THE BROADCASTING CAREER OF LOWELL THOMAS: A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF HIS PROFESSIONAL LIFE

DISSERTATION

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By

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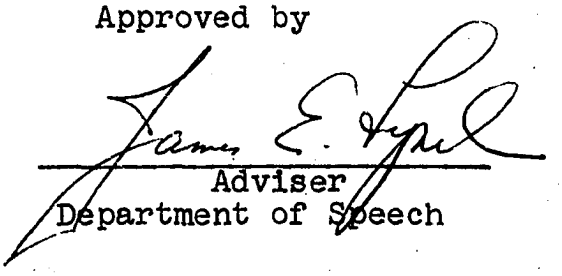

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Design of the Study

Perhaps it will serve as some indication of the task in writing about Lowell Thomas if one begins with a few lines from a note recently addressed by Thomas to his eighty-year old high school teacher, Mrs. Mabel Barbee Lee:

> I've told him I think he's undertaking a much too complicated job. His major problem when it comes to making a thesis on me, is that I'm involved in so many activities. As a result the poor man is lost in a maze. He should have tackled Ed Murrow or some other fellow whose life runs largely in one channel. Harnessing me is a bit like taking a boat down the Ganges, and suddenly finding that you are on one of a dozen other rivers that debauche from the Ganges and the Brahma-putra before the water reaches the Bay of Bengal.[1]

The note does indicate some of the scope of the problem involved in writing about a man whose professional life has embraced so many activities, and who has steadily remained in the spotlight of national and international publicity for forty years. The writer of this dissertation realized before embarking on the subject that no full-scale treatment, academic or popular, had been done on Thomas and that there had been no systematic evaluation of his multifaceted career.

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[1]Letter from Lowell Thomas to Mrs. Mabel Barbee Lee, June 15, 1964.

Because Thomas' career spans so long a time, it is difficult to locate colleagues and contemporaries who can provide valid commentary. So it developed that the inevitable chief source in the search for information became Thomas himself. He made available his library in his home in Pawling, New York, his complete set of radio scripts on file in his office on East 51st Street, New York, and agreed to a number of personal interviews.

The design of this study is partly historical, in that the author will attempt to assess the "whole man" beginning in his youth and continuing chronologically to the present. The study is also a critical one in that it attempts to put into perspective the various components which add up to the "image" of Lowell Thomas as he is known today. The study intends also to list his publications and methods of research for projected volumes, to give some insight into his modus operandi as an entrepreneur. Finally, after examining the firsthand materials made available to the author, the scripts, statements by Thomas, statements about him from colleagues and co-workers, critical notices, correspondence about Thomas from family friends or associates, and scholarly references which mention Thomas in a historical connection, an attempt will be made to evaluate Thomas' position in American broadcasting.

The author believes that the career of Lowell Thomas deserves a thorough investigation because his name is

something of a household word, and his radio network newscast holds the longest continuous run of any news program in American broadcasting history.[2] It has been on the air thirty-five years at the same time period. Moreover, the author presents the hypothesis that Thomas' name is synonymous with a certain kind of travel or adventure appeal; that he has become a kind of legend in his own time. It may very well prove to be of some importance for broadcast historians that no systematic study of Lowell Thomas has been undertaken until now.

Problems of the Researcher

The purpose of this study is to determine the essential role of Lowell Thomas over the years, and to examine chronologically the particular contributing factors which have produced a personality unique in American broadcasting. It is also to discover what his contributions to broadcasting have been in format, in style, in the creation of new techniques, and in influence upon other newsmen. It is also part of the intention of this study to separate the man from the myth, and to see the working performer as he is, separated from what might be called his "legend." It would also

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[2]Quincy Howe, "The Rise and Fall of the Radio Commentator," Saturday Review (October 26, 1957), p. 13. In this article, Howe states that in the 1920's Graham MacNamee and Floyd Gibbons pioneered the field of reporting news events by radio, and that Boake Carter and Lowell Thomas pioneered the field of newscasting. By the mid 1930's their names had become household words, he declares.

be germane to the topic to see just how much Thomas is a product of the media themselves and to what extent he has been an innovator. It will also be relevant to examine the qualities of durability and popularity, and to scrutinize the elements of his success and his continuing popularity.

Previous Studies

(A) Academic

A master's degree was granted to Presley D. Holmes in 1951 at the University of Michigan for his "Analysis of Lowell Thomas, Newscaster." This thesis examines ten aired newscasts from November 27, 1950, to December 8, 1950, with certain pre-established criteria. In particular, Holmes contends that Thomas is of the "choppy sentence school" in writing newscasts, but that over the air as voiced by Thomas these fragmented and incomplete sentences turn into something "highly agreeable to the ear." Some of the conclusions reached in this thesis are stated in Chapter V which treats Thomas' style.

There was a doctoral dissertation presented to the University of Wisconsin in 1955 by Frederick Ritter Dowling which included the newscasts of Thomas among the five news commentators examined in "The Style of Five Radio Commentators." Variations were noted between the word choices of these commentators: Elmer Davis, Edward R. Murrow, Lowell Thomas, Fulton Lewis, Jr., and Gabriel Heatter. Dowling

singled out Thomas for his wide range of topics in a daily newscast, for his "colorful and picturesque vocabulary," and his non-controversial stance which he characterized as "almost a-political."

(B) Related Academic Studies

Chester, Giraud. "The Radio Commentaries of H. V. Kaltenborn: A Case Study in Persuasion" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1947).

Dempsey, William C. "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Methods of Argumentation of News Commentator Fulton Lewis, Jr. as Found in His Broadcasts from Hawaii" (Master's thesis, State University of Iowa, 1947).

Goss, Inez B. "A Study of Walter Winchell's Sunday Evening Broadcasts Made in the Summer and Fall of 1948" (Master's thesis, Miami University, 1951).

Moore, Gary Lee. "The News Commentator in American Broadcasting, 1922-1950" (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1954).

Salter, James Q. "An Analysis of the Radio News Commentary of John T. Flynn" (Master's thesis, Stephen P. Austin State College, Texas, 1954).

Shephard, David. "The Radio Addresses of Henry J. Taylor, 1945-50" (doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1953).

Yaeger, Murry R. "An Analysis of Edward R. Murrow's See It Now Television Program" (doctoral dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1956).

The above-listed seven university studies illustrate the degree of specialization in radio-television research and they illustrate as well different modes of treating individual figures in broadcasting. As the titles indicate, the studies of H. V. Kaltenborn, Fulton Lewis, Jr., Walter

Winchell, John T. Flynn, Henry J. Taylor, and Edward R. Murrow investigate in depth matters pertaining only to the figures discussed and rarely mention colleagues or contemporaries except in cross-references or in the bibliographies.

Of the seven cited above, only three refer at all to Lowell Thomas. The dissertation by Giraud Chester refers to Thomas in a chapter treating the background history of the earliest commentaries by Kaltenborn; but this is a fleeting mention which provides no clues or "leads" to be developed. Gary Lee Moore has several references to Thomas in his master's thesis, including a sample script and an observation about Thomas' "genial, jovial tone of delivery," but the thesis contains no information or insights which the author wished to develop. Finally, the doctoral dissertation by David Shephard treating the radio addresses by Henry J. Taylor made one or more references to Thomas, and stated at one point that both men occupied a conservative, middle-of-the road position generally.

