in 1951. He was much like William Wrenn in his first book, an idealistic dreamer who wanted, so much, to experience European civilities and culture.

In Our Mr. Wrenn Lewis writes about the American innocent abroad. It expresses the author's need to free himself from routine jobs and to travel to exotic foreign lands. The protagonist, William, collects travel folders and books about foreign ports of call. He is employed as a sales clerk at a New York City souvenir and novelty company. By means of an inheritance, he is able to quit his job and travel to Europe via a cattle boat. In Europe he meets Istra Nash, a Bohemian artist, who espouses the quality of individuality and blunt honesty. Eventually, he comes to the conclusion that the lure of Europe has proven to be an illusion, and that a dull, but secure job at home with a dull but sensible female is highly desirable.

The attraction of Istra indicates that William has a need for feminine companionship so that Europe can be fully appreciated. He had tried to pick up a waitress before meeting Istra, but this move had been thwarted.

This need for female company in order to enjoy Europe is found again in Dodsworth (1929) and in The Prodigal Parents (1938).

Istra's exoticism at first holds the attention of William, but he soon tires of her artistic friends and her unconventional ways. He knows that he has been chasing phantoms of delight, and he must return to where he can find genuine friendship, and the best that life has to offer. He knows that the English are "unfriendly and so vastly wise that he could never understand them."²

In this novel, the "international theme" is evident in a limited number of passages. The major theme of finding happiness in William's "own backyard" is apparent in the reading of the work. As the author became a regular habitué of the European scene, his fictional constructs began to reflect his altered perspective.

In Elmer Gantry (1927) Lewis writes of what he most detests: the excesses of American evangelism. Elmer, his protagonist, is shown to be incapable of satiating his need for sexual conquest, alcohol, or power in the church. Elmer is introduced to the reader as a student at a Baptist Bible college in Kansas. There, he stays in trouble most of the time, and finally is dismissed after he is caught drinking in a saloon. He then leads the life of a back-slapping salesman of a farm implement company.

Eventually, Elmer becomes dissatisfied with his lot in life. Out of curiosity, he visits Sharon Falconer's great evangelistic crusade which is stationed in the town where he is staying. After ingratiating himself with her hired help, he gets to meet Sharon and, after much insistence, becomes a part of her crew. Within a few months he is her best assistant, and all is looking well until their newly erected church is burned. The

² Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn (New York: Crowell, 1942), p. 120.

building is destroyed along with the lives of several people--including Sharon. Elmer, then, goes from job to job until he meets a Methodist bishop who brings him into the church. Elmer rises in the church hierarchy, and one day, he decides to travel to Europe in order to improve his image as an "up-and-coming" preacher of the gospel.

The "international theme" comes into play as Elmer confronts foreigners and exposes his gross provinciality. His observations on England are intended by the author to illustrate the jingoistic attitude of the protagonist, and to show that this is just another facet of his many-sided ignorant nature. The aspect of international conflict is not the main thrust of the novel, but it is noteworthy because it shows the author's continuing interest in the theme.

In Work of Art (1935) the story begins in Black Thread Center, Connecticut in 1897. The protagonist is Myron Weagle, a hard-working young man who assists his parents in their hotel. A Bildungsroman novel, Lewis relates the development of Myron from his humble beginnings to a respected place in the world of hotel keeping. Also, Myron's brother Ora serves as a foil: he is unscrupulous and always willing to try for a fast buck. He becomes a pulp fiction writer and, in general, a confidence man.

The point of the novel is to show that building and managing a great hotel is as creative as the art of writing fiction. The "international theme" is illustrated by the protagonist going to Europe as a passionate pilgrim in order to learn the best in hotel management and architecture which is to be found in the great hotels across the Atlantic. Myron, while in Europe, is surprised at the efficiency of some of the hotels and is impressed by the irregular craftsmanship of the structures and other features. He also meets an old friend who was a clerk at a hotel in America but who in his native Italy is the owner of a magnificent hotel which

has all the services and beauty that Myron admires. The only conflict of manners in this novel is Myron taking exception to some of the hotels he sees. The author, however, impresses the reader with the evident superiority of European culture in public accommodations.

The Prodigal Parents (1938) is the story of a successful auto dealer who flees to Europe with his wife to escape the criticism of his socialist-leaning daughter who badgers him for his capitalist business and the dependent, weak son who wears his father out with his demands on him.

Fred Cornplow is the protagonist of this badly written saga of a man who finds out that in the midst of material success he is terribly unhappy. His son, Howard, is a weak-kneed flop in Truxon College and, later, in his auto business. His daughter, Sara, is a helper and true believer in a Marxist-Socialist organization headed by Gene Silga, a young man who plots the overthrow of capitalist society while pressuring Sara for contributions from her father. Eventually, Gene Silga runs out of town with the police in pursuit, and Sara is released from the hold that he has had on her. Howard, however, descends into the pits of degradation when he becomes an alcoholic and his marriage falters.

Fred, during his international episode, hears of the troubles of Howard and comes to his assistance, while his wife continues to tour Europe. Both parents finally return to the United States because of the love of their children and the realization that in an alien clime, they cannot find true happiness as they once thought they would.

The "international theme" is present when their attitudes formed at home conflict with the attitudes and the prevalent ideas in Europe--as for example, in politics. Fred's political ideas find no audience in France where he is an outsider. The conflict of manners is thinly presented here, as in the previous novel, but it is noted to show Lewis'

continuing interest. In the last Lewis novel, World So Wide (1951), the author would rejuvenate his enthusiasm for the "International theme" by a fuller treatment.

