

WORLD'S END IMPENDING

Notes on the Writing of WORLD'S END

By Upton Sinclair

Fate has put you and me upon the earth in one of the critical periods of human history; a dangerous time, but exciting—and certainly there has never been a time when it has been possible for the ordinary person to know so much about what is going on. The field is so enormous, the issues so crucial, that I, as a novelist, have for years been running away from them. I have said: “I am an American, and America is enough for me.” So I wrote *Oil!*, dealing with one industry in my home neighborhood; and *Boston*, dealing with the Sacco-Vanzetti case; and *Co-op*, portraying the unemployed of my state and their efforts to establish self-help groups.

But all the time I was watching world events and hearing stories, and I suppose that whoever or whatever it is that works in the subconscious mind of a novelist was having his or her or its way with me; the big theme was stalking me and was bound to catch up. I saw the rise of Mussolini, and of Hitler, and of Franco; the dreadful agony of Spain wrung my heart; then I saw Munich, and said to myself: “This is the end; the end of our world.”

A Garden Path; a Book of Notes

I was walking up and down in my garden one night, and something happened; a spring was touched, a button pressed—anyhow, a novel came rolling into the field of my mental vision; a whole series of events, with the emotions that accompanied them, a string of characters, good and bad, old and young, rich and poor. I have had that happen to me before, but never with such force, such mass and persistence. There was no resisting it, and I didn't try. I spent the next thirty-six hours in a state of absorption. I slept little, but lay in bed and “saw” that theme; I ate little and talked little—I have a kind and long-suffering wife, and when I tell her what is happening to me she lets it happen. I trod the garden path hard under my feet, and filled sheets of paper with notes of characters, places, events—the whole panorama of *World's End*. Ultimately I had nearly a hundred typewritten pages of notes, a small book in themselves.

I am one of the fortunate ones in this land of ours. I live where the sun shines most all of most days, and in the morning I can take my typewriter out into the garden. I can wear a pair of bathing trunks and a white canvas hat while I walk up and down behind jasmine and rose

hedges with the people of my books as they live their adventures and say their say. I suppose a psychologist would describe what goes on in the mind of a novelist as controlled multiple personality. These imaginary persons are more real to me than the people I meet in the outside world, for the latter keep me guessing, whereas the former are my grown-up children; they do what they please, and while they often take me by surprise, I am able to understand them instantly.

A Writer's Life

In a historical novel like *World's End* I cannot, of course, leave everything to my imaginary characters. I have to spend a part of my day reading books to refresh their memory as to places and events. In the evening, propped up in bed, I revise the morning's manuscript, or stroll in the garden and invite the next chapter to unroll itself. This, I take it, is the ideal life for the writer. Sticking to it, day in and day out, rarely seeing anybody or going anywhere, I can produce a thousand words a day, and at the end of a full year I have a thousand pages. It is the hardest kind of work, yet also the most delightful play. The end and goal of it all is you, the reader, and the day when you sit down and open the new book, my heart is in my mouth.

The scene of *World's End* is Europe, with a visit to New England and New York. The time is 1913 to 1919. I lived in England, Holland, Germany, France, and Italy during 1912 and 1913, and naturally my thoughts were there during the war-making and the peace-making. Also the records are voluminous. For *World's End* I must have read a hundred books and consulted several times as many.

I could not write a novel about Europeans, except as subordinate characters. Most of those in *World's End* are Americans living in Europe; I have known many of these, and new ones come calling and refresh my memory. If there was a place I wanted to know about, I could find someone who had been there; if there was an event I had to describe, I could find someone who had witnessed it. First and last I must have written several hundred letters and asked a thousand questions.

Of course there will be some slips, as I know from experience; but *World's End* is meant to be history as well as fiction, and I am sure there are no mistakes of importance. I have my own point of view, but I have tried to play fair in this book. There is a varied cast of characters and they say what they think.