Thomas is usually referred to very briefly in most of the standard texts in broadcasting, although the references are under the "history of news development" or similar categories as in Television and Radio where his name is linked to the beginning of the Literary Digest-sponsored news

program in 1930.[3] He is not referred to in Sydney Head's Broadcasting in America.[4]

In books by Quincy Howe,[5] Cesar Saerchinger,[6] and Paul White[7] which treat the news-gathering processes and sometimes present biographies of famous news personalities to illustrate previous training in newspaper work before embarking on a career in radio news, one finds Thomas cited briefly. The pattern, however, is much the same: Thomas is often given credit for a "first" in some phase of remote or overseas broadcasting. Saerchinger calls attention to the excellence of Thomas' narration of the 1937 Coronation in London. Paul White speaks of his versatility in being able to broadcast from a submarine or an airplane or from some spot in the jungles of Africa; and Quincy Howe speaks of Thomas' "intuitive grasp of the news" but none of these writers examines his long career or specifically mentions his contribution to broadcasting.

The author found that Thomas apparently had not been taken seriously or given a thorough investigation by either

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[3]Giraud Chester, Garnet R. Garrison, Edgar E. Willis, Television and Radio (3rd ed.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 90.

[4]Sydney Head, Broadcasting in America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956).

[5]Quincy Howe, The News and How to Understand It (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1940).

[6]Cesar Saerchinger, Hello America! (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939).

the academic researchers previously or by the chroniclers of broadcasting history such as Head, White, Saerchinger, and others.

Modus Operandi

When the author had decided that he would like to write a dissertation on Lowell Thomas, he investigated the primary sources and found these wanting. He next examined the secondary sources, and sent for the above-cited university studies, additional bibliographies, articles relating to news broadcasters, and he made contact with Thomas himself. After permission was secured to research a dissertation, a plan was formed whereby a certain number of personal interviews with Thomas would take place spaced from November, 1963 (the initial meeting) to the spring and summer of 1964. It became clear, also, that as there was a paucity of relevant material written about Thomas, he would become a primary source himself. And as the researcher had access to his files, his library, his complete volumes of scripts from 1930 to 1964, it was felt that one could balance what Thomas related with supporting evidence from the materials at hand.

Also, the project was made known to officials of the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company in an effort to authenticate and to cross-check data. Specifically, Mr. Robert Brown, the Corporate Information Officer for NBC supplied the writer with a chronological

outline of Thomas' service with NBC, gave him permission to use the NBC library, but was not able to obtain interviews from him with senior newsmen. Similarly, from Mr. Arthur Hull Hayes's office in CBS contact was made with Mr. Frederick W. Friendly, President of CBS News who suggested that letters explaining the project be sent to the following: Mr. Richard C. Hotellet and Mr. Harry Reasoner--all of CBS News--who might provide candid commentary on Lowell Thomas. This was done, but their estimates of Thomas submitted have not been included since they tend to be uniformly laudatory and uncritical in nature.

In doing research on a living figure, the approach was necessarily somewhat different. It was important to obtain as much quantitative and qualitative information as possible initially and to sift this in order to separate the man from the myth. Moreover, the approach would differ markedly from those studies cited above, since this was an investigation of the "whole man" in relation to historical periods and to the media which helped produce him.

No limit was set on the number of interviews which would be conducted, but it was felt that after six interviews of some three hours each, most of the material would be covered, and additional material or queries could be handled by letter or correspondence. The interviews were conducted

for the most part in the offices of Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation on East 51st Street in New York, and the total time spent there with Thomas (exclusive of a trip to his home in Pawling, New York and two encounters in his Rockefeller Center Office) amounts to about twenty hours. The author spent approximately two weeks in the private office of Thomas reading his collected scripts, making photostats of material that he wished to include in the dissertation, checking over correspondence and photographs, and all of the ancillary material made available to the writer. Questions which needed answering by Thomas were typed on cards and forwarded to him. The first part of each succeeding interview was devoted to questions which had arisen from reading or inquiry. This plan of operation was followed from November, 1963, to June 8, 1964, the date of the last interview with approximately seven exchanges of notes and letters since that time.

Further, the writer scrutinized all of Thomas' literary activity. He assembled the forty-seven books printed under Thomas' name in his office and studied them in order to see a pattern of interest or motivation which reflected further on Thomas. The author also read most of Thomas' magazine articles and has accounted for those appearing in the Reader's Digest in Chapter IV.

Without claiming that he is an authority on Lowell Thomas, the author must, nonetheless, assume responsibility

for some subjective judgment in the dissertation. Further, as he has accounted for the dearth of critical materials and valid "outside" sources in shaping the dissertation, he presents the hypothesis that this is the first substantial outline of Thomas' life and career in broadcasting. Some areas of investigation which proved fruitless are mentioned in Chapter VIII under the heading "Areas for Further Research."

(C) Other materials

Countless magazine articles have appeared over the years, most of them being personality sketches for either trade publications or popular magazines. Most substantial of these are (1) "The 2,000,000 Words of Lowell Thomas" by Maurice Zolotow in Coronet, June, 1949) and (2) "Yes, There is a Lowell Thomas" by Russell Crouse in Reader's Digest, April, 1961, (3) "The Stranger Everyone Knows: Lowell Thomas" by Eleanor Harris in Reader's Digest, December, 1948. These articles tend to extol the exploits of Thomas and to enhance his public image as "king of the newscasters" in Miss Harris' phrase. It is this kind of article, reflecting a certain public relations quality, which may have prevented the more serious scholar fromcoming to grips with Thomas' personality or his role in broadcasting.

Most of the cursory items in the national magazines over a thirty-year period are concerned with some news happening to which Thomas is related; or possibly they

announce the founding of Cinerama in which he played a strategic role as a partner and financeer; or the launching of the television series High Adventure. Such items have been catalogued, as has every article of note on Thomas obtainable. But this dissertation will rely on no more than five or six of these articles.

Organization of the Dissertation

The first chapter introduces the study, states the purpose and design of the study, and states the reasons for the investigation. The second chapter provides the essential family background of Lowell Thomas in Ohio and later in Colorado where he got his first job as a reporter. In Chapter III, the writer traces the beginning of Thomas' radio career and mentions those factors contributing to survival and durability.

Chapter IV analyzes the "literary product" from 1924 through 1964 and points out the connection between his books and his broadcasting career as a whole. The interrelatedness of his creative effort is stressed. In Chapter V the key to his particular style is emphasis on "human interest," and the distinctive devices he uses are discussed. Chapter VI examines the content of his news programs over specified periods, and in many instances comparison with the New York Times is made in order to assess Thomas' degree of objectivity, to see what differences occur in the order and emphasis

of various items. In Chapter VII the over-all achievement of Lowell Thomas is examined, and his contribution to American broadcasting is suggested. The chapter also includes a section of criticism to balance the perspective. The final chapter summarizes the study and draws certain conclusions. This chapter accounts for the essential role of Thomas in broadcasting and summarizes the factors contributing to his popularity.

Summary

The purpose and the design of this dissertation were stated. The author believes that the career of Lowell Thomas deserves an investigation because his name is something of a household word, and he has held an eminent position in radio news for thirty-five years. It is also felt that a systematic study of Lowell Thomas might be of value to broadcast historians. Previous academic studies which relate to Lowell Thomas were cited, as well as a number of magazine articles treating some phase of his career, but none of these accounts for the "whole man" which is the approach used by the writer.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND OF LOWELL THOMAS

The Early Years

Lowell Jackson Thomas was born in Woodington, Darke County, Ohio, April 6, 1892, the son of Harry and Harriet Thomas. He was reared, however, in a Colorado gold camp at Cripple Creek, Colorado, for his parents moved to this mining community when Lowell was about five years of age. Dr. Harry G. Thomas, a general practitioner, apparently exerted a strong influence on his son; he encouraged and stimulated his appetite for adventure as well as his thirst for knowledge. Thomas admits that it was his father who really started him in his career by insisting on vocal training at an early age.[1]

It was Dr. Harry Thomas who saw that his son had a unique gift: a voice which compelled attention. He told young Lowell that it was unquestionably his most prized possession and that he must take steps to develop a pleasing voice for professional purposes. Dr. Thomas, therefore, took charge of his son's speech education by having him

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[1] "Biographical Sketch of Lowell Thomas" unpublished, undated release of six pages furnished by the Thomas office in New York, p. 1.

practice elocution, as it was then known, and by assigning him speeches of five or ten minutes' length which he would be expected to deliver. As it happened, Lowell Thomas was making short speeches on special occasions in Cripple Creek when he was nine and ten years of age. When he was a high school student, Dr. Thomas was convinced of his oratorical talent and predicted that his son would use his voice professionally.