In World So Wide the author reverts to the first novel in many aspects. For example, both protagonists go to Europe by accident: for William Wrenn, a relative dies and leaves money for him, and in the latter case, the protagonist, Hayden Chart, goes to Europe following the accidental death of his wife. Also, both become romantically involved with ambitious females who aspire to professional careers--one as an artist and the other as a research professor. In addition, they both eventually marry "conventional" women--that is, passive and supportive women--and return to America.

In this last novel the "International theme" is, as mentioned before, a major part of the work. Hayden travels to Florence and there meets an old friend of his father--Sam Dodsworth--who has divorced his wife Fran and lives in Europe with his second wife, Edith. Sam warns him not to stay in Europe too long because he may become vitiated by the alien culture. This, however, is gainsaid by Sam's own residence and his continuing American way of behaving with his "quick humorous glance, his scorn for social climbers, his monotonous voice, his liking for dry cereals, his belief that if he met a stranger and took to him, they were friends from that hour."³ Hayden is able to meet many of the Florentine residents during a party given by the Dodsworths. One of them is Olivia Lomond, a research professor from the State University of Winnemac, who is doing work in the Laurentian Library for a period of time. She becomes his romantic interest until she discards him for a history professor who arrives in Florence to gather material for a popular lecture series. Finally,

³ Sinclair Lewis, World So Wide (New York: Random House, 1951), pp. 96-7.

after meeting various expatriates and natives, Hayden falls in love with a local girl who is on a business trip and returns home to the United States.

During Hayden's sojourn in Italy he finds that his escape to a foreign land is illusory and that he finds problems in any country. He finds himself a part of the American colony in Florence and meets such international characters as Sir Henry Belfont who pretends to be an English-born aristocrat, but who really is an American who disparages his native land.

The conflicts Hayden faces in this international setting are really with other temporary or permanent expatriates and not with the people native to the country. It is an extension of the original conflict of manners between citizens of different countries, represented in earlier literature.

Dodsworth (1929) is the author's most impressive contribution to literature of his "international theme" novels. It fulfills the definition of the theme in its purest sense. There is confrontation and conflict between the protagonist, Sam Dodsworth and various Europeans.

The novel begins with Sam and his wife Fran deciding to escape the routine of Zenith for the adventure of Europe. Sam wants to see if he can find himself away from the materialistic culture of America; and Fran wants to find her lost youth among the suave European men she envisions. They travel through England, France, and Germany meeting various types of people such as American expatriates who are snobbish over the adopted culture of Europe, and members of the nobility who have regressed into a state of degeneracy. In Germany, Fran finally gets her foreign catch-- a mother-dominated Austrian named Kurt von Obersdorf who intends to marry her but decides not to do so at the last moment because of his mother's

disapproval. In the meantime, Sam has wandered around Europe in a melancholic state and finally has an affair with a prostitute, Nande Azeredo, in Paris. Sam, eventually, gets control of himself and meets Edith Cortright, a widowed American who lives in Venice. They fall in love, marry and remain content with the thought of living out their lives in an Old World culture of Italy.

As with other round characters, as opposed to the many flat characters that Lewis uses in his novels, Sam shows human qualities of growth from a provincial type to a sophisticated expatriate. The message from the author is clear: if you want to escape the frenetic pace of materialism, you must leave America for the more leisurely pace of older civilizations.

Sam had always been a builder, a producer of automobiles, with a clear purpose in mind as a successful cog in the American society. He soon realized that material success could leave him empty in the sense that he was not fulfilled as a man with a soul to nurture. In Europe he finds what he is looking for: a slower, undemanding pace so that he can enjoy art, conversation, and good friends.

CHAPTER II

The Europeans

Sinclair Lewis, as with many popular novelists, uses stock types as characters in his fictional works. These types find their way into the six novels concerned with the "International theme." In this chapter the European types will be examined in detail.

The stereotyped character, as found in the European setting created by Lewis, is not treated as fully as is the American. Lewis was more familiar with types derived from his own milieu, and therefore there exists a differential. Still, there are some interesting types which should be discussed.

The "degenerate nobility" is a type which is more highly developed in Dodsworth but is found also in The Prodigal Parents and in World So Wide. In the former work Kurt von Obersdorf is an Austrian count who has fallen on hard times. He is without wealth and has to work at a tourist agency for a living. His purpose in the novel is to demonstrate how foolish Fran becomes by leaving a steady provider for a womanizing European. Also, he provides the impetus for the final break in the tottering marriage of Sam and Fran Dodsworth.

Kurt is symbolic of the titled, European aristocracy which produces nothing, and whose only claim to respect is its famed ancestry. Yet he is genial to both Sam and Fran--acting the part of the cicerone--as he takes them from one interesting place to another. One of the places he

takes them to is a night club for homosexuals, a place which he says he enters by mistake. It is doubtful that Kurt would have mistaken this establishment--after all, it's his business to know entertainment areas. The author has inserted this episode to remind the reader again of Kurt's inherent degeneracy.

Kurt manages to keep Sam's hostility under reins by his ingratiating manner toward him as he slowly plots to marry or at least seduce his wife. It is evident that Kurt is interested in Fran--not only for her physical beauty--but for her money. If he can marry a wealthy American, his life can be changed from genteel poverty to that of monied aristocracy. Beneath the smiling exterior, Kurt boils with emotion over his lost hereditary fortune and worthless title.

When Sam goes back to America briefly for a class reunion at Yale, Kurt and Fran stay in Europe to enjoy each other without the uncomfortable presence of the hovering husband. When Sam returns, unexpectedly, the depth of their intimacy is revealed. Sam goes to his wife's hotel suite in Berlin, and requests the key to the room from the clerk when he finds out that she is out for the evening. Hours later, he hears Fran and Kurt coming up the hall; on an impulse, he turns out the light and waits for them in the dark.

He heard the door opening; heard Fran bubbling, 'Yes, you can come in for a moment. But not long. Poo' ill Fran, she is all in! What an orchestra that was! I could have danced till dawn!'
And Kurt: 'Oh, you darling--darling!'