The Background of Reality

Some of them are real persons, living or dead. George Bernard Shaw stood with me and my family on the "bright meadow," with the sunshine glinting in his whiskers as I have described him—or rather, to be exact,

the description is my wife's. We were as happy as children at that "Dalcroze" festival—although I knew that the war was coming, and took my son out of school in Germany for that reason. In the opening pages of *World's End* as I wrote them originally there was more about the *Orpheus* dancing, but some of my friends persuaded me that a descent into hell was a misleading opening for a realistic novel. Whether they were right I shall never be sure.

Isadora Duncan I met in her prime, when she carried her magic with her into everyday life. Anatole France and Rodin I never met, but the records concerning them are detailed. Zaharoff was known to friends of mine, and the stories they tell about him are even stranger than the ones I have used in *World's End*. Woodrow Wilson I once watched in action. George D. Herron and Lincoln Steffens were among my oldest friends, and their widows have checked me on various details.

The Peace Conference of Paris, which is the scene of the last third of *World's End*, is of course one of the great events of all time. A friend of mine asked an authority on modern fiction the question: "Has anybody ever use the Peace Conference in a novel?" and the reply was: "Could anybody?" Well, I thought somebody could, and now I think somebody has. The reader will ask, and I state explicitly that so far as concerns historic characters and events my picture is correct in all details. This part of the manuscript, 374 pages, was read and checked by eight or ten gentlemen who were on the American staff at the Conference. Several of these now hold important positions in the world of troubled international affairs; others are college presidents and professors, and I promised them all that their letters would be confidential. Suffice it to say that the errors they pointed out were corrected, and where they disagreed, both sides have a word in the book.

The story of the German secret agent in Paris and the love story which is woven through these scenes are of course fictional. But I knew of a story not so different—*amor inter arma*; and it happens that an old friend of mine had much the same experience with the Paris police as befalls my hero. The glimpses of world revolution and its makers which I give you are from first-hand knowledge, for many of these men and women have been my friends since youth; they know that I respect their sincerity even when I do not agree with their tactics. This may sound suspicious to the Dies Committee, but it is useful to a novelist.

A World on Fire

Now this offering of my spirit has been brought to maturity and goes out to you, my fellow-citizens of a world on fire. John Milton wrote, with no false modesty: "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-

spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." I make no such claim for *World's End*, but I can say that I have put into it the best spirit I have; also whatever of knowledge of the human heart, of the world we live in, and of the future we are helping to make. Will it be the good life for which the saints have pleaded, or the "World's End" by fire and sword which the prophet Isaiah predicted more than twenty-five centuries ago?

The above article was written for *Wings*, the monthly publication of the Literary Guild, which has taken *World's End* for its book for July, and is printing a first edition of 50,000 copies. The total printing of the book before publication is 83,000 copies.

W. E. Woodward: I hate to prophesy, but in this case I will lay aside that inhibition, and my prediction is that *World's End* will be considered one of the great novels of our time.

Theodore Dreiser: A powerful, timely novel that I believe all Americans should read.

Louis Adamic: Timely and simply loaded with importance.

Henry Goddard Leach: One of those novels created out of infinite pains and profound sincerity which points the way of destiny both to the individual and to society.

Carl Van Doren: *World's End* is Upton Sinclair's best novel since *The Jungle*.

Pearl S. Buck: I very rarely say anything about books but I am very glad to acknowledge Upton Sinclair's *World's End* because I read it with real enjoyment. I think that it is Mr. Sinclair's very best book and one which is very timely. To read it now is like seeing the future in a mirror.

Louis Bromfield: I certainly agree with Mr. Sinclair in believing that this is his best novel. It is a large and comprehensive work, very human and moving, dealing with a large subject of passionate interest to all the world at this moment.

Irving Stone: What a fine, brave, beautiful book it is! I wish every mature American could read it; how much of intelligence there would be in it for them, how much of understanding!

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Order from Upton Sinclair, 424 Madison Avenue, N. Y.