> I have my father to thank that as a boy I was off to a good start. In the midst of the gold camps of the Wild West, he was a Christian teacher and physician who emphasized education. With my father's encouragement, I became proficient at public speaking.[2]

Dr. Harry G. Thomas was born May 30, 1869, in Hollansburg, Ohio. Both of his parents, Lowell's grandparents, were country school teachers, and Harry Thomas was brought up in a pioneer region with a background of emphasis on education and religion. Thomas has characterized the atmosphere of his boyhood home as one of "high thinking and plain living." But his father's most marked characteristic--that dominant trait of personality which Lowell inherited--was an insatiable yearning for knowledge and an enormous curiosity about the world.[3]

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[2]Roland Gammon, Faith is a Star (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1964), p. 156.

[3]"Biographical Sketch of Lowell Thomas," p. 3.

Dr. Harry G. Thomas taught in country schools for several years after he completed high school in order to earn money for a college education. First, he went to Lebanon University at Lebanon, Ohio. He was graduated from Lebanon in 1890 and went to the University of Cincinnati Medical School a few years later. When he had completed his medical degree, he moved to Leadville, Colorado, and later to Cripple Creek. As Lowell Thomas has stated: "My father made a study of the mountains which framed his backyard view in Cripple Creek. He loved those mountains; he found time to collect specimens of flowers and stones and to study the stars in the clear mountain air."[4]

In 1900, at Cripple Creek, Dr. Thomas organized study groups for the men and women of that region. He formed a Shakespeare Club and also joined a group of mining engineers who were doing advanced work in geology. His free hours were spent with his geology pick, studying the mineral formations of the Rockies or collecting rare specimens of alpine flowers. In the evenings, if he was free from his duty, he would carry a telescope to a nearby mountain to study the stars. It is hardly the purpose, however, of this study to sketch the details of Dr. Harry G. Thomas' life other than to show the strong influence he exercised on his son. Suffice it to say that the older Thomas, with his inquiring mind, his

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[4]Lowell Thomas, interview with author, November 1, 1963, New York City.

curiosity about the world, and his informal but aggressive program for training young Lowell in public speaking, inspired his son.

Lowell Thomas gives full credit to his father for discovering and developing his public speaking ability. Dr. Harry G. Thomas was obviously not a speech teacher, rhetorician or therapist of any kind; yet he had definite views on the importance of a pleasing, melodious voice, and he urged his son to get up before audiences to recite poetry or amusing stories. "In this way, I shed any self-consciousness that I might have had quite early. My father kept after me constantly to deliver these 'little pieces' before friends or at a banquet. He was my severest critic."[5]

In retrospect, Thomas admits today that his father was a strenuous taskmaster. "He kept me out of the saloons of Cripple Creek, busy with worthwhile intellectual pursuits. He was always stretching my mind to new horizons."[6] It is apparent that Lowell Thomas inherited something of his father's range of interests and his outlook; and since he actually began his career as a platform lecturer he utilized the skills he developed as a youngster under his father's tutelage.

Lowell Thomas' mother remained more quietly in the background and exerted, apparently, a far less definable

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[5]Lowell Thomas, letter to the Author, November 29, 1963.

[6]Ibid.

influence than his father. Today, Thomas thinks of his mother with affection, but admits that she was second in his affections as a boy.

> My mother, like my father, came of pioneer frontier stock. Her people were Wagners of English origin, and on her mother's side they were Dutch from New York. Her chief characteristic was patience, which I'm told I have inherited.
>
> Her primary interests were her husband, her children, and her church work. If there is anything special about my voice, I suspect I owe that to her. When she was a young woman, she sang in the choir and her voice always attracted attention.[7]

There is not much information that a researcher can locate about the early and formative years of Lowell Thomas. Yet to document this important phase of his life, reference to Mabel Barbee Lee, his high school teacher in Cripple Creek throws light on the atmosphere which prevailed at the gold mining camp. In her novel, Cripple Creek Days, in the dedication, "For Lowell Thomas," Mrs. Lee includes a short foreword by Thomas himself:

> There is only one first day of school that I can recall. That was one September morning when we were all surprised to find that we had a young and stunning redhead for a teacher, a girl who obviously was only a few years older than we were. Most of my teachers made less of an impression on me than did the men I met in the mines and the gambling halls. Except two: an Amazon who sat on me and there on the floor gave me a licking I'll never forget, and on the other, the lovely Mabel.[8]

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[7]Lowell Thomas, letter to the author, November 29, 1963.

[8]Mabel Barbee Lee, Cripple Creek Days (Garden City, N.Y., 1958), from the "Foreword," page xi.

In this same foreword to the book, Thomas reveals his enthusiasm for the outdoor life, and for Cripple Creek as a place to grow up in. He states further:

> None of us wanted to play hooky from her class, and playing hooky was a thing we all dreamed of and occasionally did. This was so that we could explore the abandoned mines and caves that made our part of the Rockies a place of magic for youngsters. How any boy could get good grades in a roaring camp like Cripple Creek in its heyday, with all the diversions we had, I don't know. Maybe that's just my alibi for the near-flunking record I racked up year after year.[9]

Actually, Thomas' academic record was good, and the above statement may have been made in a spirit of recklessness designed to show that he was a "regular fellow" who went along with the roughnecks of the camp. But Mrs. Lee, in her letter to the author, has said that Thomas was an exceptionally good student. She states her recollections of fifteen-year old Lowell Thomas as he appeared in her classroom:

> Generally speaking, I recall Lowell as a rather tall, slender lad of fourteen or fifteen, with dark wavy hair and blue eyes under heavy lashes.
>
> He was one of the best-looking, well-mannered, and most studious boys in high school. The kind any teacher would note and come to love. He was in a Spanish class which I taught, and one or two history classes which I struggled with, because I had little preparation for that subject.
>
> I lived in dread of Lowell's asking me questions in class which I could not answer. And he did just that two or three times. I had him as a pupil for two years.[10]

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[9] Ibid., p. ix.

[10] Letter from Mrs. Lee to the author of May 29, 1964.

Mrs. Lee concludes her letter by stressing the intellectual home environment in which Thomas grew up; by stating that he was an unusually bright student; and that his parents' cabin in Cripple Creek was something of a cultural oasis in those bleak surroundings.

The period from high school to college years is rather uneventful; but it might be characterized as a journey in experience from Cripple Creek (where he had spent a total of ten years) to the Middle West where he was to spend five years. There had never been much spending money, and the young Thomas had learned to be frugal and saving with the money he earned. There seemed to be no question but that he would attend college; yet he would have to find a scholarship or work part-time to pay the tuition. Through his father, Dr. Thomas, he learned that the University of Northern Indiana offered a good education and that he might work at odd jobs to pay his way.

While working his way through the University of Northern Indiana at Valparaiso, Thomas was a janitor, a book salesman, and a night cook in a railroad short-order restaurant. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree when he was eighteen years of age; and then decided to move to the University of Denver for a master's degree.[11] Upon his return

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[11] "Biographical Sketch of Lowell Thomas," op. cit., p. 5.

to Colorado, he also began working part-time on the Cripple Creek Times and within a year became editor of the two mining camp daily papers, The Victor Record and The Victory Daily News. In his spare time, as he advanced in his work at the University of Denver he also reported for The Denver Post.