Sam interrupts this romantic episode when he makes his presence known and the two lovers pretend to be the usual innocent friends out for an evening of wholesome fun.

¹ Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 286.

After this faux pas by the two miscreants, Sam realizes that his marriage has deteriorated irreparably. After a violent argument, he and Fran part, and he begins to wander around Europe. He finally meets Edith Cortright in Venice and receives a letter from Fran that reveals the extent of Kurt's lack of manhood. Fran is disillusioned and wants Sam to take her back.

I haven't much excuse, probably I've been a fool and not appreciated you but anyway, maybe with no right to, I am turning to you rather desperately, Kurt's mother finally came up from Austria. She was pretty rude to me. She indicated, oh quite clearly that for the Catholic and Highly Noble Kurtriel to marry a female who was (or soon would be) heinously divorced, who was an American, and who was too old to bear him heirs, would be disastrous. And she didn't spare me very much in putting it that way, either. Not a pretty scene--me sitting there smoking in Kurt's flat and trying to look agreeable while she walled at Kurt and ignored me. And Kurt stood by her. Oh, his nice little sentimental heart bled for me, and since then he's such a good time being devastated and trying to take both sides at once. But he 'thought we had better put off the marriage for maybe a couple of years till we von her over.' God! Is he a man or a son? There ain't going to be no winning over, and no marriage! I'm sick of his cowardice, when I risked so much, but why go into that,²

At the end of the letter Fran begs for Sam to forgive her and to consider a reconciliation. This, he does, with some misgivings. After they meet again Fran reverts to her abrasive, bitchy personality that convinces Sam that he must sever this relationship permanently.

Madame de Pénable is another member of the degenerate nobility. Fran meets her at a party in Paris and is enthralled. Sam dislikes her immediately and is disturbed over Fran's attachment to her and her coterie of clever, pseudo-intellectuals. Madame de Pénable is a woman of mystery and nothing is really known about her. She talks about herself frequently but manages not to disclose anything of substance. She appears, however, to be a woman of independent means--probably supported by alimony since

² Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 340-41.

her husband is never discussed or seen.

In the tradition of Henry James's The Ambassadors, this character appears to be a corruption of the Madame de Vlonnet persona which presents a portrait of refined nobility with only one moral flaw, that of loving a young man while she is not divorced from her husband. Lewis' Madame de Pénable is different because she has no real substance and gathers round her a group of fawning viles that cling to her while she chatters endlessly about things that don't really matter. Madame de Vlonnet is a woman of integrity, but Pénable is frivolous and base.

Madame de Pénable has red hair and is fat--a visible symbol of her degeneracy. She always has eager gentlemen "about her, running her errands, drinking her excellent Moselle, listening to her scandalous anecdotes."³ She is interested mainly in having a good time in life and has no constructive purpose for living. In opposition to Sam, she is a non-producer, a parasite on the society of purposive men and women. She collects clever, shallow people who can amuse her, and Fran is one of these specimens. Fran, naive as she is, believes the woman to be a fine example of European's rich heritage of noble personages. "Madame de Pénable went in for assorted titles--a judicious mixture of Italians, French, Roumanian, Georgian, Hungarian--and she always had one sound, carefully selected freak: a delightfully droll pickpocket or a minor Arctic explorer."⁴

Sam realizes that Madame de Pénable is corrupt and is representative of those drags on society that deride those who would aspire to idealism and build better things for the benefit of others. She is really the opposite of the new life for which he came to Europe. For Sam and the reader

³ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 130.

⁴ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 131.

she is "its very negation--the bustle, the little snobberies, the cheap little titles, the cheap little patronage of 'art'"⁵

In The Prodigal Parents, a flat character named Lady Jaxon is mentioned in passing. She is reminiscent of Madame de Pénable because she is also mysterious and fat. Being English, unknown, and overweight are the only things which recommend her to others, the author comments. As with Pénable, she is in the company of titled people: a Russian colonel, a Belgian count,

Lady Jaxon is left undeveloped by the author but we soon understand her attraction to the protagonist's wife, Hazel, who says: "Lady Jaxon--she really is top-drawer--she says we can get a perfectly ducky cottage near her Place in Devon,"⁶ Hazel's admiration for Lady Jaxon is much like Fran Dodsworth's devotion to her noble personage.

Another European type is that of the "Innocent." The characters utilized here fulfill the sense of the definition in that they are candid; they openly express honest and sincere sentiment without any intention to deceive or to phrase their thoughts in euphonious utterances. They always say what's on their mind--they are really child-like in their forthrightness.

In the preceding sense of the word, Major Lockert in Dodsworth is, indeed, an Innocent. His outspoken and blunt honesty is noticeable from the first time he becomes a part of the narrative. Sam meets him aboard ship to Europe and introduces him to Fran. He becomes engaged in conversation with Fran and says to her:

'Why is it that the travelling American is such a dreadful person?

⁵ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 135.

⁶ Sinclair Lewis, The Prodigal Parents (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1938), p. 274.

Look at those ghastly people at that second table there--no, just beyond the pillar--father with horn-rimmed spectacles, certain to be talking about either Coolidge or Prohibition--earnest mother in homemade frock out to hunt down Culture and terribly grim about it--daughter with a voice like a file. Why is it?'

'And why is it that you Americans, the nice ones, are so much more snobbish than the English?''⁷

Despite his unveiled criticism of Americans, Fran senses that he appreciates her feminine presence. Major Lockert is, indeed, a man who enjoys being with beautiful women, but he tends to be protective like a father rather than a preying seducer like von Obersdorf. It "was Lockert who assumed that he was her patron, who looked over her new acquaintances one by one, and was not at all shy about giving his verdict on them,"⁸

Fran and Major Lockert have a brief friendship which is further developed after they get settled in England. Their conviviality arouses Sam's suspicions but it seems that he has misinterpreted Major Lockert's intentions when he briefly rests his hand on Fran's shoulder. Fran is not amused when Sam accuses her of flirting. It could be surmised that Fran is trying out her charms on the first European she has met, but not for romantic involvement with Lockert, but just as a testing of her powers for serious encounters later in her travels.

Angelo Gazza is the photographer who works for the profit-minded history professor in World So Wide, Dr. Lundsgard. Gazza is another of Lewis' passing characters who are created just to present some point of view. He is approached one day by Hayden Chart, the protagonist, who questions him about his employer. He answers directly and honestly and then Hayden says to him:

⁷ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 44.

⁸ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 46.

'You don't like us Americans, do you?'

'No, that's the hell of it. I love you. Best chum I ever had was a master-sergeant from Brooklyn, half-Wop and half-Mick. I'd like to live in America....Why are so many Americans immature? Why don't you grow up? Half of you pulling polysyllables, when 'I don't know' would do, and the other half--medical majors and chaplains and flying colonels--talking like high-school boys, 'Oh, Boy!' and 'Watch my smoke' and not enthusiastic about anything except baseball and women.

'And the American woman is the only one I know of whose heart and brain stay cold and indifferent to you while all the rest of her body pretends to catch fire. An Italian or French woman either loves you or she doesn't, but the American lady--she kisses you hot at eight-thirty and looks at you cold at eleven--or anyway at eight-thirty next morning. And yet I do admire so your American enterprise. I am so sick of all the Memorable Ruins in Italy.

'That's what has turned so many of us into guides and postcard sellers....

'I'd like to blow up every building in Italy older than 1890.'⁹

Angelo just says anything which enters his mind regardless of the consequences. Lewis uses this "Innocent" as a mouthpiece to voice his own opinions on sexuality--probably thinking of his lukewarm relationship with Grace Hegger, his first wife. The comments on American slang show Lewis' feelings about "Main Street" speech habits. The last part, may have come from comments by Italians in Lewis' presence.

Lewis uses two variant types of the genus "Intellectual." One is the true intellectual who is a seeker after truth for its own sake. Then there is the pseudo-intellectual who pretends to seek verities, but really has some ulterior motive such as self-enhancement and puffery. The latter cares nothing for scholarship but would like to have the reputation for attaining levels of superiority in the world of learning.

Professor Braut in Dodsworth is the true European intellectual who is useful in revealing aspects of the European and American clash of attitudes. While meeting with the Dodsworths and others, he lectures Fran on his beliefs.

⁹ Sinclair Lewis, World So Wide (New York: Random House, 1951), pp. 188-89.

'I detest the prostituted elegance of Paris and the Italians, like children playing at Empire,...The European culture is aristocratic, I do not mean that boastfully; I do not speak of famous old families, like that of our friend Graf Obersdorf here. I mean that we are aristocratic, as against democratic, in that we believe that the nation is proudest and noblest and most exalted which has the greatest number of really great men--like Einstein and Freud and Thomas Mann--and that ordinary, undistinguished people (who may be, mind you, counts or kings, as well as servant maids) are happier in contributing to produce such great men than in having more automobiles and bath-tubs.

'And by the aristocratic tradition of the real Europe I do not mean any hauteur. I think perhaps I have seen more rudeness to servants--as well, of course, as more rudeness to masters--in America than anywhere in Europe,...An American thinks of a good cook as a low person; a European respects him as an artist.

'The European, the aristocrat, feels that he is responsible to past generations to carry on the culture they have formed. He feels that graciousness, agreeable manners, loyalty to his own people, are more important than wealth; and he feels that to carry on his tradition, he must have knowledge--much knowledge,...

'He must know at least two languages,...[H]e must have some understanding of music, painting, literature,...[H]e must know the politics of all the great countries,...

.....
'And also...most Americans who think they have 'seen Europe' go home without any idea at all of its existence and what it stands for, and they perceive of Europe just loud-tongued guides, and passengers in trains looking unfriendly and reading Uhu or Le Rire. They have missed only everything that makes Europe!¹⁰

After this episode of verbosity, the reader does not see Professor Braut anymore. He has talked about the basic values of the American culture and the European such as the American love of material objects and money, and the European reverence of the past. He is critical of the trippers who go through the country without taking time to experience real people removed from the tourist traps. He sees faults in the European culture but is biased, somewhat, in favor of his own heritage.

Professor Braut, as a true intellectual, is more excited by ideas than by the piling up of wealth. He mentions three great German thinkers who have changed mankind more by their theories than by any tangible product they may have produced.

¹⁰ Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 231-233.

He also brings up the hostility that exists between labor (servants) and management (master) in America. In Europe the worker is respected by the master as a craftsman, and not as an undesirable inferior. This thought is brought to mind again, later in the novel, when the Europeanized American, Edith Cortright, demonstrates that she has a smooth and egalitarian relationship with her servants in her home in Venice.

Professor Braut also mentions the difference between the cosmopolitanized European with his grasp of international politics and languages as opposed to the intentionally narrow, provincial knowledge that the American is proud of possessing. The American is prideful of his small area of knowledge because he feels that since the United States is the greatest nation in the world, let the foreigner learn his language, and learn about his political institutions, and the like. This is the jingoistic attitude of many Americans who are enveloped within the "Main Street" philosophy of life.

The next type is not, of course, restricted to Europe, but in the six Lewis novels under study, the "whore with the heart of gold" occurs only once, in Dodsworth. The name of the character is Nande Azeredo and she lives in Paris. Her role in the novel is that of the amoral Parisian who releases Sam Dodsworth from his sexual inhibitions which occurred while he was married to the cold and uninterested Fran. This is just one area of inadequacy that has plagued Sam with his marriage to that bitter emasculator, Fran Dodsworth. With Nande, sex becomes joyful rather than ridden with guilt.