It is interesting to note that Lowell Thomas holds a master's degree from the University of Denver in English Literature. He believed that a thorough grounding in literature, poetry, and drama, in addition to certain courses in rhetoric, would stand him in good stead wherever he went and whatever line of work he later adopted. He has commented that "my nose in those days was always buried in a book. Often it was poetry, but more often it was in heroic sagas of adventure."[12] Thomas also admits that he had not known of formal courses offered at the time in journalism as a separate discipline other than at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. But he states that as he completed his graduate work at the University of Denver, his mind turned more to law, and he had very little interest in journalism as such.[13]

From Colorado he returned to the Midwest to study law in Chicago at the Chicago Kent College of Law where his skill

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[12]Lowell Thomas, in interview with author, Nov. 21, 1963 in New York.

[13]Lowell Thomas, in letter to the author, Nov. 29, 1963.

at public speaking so impressed the dean that he put Lowell Thomas in charge of a class of forensics and asked him to teach a class in stage oratory. Thomas remained in Chicago for two years, and made two summer trips to Alaska. There he experimented with a newsreel camera, and succeeded in bringing back enough usable footage to make one half-hour feature on "Life in the Yukon." These were the years of 1912-1913 and the college record or experience of Thomas is a bit difficult to document for this period. He has stated that his real reason for moving to Chicago was to get closer to big city life; and he felt that the thriving metropolis of Chicago would be a better proving ground for his talents. Yet he was not certain at all what these talents were precisely or what his ultimate profession would be.

The possibility of a career in public life, of running for elective office, intrigued Thomas for a few years and it was partly with this motivation that he entered Chicago Kent. Yet he did not complete his law degree there, for he was sidetracked into something else:

> They discovered somehow that I had done a lot of public speaking, and because the head of their Forensic Oratory Department was obliged to drop out for some complicated family reasons, they asked me to sit in as his substitute.
>
> After a few weeks, they decided they wanted me to stay on in that capacity. So I had a rather unique opportunity: attempting to teach public

> speaking to several hundred embryo lawyers, all of whom were older than I was.[14]

During the two-year period at Chicago Kent, he taught public speaking to support himself and to pay his tuition in the law school. These were years when he was discovering the tempo of a large American city, when he was entirely on his own financially, when he managed to show his Alaskan film "Life in the Yukon" a few times to luncheon groups such as the Rotary Club and the Chicago Athletic Club. Nonetheless, Thomas has characterized this time in Chicago as "an uncertain and lean" period.

> In Chicago I discovered that I did not want to be tied to a desk in a law office in the Middle West. But I was not about to give up the law. I succeeded in getting a scholarship to do graduate work at Princeton University in constitutional law under Professor Corwin who was Woodrow Wilson's successor. Corwin was the number one authority on constitutional law.[15]

Again at Princeton University, as had happened at Chicago Kent, they discovered he had experience and ability in public speaking. According to Thomas, he was asked, about two months after he arrived, to become head of the Department of Speech. Specific details of his function at Princeton are lacking, and no corroborating information was obtainable from Princeton University in this regard.

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[14]Lowell Thomas, letter to the Author, October 7, 1964.

[15]Ibid.

In 1914, Thomas was registered as a graduate student in constitutional law at Princeton; but he took formal course work for only one semester. Yet he remained for two years, and in his own words, "ran the speech department."

> So during my two years at Princeton I was a graduate student, ran the speech department, and also did a lot of lecturing on week-ends in Philadelphia, New York, Trenton, and so on. It was this experience which I found intriguing and remunerative as well.[16]

He relates that upon America's entry into World War I, he was asked to take an interesting assignment in Europe and so "did not bother to finish a thesis or get a diploma."

> At that time, degrees seemed unimportant because of the nature of my work. I believe I am listed as having an M.A. from Princeton, but that was simply an automatic one that came after my first year of graduate work.
>
> My intention had been to stay and get a Ph.D. Yet from that time on, all degrees I ever received were honorary. I believe there are some twenty of these, two of which were awarded to me in recent months. My old law school, Chicago Kent, and a university out in Utah, Brigham Young.[17]

Thomas has commented candidly on this formulative period of his life in college. His college experiences were different from those of most graduate students in that he had his eyes turned to adventure and travel as well as to books. He read adventure stories at night and frequently attended travel lectures whenever these appeared; and he

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[16]Lowell Thomas in a letter to the author, October 7, 1964.

[17]Ibid.

believed that he could improve on the standard type of travel-lecture.

At the outbreak of World War I, Lowell Thomas was trying to find a workable and profitable formula for himself. He wavered, then, between a somewhat bookish desire to practice law or to teach rhetoric on the one hand; and on the other, to sail the seven seas and to satisfy the inborn adventurer.

Thomas as Lecturer

While teaching rhetoric at Princeton, and steadily losing interest in constitutional law, Thomas received a letter from the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane. Lane, in the spring of 1916, was launching a "See America" movement partly because the war had shut off travel to Europe. Someone in Washington advised him that Lowell Thomas at Princeton University was an expert on Alaska and so a letter was sent to Thomas asking him to come and to explore the possibilities of a lecture tour, selling the merits of Alaska to urban audiences in the United States.

In request for specific information concerning this Department of the Interior speaking tour, Thomas answered as follows:

> During my second year at Princeton, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane asked me to take over the "See America" movement and stir up interest in America, in Western wonders, national parks, and so on. But, our entry into World War I interfered with

> this, and I never did a speaking tour for the Department of the Interior. At the end of World War I, I did put on a series of illustrated productions, with my own personal narration, in New York City. These turned out to be something of a sensation, and resulted in my getting an invitation to do likewise in London, where I broke all records, and that was followed by what I surmise was the most extensive speaking tour of the world that anyone ever made. More than a million people came to hear me in London alone. By then, I was concentrating on the story of the Near East campaign, and the title of my production was "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." To answer your question more specifically about my first speaking engagement in the U.S.A.: I opened at the largest theatre in New York, "The Century," which is no longer in existence. From there I moved to Madison Square Garden. Then, to London, and so on.[18]

Early Experience with Films

Thomas began comparing himself with other lecturers of the day who were accustomed to reading scripts or speaking from notes when giving illustrated talks. He took note of their platform manner and recalled a precept which he had formed earlier in Chicago: "I shall make a few notes beforehand, think out carefully what I have to say, and refrain from reading a script before an audience when the film is being projected. They detest that."[19] Thomas hired a projectionist to help him; and they made about $35 a week between them with his Alaskan film. Thomas spoke in a more

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[18]Letter to author, October 7, 1964.

[19]Lowell Thomas, interview with author, April 19, 1964, New York.

swashbuckling style than other platform speakers and he was frequently, deliberately, humorous.

According to information provided by his office, Thomas visited the fighting fronts in 1917-1918 at the request of the Department of the Interior. He was sent to Europe with three assistants: two of these were cameramen, and the other a reporter like himself.

> Lowell Thomas followed the German Revolution of 1918 from its birthplace in Kiel to the mountains of Bavaria. From Central Europe, he arrived in Paris in time to provide President Wilson and his colleagues with the first eyewitness report on civil war in Germany.
>
> At the request of President Wilson, he made a report for the Peace Conference on the state of affairs in Germany.[20]

The statement above issued by his office might be disputed, and as the event has now receded into history there is virtually no one alive to disprove the statement; but exactly how Thomas came to the attention of President Wilson's advisers in the State Department, this researcher was unable to learn.

In the summer of 1917, shortly before he left for the Middle East and his encounters with Allenby and Lawrence, he paid a visit to Denver in order to ask Miss Frances Ryan to marry him. Thomas had known her as a student at the University of Denver and had corresponded with her a few times.

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[20]"Biographical Sketch of Lowell Thomas," op. cit., p. 2.

They were married and five years later had one son, Lowell, Jr. who presently lives in Alaska.