She had...broken down all the celibacy which had plagued him, and however much he still fretted over Fran, imagined her loneliness in Berlin, let himself he (sic) wrung by pity for her self-dramatizing play at romance which was bound to turn into tragedy, he no longer felt himself her prisoner, and he began to see that his world might

be a very green and pleasant place.¹¹

Not only is there a release from sexual timidity, but there is a symbolic release from Fran's tyranny over him. He is now ready for a serious relationship with a mature and respectable woman, should he find her.

Nande proves her worth as a person of kindness even though her morals are not of the best quality. After Sam and she have had their three-day liaison, she refuses payment for her services by taking the one hundred dollars he gives her to buy Sam a gold cigarette case which costs the same. After all, she says, she has had "fifty-seven lovers"¹² who never gave her anything more valuable than a "few frocks."

Luclano Mora is a minor character in Work of Art who proves himself a type called the "builder." He was a hotel clerk in America with his friend, Myron, until he saved enough money to move back to his native Naples, Italy. There, where labor is cheap, he runs the Hotel Pastorale which is a model of efficiency and good service. Luclano is a builder in the sense that he has enhanced his status from that of a menial kind of clerk to that of a high position as manager of a prestigious hotel. Myron is surprised at the change in status of his old friend and the apparent wealth which has accompanied his present level of attainment. Myron comments on his automobile which is a symbol of his altered fortunes by saying that he is 'astonished by the magnificence of Luclano's Isotta-Fraschini car and its uniformed chauffeur,..."¹³

Luclano is not a builder in the literal sense of the word, but he is in the sense that he has built himself a respected reputation, and

¹¹ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 302.

¹² Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 299.

¹³ Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1935), p. 353.

is a recipient of admiration from those around him.

The preceding discussion has been concerned with Europeans that are types created by Sinclair Lewis. Some of these types are duplicated in the chapter on Americans, and some of the types are additions. Some European certainly could be fitted into the definition of a type used for an American, but Lewis chose not to do this in his six novels concerned with the "International theme."

CHAPTER III

The Americans

The "patriot" is a type which may be subdivided into the "Jingolst" or super-patriot, and the nationalist. These types are found in three novels of Sinclair Lewis which are concerned in greater or lesser degree with the "International theme."

The Jingolst type is the one who is a victim of excessive nationalism and is represented by the phrase: "my country right or wrong." A person with a Jingolstic attitude reveals himself as a person with parochial views. Such a person is the fictional Elmer in the novel Elmer Gantry,

Jingolism is just one facet of Elmer's restricted knowledge. He exposes his attitude even before his England-bound vessel has time to reach the foreign port. As he strolls the deck, he finds an elderly couple and exclaims to them in an opinionated tone that

there's nothing so broadening as travel, is there!--still, in America we've got a standard of decency and efficiency that these poor old European countries don't know anything about, and in the long run the good old U.S.A. is the place where you'll find your greatest happiness--especially for folks like us, that aren't any blooming millionaires that can grab off a lot of castles and those kind of things and have a raft of butlers. You bet!¹

After Elmer reaches England he begins to disparage just about everything in sight. He doesn't like the railroad passenger compartment in his trip from Liverpool to London. He thinks the passing towns are backward, and not forward-looking like American towns and villages. Upon

¹ Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry (New York: Dell, 1958), p. 417.

reaching London, he complains about the smoke, ignoring the positive attributes of the city. When Elmer checks into his hotel, he again complains that the bellboy is not talkative like his counter-part in America. Therefore, he cannot get any inside information about the workings and activities of London. Elmer later tours the area by foot and passes through a fashionable clothing district which probably is Bond Street. There he criticizes the stores as distinctly inferior to anything that Zenith has to offer.

Elmer has a confrontation with a "little greasy man"² who accosts him and tries to sell him pornographic post cards. At first, he is enthusiastic but as Clio, his wife, descends upon him, he remembers that he is a member of the clergy and angrily refuses the offer. He projects his own lustful desires upon the surprised vendor by shouting to him and to Clio--for her information--that "these Europeans have dirty minds!"³ This incident occurs when the Ganttrys tour the wicked city of Paris.

Elmer Gantry is probably Lewis' most accurate expression of the Jingoist. Another character, however, is almost as ignorant as Elmer. He is Dr. William Windelbank, a dentist from Newlife, Colorado, who is a character in World So Wide. Dr. Windelbank is the infamous tripper who travels through foreign cities and countries too fast to appreciate the cultures that he only brushes lightly against. As with Elmer, he views foreign customs and attractions with a jaundiced eye. His exposure to alien customs only confirms his attitude that America has the best that life has to offer. Everything that he sees is seen as pale comparison to the wonders of Newlife. When he arrives in Italy he finds little to praise.

² Lewis, Elmer Gantry, p. 422.

³ Lewis, Elmer Gantry, p. 422.

In a conversation with Hayden he complains about what he has been exposed to in the way of food and sightseeing.

'The food may be delicious, but it don't stay by you and nourish the maxillary blood supply like a good Colorado beefsteak. So we're finishing up the tour with two days in Florence and three in Rome, just like we originally planned. We did our two days in Venice, but don't think too much of it: real picturesque, but awful rundown and shabby.'⁴

In another conversation, Dr. Windelbank again refers to the food found in Italy with a snide remark--slightly ludicrous--that it is just "barbaric" that this country does not serve "flapjacks and doughnuts...."⁵ This character obviously measures the worth of every European country against the customs found in America--the latter country being the standard of excellence for the world.

Dr. Windelbank reminisces about his travels through Paris with his wife, Jean. He discusses one instance when he inadvertently revealed his sloppy sentimentality when he heard a band play "Home on the Range." This must have happened in a tourist spot for Americans. "'Well, sir, I looked at Jean and Jean looked at me, and suddenly I could just see those cottonwoods, and God, how I did long to be back there, safe! I could have cried! And Jean--she did!"⁶

Ross Ireland in Dodsworth is the "nationalist" type in the sense of the word which indicates that he is a loyal devotee to his nation--America. It is really a love-hate relationship because he boasts of America's greatness and in the same breath berates its deficiencies. In New York with Sam he brings out his ambiguous feelings that lean toward love of country.

⁴ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 100.

⁵ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 99.

⁶ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 106.

'And I thought I knew this town! Ten years I put in here!
But honestly, it's sixteen times as bad as it was three years ago,
seems to me.'

.....
'Oh, I've learned a lot about myself and my beloved America today!'

'Just the same, Ross, I prefer this country to--'

'Hell, so do I! Things I can remember, people I've talked to,
knocking around this country, High Sierras to the Cape Cod cranberry-
bogs....But we're turning the whole thing into a six-day bicycle race,
And with motor-cycles instead of the legs that we used to have once!'

With Ross Ireland talking always--assailing the American bustle
except at such times as Sam complained of it, whereupon Ross would
defend it furiously--they ambled to a Broadway cabaret.⁷

Sam Dodsworth is a character who evolves from a small-town provin-
cial, suspicious of foreign ways and places, to that of an American who
considers himself a permanent expatriate. He appears in two novels:
Dodsworth and World So Wide. In the former novel he is cast in the type
called the "bulldozer" and in the latter, the "Europeanized American" type
which was previously mentioned.

As a bulldozer type, Sam makes the Revelation Motor Company a prosper-
ous concern in Zenith. He becomes a millionaire and is able to travel
to Europe to escape the materialistic society that has finally wearied
him. Also, he is a bulldozer in the sense that after his relationship with
Fran shatters, he is able to pick up the pieces and build himself a new
life with another woman and lifestyle. He says to Fran, "I don't have to
depend on any title or clothes or social class or anything else to be dis-
tinctive."⁸

In World So Wide Sam, as the retired Europeanized American, is engaged
in conversation with Hayden Chart about his life in Italy and its seduc-
tive charms. He also mentions negative aspects of the American experience.

⁷ Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 154, 156.

⁸ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 200.

'Well, we tried to go back and live in the States, in Zenith, but we're kind of spoiled for it. Everybody is so damn busy making money there that you can't find anybody to talk with, unless you're willing to pay for it by busting a gut playing golf. And I got to dislike servants that hate you and hate every part of their job except drawing their pay.'

.....
 'And then I like these hills in Tuscany and the monasteries and villas and the variety of it--get in your car and in an hour or so you're in San Gimignano, looking at those old towers....'
 'Me--I never can learn this cursed Italian language; Edith has an awful time getting me to say acqua fresca when I want a glass of water. But I do like to have food that you can eat and wine that you can drink without paying four and a half bucks at a restaurant for a burnt steak and some fried spuds flavored with penicillin!'⁹

Thus, Sam, an older and wiser man than he was before Europe, lives out his retirement years in the placidity of Florence. His new wife, Edith Cortright, does not play much of a role in World So Wide as she does in Dodsworth. She does, however, assume the type of Europeanized American in the former novel as well as in the latter. Edith, also, is cast in the type "confidante" in Dodsworth.

As a confidante, Edith listens sympathetically as Sam unravels his marital tale of woe in their early meetings. At first Sam struggles to hold in his feelings of frustration over Fran, but he lets it all out with the encouragement of Edith.

'Why don't you tell me about it? If you care to, I'm a good confidante!'

'Well--'

He flung out with a suicidal defiance.

'I don't like to whine--I don't think I do, much--and I don't like admitting I'm licked. But I am....'

Edith Cortright was beside him, murmuring--oh, her words were a commonplace 'Would you like to tell me about it?' but her voice was kind, and curiously honest, curiously free of the barriers between a strange man and a strange woman.

.....
 He talked, of Zenith and Emily [his daughter], of motors and the virtues of the Revelation car, of mechanics and finance. He had never

⁹ Lewis, World So Wide, pp. 46-48.

known another woman who was not bored when he tried to make clear his very definite, not unimportant notions on the use of chromium metal.¹⁰

Edith first came to Europe with her husband. When he died she decided to stay for definite reasons of her own. She had assimilated much of the surrounding Old World culture and had become Europeanized. When she sees Sam in Venice, during one of their meetings, he asks her why she stayed in Europe.

'Oh...I suppose America terrifies me. I feel insecure there. I feel everybody watching me, and criticizing me unless I'm buzzing about Doing Something Important--uplifting the cinema or studying Einstein or winning bridge championships or breeding Schnauzers or something. And there's no privacy, and I'm an extravagant woman when it comes to the luxury of privacy.'

.....
'It's only in Europe that you can have the joy of anonymity, of being lost in the crowd, or being yourself, of having the dignity of privacy!'¹¹

The other character in Dodsworth who is given the role of confidante is Matey Pearson, wife of Tub Pearson--the banker from Zenith. She is the keen listener who sees through Sam's bravado to realize that his marriage is in trouble and Sam is extremely unhappy. The scene where Sam unloads his troubles is in Tub's apartment, after he has been put to bed, drunk, by Sam and Matey. She says to Sam:

'Sam! You old dear thing! When are you going to chuck Fran and let yourself be happy again?'

'Why, Matey, honestly, she and I are on the best terms--'

'Don't lie to me, Sam darling (you know how Tub and I do love you!). Rather, don't lie to yourself!'

.....
'Yes, Matey, I'll admit there is something to what you say.