After the cessation of hostilities in Europe, Mrs. Thomas accompanied her husband to London and later around the world on his lecture tours. Although content to play a quiet role in the background, Mrs. Thomas has served as his business manager and still supervises to some extent his business affairs.

Learning about General Edmund Allenby's campaign to recover Palestine from the Turks, Thomas had gone to the Holy Land with two cameramen and covered the battles that led up to the taking of Jerusalem. Then came the pivotal adventure of his life--his meeting with the Oxford scholar, T. E. Lawrence who inspired the revolt of Arabian tribesmen against the Turkish and German armies. It seems that Lowell Thomas, from his own account, found Lawrence shy and withdrawing, and yet he broke down this reticence and obtained the story of an academic archeologist who had turned guerilla leader.[21]

There is a great deal of material concerning the Lawrence legend and Lowell Thomas' part in it which has little relevance in this study except that it is important for an over-all understanding of Thomas' sudden rise to fame as the "discoverer" of Lawrence. It is true that Thomas did utilize Lawrence's story commercially for a number of years,

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[21]Lowell Thomas, With Lawrence in Arabia (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1924), p. 12.

and that their meeting in Jerusalem gave Thomas the idea for a successful lecture tour based on Lawrence's exploits. As recently as June 1964, Thomas pursues the Lawrence legend in order to clarify the record. His twenty-three page article does not quibble historically with the producers of the film, "Lawrence of Arabia," but he does take exception to the way the film portrayed the man; and he proffers his own version of how Lawrence looked, acted, spoke, dressed, and behaved. Yet this article is essentially a re-working of earlier materials as close examination of With Lawrence in Arabia will reveal.[22]

The author does not feel that much of the Lawrence of Arabia affair is germane to this dissertation; but Thomas was asked about it, because he is recognized as an authority on Lawrence. The meeting with Lawrence in 1917 he characterizes as "one of the most fortunate stepping-stones in my career." When Thomas returned to the United States in 1919, some of the notoriety had already preceded him. And after a few months of lecturing at the Century Theatre in New York, Lowell Thomas was no longer a relatively obscure lecturer-correspondent; he was no longer an "unknown." He was definitely becoming a celebrity, at least in the New York City area. His lectures there drew capacity audiences; and gradually when he began touring the country, he was well on

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[22]Lowell Thomas, "The Real Lawrence of Arabia," Reader's Digest (June, 1964), pp. 252-274.

the road to fame. Quincy Howe states that Thomas delivered his Allenby-Lawrence lecture 4,000 times to 4,000,000 people.[23]

In the next ten years, he delivered the identical lecture with the identical films to audiences all over the world. In a sense, this was a means of launching two celebrities at the same time: Lawrence of Arabia and Lowell Thomas. From a collection of laudatory comments gathered into a booklet of sixteen pages privately published in 1927[24] one has evidence that "With Lawrence in Arabia" and "With Allenby in Palestine" were remarkable specimens of platform showmanship. With all of the publicity surrounding the lecture, Thomas had a personal staff of only one secretary to handle correspondence; he did not engage a publicity agent, a "front man" or even a speaker's bureau to book the tour. He did it all himself, including gathering the photos and materials for the "memorial pamphlet" referred to.

The kind of informative entertainment found in With Lawrence in Arabia" seems still to be a hallmark Thomas identifies with. For instance, Thomas stated in an interview that he used 16 milimeter black and white film; he used his own voice "live" but synchronized to fit the given segments

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[23]Quincy Howe, The News and How to Understand It (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 40.

[24]Pamphlet printed in 1927 to advertise the lectures and books of Thomas.

where narration was called for. In certain instances, too, the film stopped and a colored slide was used. At this point, Lowell Thomas advanced the story, then signaled the projectionist to take up the film again. Music was specially written and provided by a live orchestra. On some occasions, he did use an organ. But in London, at Covent Gardens at one time he made use of a sixty-piece orchestra. The lecture tour used the latest innovations in presentation available. Thomas was not merely the narrator-host for the evening's performance, he was the producer of the program as well.

Thomas does not like the word "lecture" and prefers to call it a "show." He designed it to be a spectacular kind of entertainment, and one can sense from the scale and scope of the performances the faint beginnings of the format used in his later Cinerama productions.

The pamphlet which Thomas had printed in 1927 offers the story of the lecture tour, along with glowing accounts of the press. There are comments from Mr. Lloyd George: "Everything that Lowell Thomas tells us about Colonel Lawrence is true." There is a photograph of the Bishop of Gloucester, the millionth visitor to hear the lecture, offering his congratulations to Thomas. The Manchester Guardian stated: "It is history without dogma, without dullness. It is filled with adventure and beauty." Of passing interest are the two concluding stories in the pamphlet. The first is "How I Discovered Lowell Thomas" by Percy

Burton, the impressario who handled Bernhardt and others. It tells of the financial and legal details involved in bringing Thomas to Covent Garden. Secondly, "A Yankee Captures London" by Captain Alan Bott tells of the enthusiasm of the English audiences and it abounds in superlatives for the lecture.

Importance of the Celebrity

It was during his ten-year period as a platform lecturer (1918-1928) that Lowell Thomas became increasingly aware of the special status accorded the celebrity or the Very Important Person. And it is one of the conclusions of this study, expressed in greater detail in Chapter VIII, that Thomas has consciously used important persons, or "names in the news" all of his life as a means of enhancing his own career. In brief, he sensed the value of the "star" system quite early; and he transferred some of the showmanship values of Hollywood to the news field. He began to be photographed regularly while on his Indian tour and while in Africa with the leading figures of the day who might also be on safari. It is from this period that his elaborate files of photographs date. The author discovered that this awareness of the V.I.P. has been a consistent career-building stratagem. In looking over the hundreds of photographs in Thomas' collection, one realizes the importance to Thomas of being photographed with King George V, with General Allenby,

with President Hoover, with President Roosevelt, or with Lawrence of Arabia outside his tent in the desert. Thomas understands how the "glamor" or celebrity industry works in this country and has utilized this understanding from his earliest days as a lecturer. "Being close to those in the news helps build the reporter's own reputation and possibly some of the lustre rubs off on the man who is merely taking down the story."[24]

Summary

The second chapter, "The Background of Lowell Thomas," has been concerned mainly with setting forth in chronological order biographical information about his early life. For the first twenty years of his life, his father, Dr. Harry G. Thomas exerted a dominant influence. He not only encouraged him to develop his speaking voice but launched him informally at an early age as a speaker for social functions in Cripple Creek.

His college experiences were chronicled at the University of Northern Indiana, at Chicago Kent Law School, and at Princeton. He was interested in constitutional law, in editing a newspaper, and yet quite uncertain of his eventual professional development. In 1919 he married Frances Ryan of Denver who went with him on his lecture tours; they have one son, Lowell, Jr., who was born in 1922. The meeting with

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[24]Lowell Thomas, in interview with the author, June 1, 1964.

Colonel Lawrence in Jerusalem was cited as being a fortunate steppingstone, for it led ultimately to ten years of platform lecturing. Thomas had definite ideas as a producer of his own lecture program of what theatrical elements he wished to use, and the devices to enhance With Lawrence in Arabia and With Allenby in Palestine are described.

The chapter endeavors to explain the simple, rural Ohio background which produced Thomas, and the emphasis on "plain living and high thinking" which characterized his father, and to some degree Thomas himself. Further, it was emphasized that Thomas has always had a kind of "romantic readiness for experience" along with a certain flexibility and mobility so that he could profit from an opportunity wherever it developed. Over the years fame and financial independence came through his innate business sense and his sense of showmanship.