I suppose I ought to be mighty-tighty and bellow, 'How dare you talk about my wife! But--Hell, Matey, I am so sick and tired and confused!'¹²

¹⁰ Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 321, 324.

¹¹ Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 313-14.

¹² Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 270-71.

Matey continues to listen to Sam as he reveals for the first time the troubles in his marriage. By letting him confide in her, he is given the opportunity to see his problems in a new perspective provided by an empathetic human being.

The next type is that of the "pseudo-intellectual" which is seen in the characterization of professor Lundsgard in World So Wide. Lorry, as he is called, is a profiteering type of intellectual who searches for knowledge which can be popularized, that is, simplified in a reductionist manner, so that he can make money by feeding pabulum to the gullible. Instead of a seeker after truth for its own enjoyment, he is a seeker after dollars. An American expatriate, Nathaniel Friar, knows his game: "Bring him in two facts and he'll cook them into a whole lecture."¹³

When this same person is forced to work for Lundsgard out of economic necessity he bemoans his task as an unwitting accomplice. He states:

'I have some difficulty in liking the fact that I am now part of a cultural swindle.'

.....
 'I'm not sure but that it's what you call a racket, I'm not sure but that he is in the soundest tradition of treason--treason to love, to friendship, to patriotism, to religion, for the most sensitive blessings are also the most interesting to betray. In his case, he is making a cheerful activity of treason to learning, like the journalists who trap invalids by praising fraudulent medical discoveries.'¹⁴

After Lundsgard spends some time researching a project on the Medics, he will return to the United States to plan his lecture series and help make a movie on the same subject. He has visions of a rich and famous future for himself.

Nathaniel Friar is the true "intellectual" who has to prostitute his

¹³ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 177.

¹⁴ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 192.

talents as a scholar in helping the notorious Dr. Lundsgard. Formerly from Boston, he has lived abroad for 40 years and has lived in Florence for half that period of time. He says that learning should be sought for its own reward, and not for any ideas of making money by adulterating it. The masses should not be spoon-fed knowledge in such a watered-down way in that it really is false. Complicated subjects cannot be simplified without losing some of their essential truth. "Particularly must one avoid the superstition that there is some mystical virtue in erudition,... These virtuous doings should be cultivated for their own sake alone."¹⁵

Olivia Lomond, another intellectual type, is found in World So Wide. Besides being cast as the romantic interest of the protagonist, she also is representative of the feminist segment of society, which the author dislikes. Invariably, Lewis makes his most desirable women as passive creatures who encourage their male companions to success. Dr. Lomond is pictured as hard-bolled and aggressive toward men, until Hayden finally cajols her into liking his company and loosening up somewhat. Hayden cannot loosen the hold that the Laurentian Library has on her, however.

Hayden is, as his friend Sam Dodsworth, a builder in the literal sense, and in the sense that he builds for himself a new life in Europe. By profession, he is an architect. Prior to Europe, he remembers, that he "liked to look up at the houses he himself had planned in these comely new suburbs of Newlife,..."¹⁶ He has some fleeting regrets that he cannot now enjoy his creations. At the end of the novel, he has fallen in love with Roxanna Eldritch, and he reflects that in this "sacred land"¹⁷ he has come to know himself. Italy has stimulated him to release his potentialities,

¹⁵ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 59.

¹⁶ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 4.

¹⁷ Lewis, World So Wide, p. 249.

and to build a new life from his old self.

Roxanna Eldritch is an Innocent type in the sense that she says just what is on her mind. This can be illustrated by the episode with Sir Henry Belfont who is exposed as a phony Englishman living in Italy. Roxanna, being a newspaper woman, has been privy to the news that the Belfont man actually is an American poseur making pretensions to nobility. She addresses "Sir" Belfont:

'I heard so many interesting things about you from a newspaperman who used to be your secretary. You fired him--remember?--for laughing when a dinky gilt chair busted under you. He was left stranded --bad. This fellow, the rat, he told me that you never saw England or the Continent till you were fourteen. You were born in Ohio and your Grampa Belfont--if that was the name--started the family fortunes during our American Civil War by selling adulterated drugs and shoddy uniforms to the North and South Equally.'

.....
'This ex-secretary said it cost you sixteen years of living in Kent and London and getting snubbed practically every hour, and then forty-five thousand pounds in cash, to buy a seat in Parliament and finally an unpaid job as a baronet.'¹⁸

Needless to say, Belfont was taken aback by this sudden revelation.

The "passionate pilgrim" type is best illustrated with the activities of William Wrenn in Our Mr. Wrenn, but Myron Weagle in Work of Art, and Fred Cornplow in The Prodigal Parents can also be included. All three of them possess the attitude that Europe has something special to offer; it is a shrine to which they pay homage.

William's devotion is seen when he first arrives at the shores of England on his cattle boat:

Mr. Wrenn had ecstatically watched the shores of England--England!--ride at him through the fog, and had panted over the lines of English villas among the dunes....

¹⁸ Lewis, World So Wide, pp. 237-38.

'Now he was seeing his first foreign city....Up through the Liverpool streets that ran down to the river, as though through peepholes slashed straight back into the Middle Ages, his vision plunged, and it wandered unchecked through each street while he hummed: 'Free, free, in Eu-ro-pee, that's me!'¹⁹

Myron also is enthusiastic about what Europe has to offer with none of the puerility of William. "He had to see the European Inns and restaurants before he approved the architects' plans or let them build one cement form for the Inn. He had to. He was going to combine with American tradition everything in European hotel practice that could be acclimated here."²⁰

For Fred Cornplow Europe is a place to escape to--a haven of Old World culture that will give him peace. Fred thinks to himself about his impending trip to Europe: "He had only this one life to live; on this side [of] Jordan, he still had, at most, some thirty years for seeing all the hills and headlands and bright rivers, and he must hasten about his business of seeing. Perhaps he would yet walk up the Champs Elysées."²¹

The "expatriate snob" is one of the most prevalent types in Lewis' six "international theme" novels. Three of them are found in Dodsworth (Endicott Everett Atkins, Fran Dodsworth, Lycurgus Watts) and the others are found in Our Mr. Wrenn (Istra Nash) and World So Wide (Sir Henry Belfont). Belfont has already been shown to be a snob as well as deceitful in pretending to be among the English aristocracy, and living abroad.