CHAPTER III

THE RADIO CAREER

In this chapter we shall be concerned with the opportunity presented to Lowell Thomas in 1929 as the successor to Floyd Gibbons; the role which William Paley played in launching Thomas' career; and we shall see what the prevailing atmosphere was like in broadcasting in the very early 1930's among his rivals and colleagues. In general, this chapter will develop the framework of Lowell Thomas' career and attempt to show the singular consistency of his on-the-air personality. More detailed analysis and investigation will follow in subsequent chapters.

The Opportunity

In 1929 Floyd Gibbons was broadcasting over the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) for fifteen minutes at 6:00 PM six nights a week. With his staccato, machine-gun delivery he reeled off fifteen minutes of news on behalf of the Literary Digest. His listening audience as well as his sponsor held him in high regard; but he was only on the air for seven months. Gibbons' picture with his famous eye-patch, which was the badge of a wound he received while a war correspondent during World War I, was familiar everywhere. But

as Thomas revealed, Gibbons was a hard-drinking, hard-fisted journalist of the old school, who ten seconds before air time might fill the air with "blue language that would curl the hair of a Ute Indian."[1] His sponsors came to dislike his personal habits and reacted unfavorably to his mannerisms and to his swashbuckling behavior. Soon they were looking for either a replacement or simply to end the matter altogether.

In the summer of 1930, Floyd Gibbons and his sponsor, the Reader's Digest, reached a definite parting of the ways. This appeared to leave the field wide open for the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), if they could find a successor whom the sponsor would be willing to accept. According to Thomas, there followed a contest between the two networks when the break was announced, and columnists, personalities from the speaking platform, editors, and writers began auditioning for the job. Yet none seemed to satisfy the Digest hierarchy who had become accustomed to Floyd Gibbons and his skill as a fast talker.

William S. Paley's role

The Literary Digest had virtually decided to give up radio when one of William S. Paley's associates at CBS decided to call in Lowell Thomas. He introduced Thomas to

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[1]Lowell Thomas, interview with author, June 1, 1964, in New York City.

Paley, and Paley was sufficiently impressed with his background and his speaking manner to stage a rather elaborate audition.

The story of how this audition took place, how the first script was written as a kind of joint effort, and how Lowell Thomas actually launched his radio career is worthy of mention:

> Bill Paley saw what appeared to be a real chance to land the Literary Digest contract. He said to me, 'We must not fail. This tryout news broadcast must be a masterpiece. Columbia will loan you its best brains to prepare it.'
>
> This gave me quite a jolt. I didn't quite understand how Columbia's "best brains" could help me prepare a fifteen minute talk. But I replied: OK, if you are going to give me your finest brains, why, I'll round up the best brains I can think of and we'll really make it an event.
>
> Three days later here is what happened: I rented the penthouse at the Princeton Club in New York for an all-day session. Mr. Paley sent his best brains and I brought mine. That is, I called up my publisher at Garden City, Long Island, and said: "Mr. Doubleday, have you any brains out there?" When I explained, he told me that he would send in several of their brightest young men. So when we sat down at the Princeton Club at 9 A.M. that morning to discuss how to prepare a radio news broadcast and what to include, our group was made up of the following: from CBS, Jesse Butcher, director of public relations (which some months later became the first news department). Butcher was a veteran newsman from the New York Times. Also, Nick Dawson, whom I was told was able to 'do almost anything in radio.' He had been an actor, a circus man, and had many talents. And for his third man, Mr. Paley sent Paul Kesten, one of their young executives who later became chairman of the Board of CBS. Doubleday sent me George Elliman and a young manuscript reader who spent his spare time writing verse, Ogden Nash.

> I also brought along Prosper Buranelli, who had been a star feature writer on the New York Herald; and an old personal friend who had managed several road companies of my Allenby-Lawrence show, and who likewise later became famous: Dale Carnegie.
>
> This was in the Prohibition era, and knowing something about the habits of newspapermen, I brought a flagon of something, that might refresh them, from our farm in Dutchess county.
>
> Nick Dawson and Dale Carnegie got into an argument as to how you should start a news show. At the end of the day, they still hadn't come to an agreement. Never was there a stormier debate than went around that table. We never did get to the business of writing a script, except for a few paragraphs turned out by Ogden Nash.
>
> Late in the afternoon, seeing that we were getting nowshere, Prosper and I disappeared; the others not even missing us. We hurriedly put together some notes and went up to CBS and I went on the air at six o'clock.[2]

William S. Paley, Chairman of the Board of CBS states that in 1930 he was instrumental in getting Lowell Thomas started as a broadcaster and that now Thomas surely holds a title: radio's most durable career.[3] Paley claims that Thomas has been on the air longer than any other American newscaster, and that he has been heard at the same time-segment in the evening which is a sort of record in itself and tends to make Thomas "a kind of living institution."[4]

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[2]Lowell Thomas in "Foreword" to History as You Heard It (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), pp. ix-x.

[3]Ibid., p. x.

[4]At the present, Thomas' Buick-sponsored program is heard at 6:45 P.M. (E.S.T.) but is only ten minutes in length. Thomas was reduced to ten minutes in 1958.

Paley continues in the "Foreword" to History as You Heard It:

> The year 1930 is not one that many people remember with pleasure. Few reputations were made that year; it was a time when many things were ending and very few were beginning. Yet something important did begin.
>
> To many it may seem incredible that in 1930 there was only one daily newscast. And it had been on the air for only seven months. But in that time it had brought further fame to a picturesque war correspondent named Floyd Gibbons. His popularity was no doubt enhanced by the fact that his program preceded Amos n' Andy, and also because he gave the impression of talking faster than anyone who had ever faced a microphone.[5]

Colleagues and Rivals

The American Broadcasting Company commentator and writer, Quincy Howe sounded a somewhat dire note in 1957 when he spoke of the general picture of decline for the radio commentator.

> Less than twenty years have passed since the conjunction of the radio industry and the Second World War brought the news analyst, or commentator into sudden being . . . the conjunction of television, peace, and prosperity threatens him with gradual extinction.[6]

Although eight years later, the news commentator is not yet extinct, relatively few of the men who emerged as commentators before World War II are still appearing on national radio networks.

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[5] Ibid., p. vii.

[6] Quincy Howe, "The Rise and Fall of the Radio Commentator," Saturday Review (October 26, 1957), p. 13.

Lloyd Morris, the social historian, has written about the importance of radio in shaping attitudes and molding opinion:

> By the middle of the century, the evaluation of news had become one of the most important services undertaken by radio. . . . It was also, by its nature, one of the most delicate and difficult. For the meaning of the news is necessarily a matter of opinion. Specialists and experts, like all human beings, are subject to prejudice. And in certain fields--such as foreign policy, industrial relations, social legislation--the real implications of news may be a matter of controversy. On the whole, the evaluation of news furnished by the four national networks was singularly free from bias, partisanship and distortion. A number of radio's news analysts were outstanding for their achievement in informing and educating public opinion rather than seeking to influence it.[7]

The radio news commentator was an unusual kind of radio performer in the 1930's. He was as much a feature writer as a reporter, because he frequently explained the importance of the news he reported. He was related to the editorial writers of newspapers and magazines, because he frequently offered his own opinions; and commentators sometimes had much in common with gossip columnists. There were few guide lines, few precedents, few declared policies of operation and certainly no manuals of style.

Most news broadcasts on the networks during the period between 1927 and 1932 were identified by the name of the man reading the news. David Lawrence, Frederick William Wile,

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[7]Lloyd Morris, Not Long Ago (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 485.

H. V. Kaltenborn, Floyd Gibbons were the forerunners of Lowell Thomas. At NBC, for instance, the identification of news programs as the "Kaltenborn program" came about rather naturally. The use of the name also made news gathering somewhat easier. "The name Lowell Thomas was sufficient to win access to many official circles where the regular press was not welcom."[8]

Many network newscasts presented a particular aspect of the news, suggesting that the person reading the news was expert in certain matters. During the 1933-34 season, George Holmes, chief of the International News Service Washington Bureau, was identified with the "Washington Bureau." Frederick William Wile's newscast was titled "The Political Situation," and Edwin C. Hill was identified with "The Human Side of the News."[9] This identification of personalities with news program was one factor which influenced the development of news commentary.