Fran Dodsworth starts out merely as a snob of extraordinary dimensions, but later she is an expatriate, too. One interesting passage which illustrates the extent of her attitude is before she and Sam have broken apart,

¹⁹ Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 53.

²⁰ Lewis, Work of Art, pp. 347-8.

²¹ Lewis, The Prodigal Parents, p. 248.

and they are in England.

In England Fran had learned to say "Lift" for "Elevator," "Zed" for "Zee," Laboratory for Laboratorly, Scenarlo for Scenario, and Shi for Ski. And before she had ever left America she had been able to point her Europeanism by keeping her fork in her left hand. But now she added to her accomplishments the ability to make a European 7 by crossing it, and ardently she crossed every 7, particularly in letters to friends in Zenith, who were thus prevented from knowing what figure she was using.²²

Istra Nash shows her snobbery when she refuses to dine in the same room with American tourists because they are trippers, and she does not want to be identified with them. Also, when William expresses the desire to see a tourist attraction she protests. "'One simply doesn't go and see the Tower, because that's what trippers do...The Tower is the sort of thing school superintendents see and then go back and lecture on in school assembly-room and the G.A.R. hall. I'll take you to the Tate Gallery.'"²³

Endicott Everett Atkins is the expatriate snob who irritates Sam greatly. Sam thinks to himself that whatever Mr. Atkins recommends for him to see, he will avoid it at all costs. When Atkins says he must see the Etruscan remains, Sam promises himself to be anyplace but there. It seems that visiting certain ruins means instant status, while visiting obvious attractions means derision from Atkins and his friends.

Lycurgus Watts, also, is a snob of the Atkins variety in that he's concerned about where he goes, for the sake of status. He says to Fran that "It was vulgar to go to Versailles but that they must see the exhibition of the Prismatic Internists."²⁴ Although Lycurgus travels back and forth between Zenith and Europe frequently, he is not an expatriate in

²² Lewis, Dodsworth, pp. 225-26.

²³ Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 87.

²⁴ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 125.

the strict sense of the word, but certainly he is in his heart. Thus, he is included in this category.

Tub Pearson is the type who fits into the "philistine" category. He's the kind of person who values money and material things more than artistic or intellectual ideas. Appropriately, he is found in Dodsworth in the role of a Zenith banker. To Tub nothing is more important than dollars. Sam, before Europe gave him a new perspective on everything, had thought that Tub was a good fellow. As the story progresses, he changes his mind. He may have guessed that "round his eyes were the lines of a banker who day after day sharply refuses loans to desperate men."²⁵ The image of a glad-handing type of good fellow is something that Tub works very hard at perfecting.

Another type, the "unassimilated American" is found in Dodsworth. A.B. Hurd is the character. He is the manager of the Revelation Motor Company in England and has been in that position for six years. Although he would like to have others believe differently, he has not absorbed one iota of European culture and even makes traveling salesmen think of home in the midwest. He is "transplanted Zenith" untouched by foreign influences. "Mr. Hurd was a round-faced, horn-spectacled, heavy-voiced man who believed that he had become so English in manner and speech that no one could possibly take him for an American, and who, if he lived in England for fifty years, would never be taken for anything save an American."²⁶ Hurd just cannot see himself as others see him.

²⁵ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 264.

²⁶ Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 61.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

The preceding stock characters were used by Sinclair Lewis to present various points of view. He tends to side with the viewpoints espoused by the passionate pilgrim type, the Europeanized American type, and the builder type. This is no surprise in view of the fact that he considered himself a blend of all three types.

When Lewis first anticipated going to Europe he was just as idealistic as William Wrenn. Later crossings and longer sojourns in Europe, however, soon cosmopolitanized him. The other type is evident in his great accomplishment in constructing several popular novels, particularly in the 1920-30 period.

Lewis was a late-comer to the "International theme" circle having been preceded by several well-known authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne with his novel, Dr. Grimshawe's Secret (written 1860-61); Mark Twain with The Innocents Abroad (1869); Henry James with Daisy Miller (1878) and The Ambassadors (1903); Edith Wharton with Madame de Treymes (1907) and others.

The master of the "International theme" novel is generally regarded as Henry James, but not every reader is privy to James's inscrutable meanings or able to read his abstruse prose. His fiction is for the educated reader who can appreciate subtlety and the presentation of fine shadings of meaning in circumlocutory sentences.

Lewis' audience, as opposed to that of James, is for the mass of general readers who probably have educational attainment between high school graduation and some college training. He wrote for the entertainment of the popular audience and in a few novels such as Main Street, Babbitt, and Arrowsmith, he reached into the arena of social criticism. He will be remembered for these three novels for a long time. They were published during the decade of his most fruitful period--the 1920's.

Dodsworth, as Lewis' most impressive contribution to the "International theme" novels, will be long remembered, too. The confrontation between European and American culture is presented in a style which is sometimes choppy and burdened with poor diction, but it is usually entertaining, and surprises even the more critical reader with wisdom in various passages.

Even though Lewis receives little attention from scholars today, his better novels will continue to attract readers. He can be humorous, razor-sharp in his social criticism, and full of cogent observations on the human drama, but then he can, also, be dull, trite, and disappointing to the reader.

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