David Bulman has stated that there were only two full-time professional newsmen in the network radio before 1934: H. V. Kaltenborn and Lowell Thomas.[10] Kaltenborn appeared on radio as early as 1922, left his job on the staff of the

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[8]Abel Alan Schechter, I Live on Air (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1941), p. 21.

[9]Robert R. Smith, "The Wartime Radio News Commentaries of Raymond Swing: 1939-1945" (doctoral dissertation, the Ohio State University, 1963), p. 3.

[10]David Bulman, Molders of Opinion (2nd ed.; Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1946), p. 46.

Brooklyn Eagle to join the CBS staff permanently in 1931. Thomas, who had been touring as a lecturer and whose fame was growing rapidly because of the 1924 Garden City edition of With Lawrence in Arabia, went into radio in 1930 because it increased the demand for his services as a lecturer.[11]

Lowell Thomas and H. V. Kaltenborn are important in Bulman's estimate because they possess two of the characteristics identified later with news commentators: authority and precise knowledge of foreign places and problems. Thus the seeds of professionalism grew during a phenomenon known as the "press-radio war" (1933-35) and radio news commentary was popularized by certain men of talent in reporting. The advancement of radio as a news medium was temporarily halted by the pressure of newspaper interests who feared the rivalry of broadcast news. There ensued from 1933 to 1935 the "press-radio war" during which time radio news bulletins were limited by agreement to thirty words and a time schedule that prohibited the airing of news while it was fresh off the wires.[12]

No treatment of the early radio career of Lowell Thomas would be complete if it failed to point out two rather important factors: (1) Lowell Thomas had very little to do

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[11]Paul White, News on the Air (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1947), p. 25.

[12]Chester, Garrison, and Willis, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

with any other radio newsmen in a professional sense and has steadfastly preferred to work alone and (2) Lowell Thomas is the sole survivor among many names which have come and gone in what is now broadcasting history. From the extensive compilation by Harrison B. Summers, "Radio Programs Carried on National Networks--1926-1956"[13] one sees a rather dramatic pattern of a few radio newsmen in the 1930's to a mushrooming growth in a period of big expansion during the war and immediately afterward, to a rather calm "finale" about 1956 in which only a handful of names are found. But Lowell Thomas' name remains as a constant thread in the pattern.

For example, in the season, 1930-31, Summers lists only six names who delivered the news, either sponsored or sustaining. Lowell Thomas was sponsored by the Literary Digest; the other five were carried sustaining by their networks. They were: H. V. Kaltenborn, William S. Hard, David Lawrence, Frederick William Wile, and Charles Fleisher.[14] In the 1939-40 broadcasting year, there were about 25 full-time commentators or newsmen of established reputation on the networks.[15] Many of the same names plus a few new ones are found in the 1943-44 period; and yet the "corps" of newsmen has grown to about forty featured personalities in the 1952-53 period.

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[13]Harrison B. Summers, "Radio Programs Carried on National Network--1926-1956," The Ohio State University Press, 1958.

[14]Ibid., p. 21.

[15]Ibid., p. 160.

Such names as Boake Carter, Edwin C. Hill, George Holmes, Gabriel Heatter, Raymond Swing, General Hugh S. Johnson, Dorothy Thompson, Cesar Saerchinger, Walter Winchell, Elmer Davis, Henry J. Taylor and others listed by Dr. Summers have either died, drifted into other occupations, or are retired. It is true that Fulton Lewis, Jr. is regularly heard on Mutual at the time of this writing, and that Walter Winchell is on the air sporadically; but none has approximated the year-in-year-out record of Lowell Thomas, with as few sponsor changes and little or no change in the broadcast hour. Thomas has had four major sponsors: the Literary Digest, Sun Oil, Proctor and Gamble, and General Motors. He did go on the air from 1950 to 1952 for Kaiser Motors; but has been sponsored by General Motors since 1952. In particular, he has been sponsored by the Oldsmobile Division of General Motors for the past four years, and at present by Buick.

Television activity

Lowell Thomas appeared on NBC-TV from February 21, 1940 to June 29, 1940 during the quarter hour, 6:45-7:00 P.M. in the first television and radio news simulcast on the air. He was also the host narrator for "Our American Heritage" during the season 1960-1961 on NBC. He has made numerous guest appearances on all networks. Philosophically, Thomas stated that "since I'm no longer young or attractive, and

never pretended to look like Michelangelo anyway, I'd as soon be the disembodied voice coming over the radio."[16] He implies that he does not care for television; although this might be interpreted that, for one reason or another, he did not actually have the same impact that he has had on radio. It has been suggested in several quarters that he is simply too short physically, and that his voice does not match his rather small physique of five feet, seven inches. Yet, his hour-long series on CBS in 1960-61, "High Adventure" would seem to prove that he could circumvent the aforementioned difficulties and even ingratiate himself with the television audience. He has revealed to the author that he has made no particular plans for the 1965-66 television season other than an occasional, unscheduled guest appearance.

The second part of this chapter is concerned with the factors which contribute to Thomas' longevity or durability in broadcasting. The author knows no scientific research process which separates the "charisma" of a magnetic personality into its component parts; but he will try to list and to assess those qualities which have kept him in public favor for thirty-five years.

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[16] Lowell Thomas, in interview with author June 4, 1964, in New York City.

Factors Contributing to Durability

Aside from Arthur Hull Hayes's calling Lowell Thomas "Mr. Radio" at a banquet of the Broadcast Pioneers, and William S. Paley referring to him as "radio's most durable personality," there are several reasons for Thomas' enduring career.

He remains with a medium he knows and understands best: radio. "I still think radio is a better medium for disseminating news than television; because most news is mental not pictorial."[17] Thomas had one year of television news experience in 1940-41 at NBC and perhaps it was the experimental nature of the medium, perhaps Thomas' discomfort under the lights and the added complexity which caused him to renounce it. There is also the question of age, and he may feel that 72 is too advanced an age to appear before the cameras regularly. Since he no longer prefaces the Cinerama film productions with his "Introduction" it is reasonable to assume that this is his acquiescence to age.

If he finds greatest loyalty among the senior citizens of the listening audience (and there are no audience research studies to prove or to disprove this), it is safe to say that the "basic Midwestern appeal" of his mildly conservative personality commands a certain loyalty, and that this loyalty has been sustained over the years.

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[17] Lowell Thomas, interview with the author, June 1, 1964, New York.

This writer believes, however, that Quincy Howe has expressed accurately the reasons for Thomas' survival:

> In the 1920's Graham MacNamee and Floyd Gibbons pioneered the field of reporting news events by radio.
> Lowell Thomas and Hans von Kaltenborn pioneered the field of newscasting. By the mid-thirties, their names had become household words.
> A few dozen other notables have come and gone with meteoric records which have since faded.
> Only Lowell Thomas now remains.[18]

Howe states in this same article that the qualities for stamina, the qualities which make not for momentary fame but for permanence in such an ephemeral trade as broadcasting are quite simply, "a rare blend of talent, character, and experience."

In an informal inquiry, the author asked John Day, Director of News and Public Affairs at Station WHDH, Boston, Massachusetts what the principal factors in Thomas' "sustained popularity" are. Day, a seasoned newsman in his own right, stated that Thomas answered the qualifications he looked for in applicants at WHDH. That is, Thomas would score highly in a check list of these personal attributes:

1. Perception and insight
2. Curiosity about the world? A good reporter has an insatiable appetite for information.
3. Clarity. Does the news come from a coherent, clear script? Is it clearly delivered?

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[18] Quincy Howe, "The Rise and Fall of the Radio Commentator," Saturday Review (October 26, 1957), p. 13.

4. Accuracy. Can the listener trust the statements made? Has the man a record of achievement that speaks for accuracy and reliability?

5. Resourcefulness. Is the radio reporter able to dig out the facts of a story despite obstacles? Will he go aboard a spaceship, a submarine, a volcano to record a short feature?

The above constitute an informal check list of qualifications that add up to what Day considers the complete newsman.[19]

The author requested Don Mozley, Director of News and Public Affairs for KCBS, San Francisco, California to reply to much the same question on the durability of Lowell Thomas. Mozley stated that Thomas had been able to arrive at the facts and to inform the public notwithstanding some barriers and problems especially during wartime. When these problems (sources, quotations, government censorship) loomed," Lowell Thomas effectively surmounted them; he seems to solve his problems quietly and not to talk about them."[20] He added that Thomas' durability was attributable to his imperturbability and his gift "to ad-lib on the air in case of an emergency" was not to be discounted.

One could also use the measuring stick which was applied by Howe to H. V. Kaltenborn. Howe found that both Kaltenborn and Thomas had authority and the background of travel. These convincing qualities are felt by the listener

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[19]Letter to the author, July 14, 1964 from John Day, WHDH, Boston.

[20]Letter to the author, June 17, 1964 from Don Mozley, KCBS, San Francisco, California.

at home, and because they are intangibles they are difficult to assess.

Don Mozley attempted further to account for Thomas' durability and his place in radio network news:

> I think he is durable because he is such a good salesman for the news. A newscast need not be thought of purely in terms of an institutional public service feature. Good newscasts attract and hold listeners; and they sell goods.
>
> News in itself commands attention. Lowell Thomas has this gift. He can also make news himself. And his sponsor relationship has been one of the most prized in broadcasting history.[21]

In attempting to pin-point reasons which account for Thomas' durable position in CBS News, one is obviously dealing with subjective statements proferred perhaps by non-typical spokesmen. By the same token, their expertise in the field of broadcasting or communications makes their opinions valid. For instance, Louis G. Cowan, former television producer and currently Director of the Morse Communication Research Center at Brandeis University spoke to the author briefly on this point of sustained popularity:

> Mr. Thomas has possibly the most familiar voice in American broadcasting. There are probably few Americans who have not heard his voice. As for his durability, I suggest that it is due to

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[21]Don Mozley, letter to the author, June 3, 1964.

his willingness to keep traveling and to sustain his curiosity about all forms of world society.[22]

There is also a strength which comes, according to Maurice Zolotow, from (1) not offending anyone, (2) purveying impartiality as opposed to thundering opinions, and (3) leaving the listener reassured that the world is pretty decent after all.[23] This last impression has been reiterated in one form or another to the author by a dozen people aware that this work was inprogress. And it may not be the least reason to account for Thomas' popularity to say that he radiates cheer, or that he reveals good humor in almost every newscast.

Below is a Hooper rating[24] showing how the public regarded the leading news personalities over a twelve-month period ending in August, 1946:

HOOPER RATING: Sept., 1945-August, 1946

Walter Winchell	18.9	Gabriel Heatter	6.1
Lowell Thomas	11.0	William Shirer	4.9
Bill Henry	9.7	Fulton Lewis, Jr.	4.9
H. V. Kaltenborn	9.3	Arthur Hale	3.8
Drew Pearson	8.3	Robert Trout	3.0
John Vandercook	6.9	Raymond Swing	2.6[25]

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[22]Louis G. Cowan, Telephone conversation with author, Boston, Dec., 1964.

[23]Maurice Zolotow, "The 2,000,000 Words of Lowell Thomas, "Coronet (June, 1949), pp. 167-172.

[24]It should be noted that the Hooper ratings, familiarly known throughout the industry as "Hooperatings" began in 1934 but were discontinued in 1950 on the national level. Hooper sold his interests to the A. C. Nielson Co.

[25]Raymond Swing, Good Evening: A Professional Memoir (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964), p. 189.

There was a poll conducted by Elmo Roper for Fortune in January 1940 to determine certain characteristics of the reading and radio-listening public.[26] Among the radio commentators, Lowell Thomas took first place. The survey was announced and revealed in these terms:

> Who is your favorite radio news commentator? There are, of course, more radio listeners than people with a favorite columnist. In the case of radio, the score is "none," 38.1%, "don't know," 7.1% which leaves 54.8% of the population who have a choice in new commentators. The leaders rank thus:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Lowell Thomas | 24.8% |
> | H. V. Kaltenborn | 20.8% |
> | Edwin C. Hill | 9.3% |
> | Walter Winchell | 6.8% |
> | Boake Carter | 6.0% |
> | Raymond Swing | 3.8% |
> | Elmer Davis | 3.5% |

The Fortune poll revealed, further, that Kaltenborn was the favorite of the "upper two economic brackets, and of executives, professional people and the proprietors of businesses. Lowell Thomas, however, pleases all the others best."

This last phrase seems significant, and it might be argued that the situation, to a degree, obtains today. Since the decline of radio in 1950, even allowing the upswing begun a couple of years ago, there probably has not been any systematic tabulating of mail received at CBS or at Thomas' Rockefeller Center office. Suffice it to say, however, that

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[26]Elmo Roper, "Popularity of Radio Commentators," Fortune (January, 1940), p. 92.

he does receive mail amounting to a hundred or two hundred letters a week. It is also his policy to answer every letter received, and one stenographer on his staff is delegated to handle this kind of mail. No special study was made of his mail because it is so mixed in nature.

Some of its stems from the CBS Radio newscast; some of it from High Adventure, some comes to him from Cinerama; still other letters may be requests for speaking engagements. It is interesting, however, to note that when Thomas announces in advance that he is going on an expedition, the mail increases; or when he returned safely from Tibet in April, 1954 his mail was voluminous; or following his heart attack in Detroit in December, 1964, his mail quadrupled. Still another example is the story of his request for rocks and stones for the Pawling (N.Y.) Community Center. He mentioned this casually on the air one time (in 1950) and there was one written report of it in "This Week" a feature supplement in the New York Herald Tribune which stated that Lowell Thomas was collecting stones and rocks with a significant history to put into his fireplace in Pawling. This would be a unique collection ultimately, and "unfold the drama of mankind," as he stated on the air. In the ensuing weeks, he was given rocks from Hirohito's Palace in Tokyo, from the Great Wall of China, from Persia, and from Jerusalem. He then mentioned on the air a month later that "the rocks were all in! And so was his staff!"

To summarize this section, the words of Maurice Zolotow seem most adequate in accounting for the durability of Thomas:

> Thomas neither views with alarm nor with superheated emotion like Heatter. He doesn't offer social messages or 'uplift.' He is not profound or ponderous. He never gives the impression that he has 'inside information' like Drew Pearson. Yet his rating as a newscaster over the years, over the decades, has been either first or second.[27]

As a listener wrote at the time Zolotow was preparing his article: "You feel he is a regular fellow, just like yourself, with the one advantage that he happens to be near a news wire."[28] Finally, there is an almost-forgotten episode which happened in 1934 and which this writer is certain deserves much more scrutiny and investigation now that methods of more scientific investigation for such field studies are at hand. At least, it deserves inclusion as a landmark in broadcasting history for a spectacular stunt.

Lowell Thomas, speaking on March 20, 1934, from Western Union headquarters in New York said on his Sun Oil-sponsored news program that any listener who wished to telegraph him via Western Union might do so without charge to the sender. It could be about anything: any topic, any sentiment, any observation that the listener wished to make. A deluge of

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[27] Zolotow, op. cit., p. 171.

[28] Ibid., p. 172.

265,567 telegrams came in from all parts of the United States and Canada. Almost every telegram mentioned Sunoco products in conjunction with Lowell Thomas' name.

As a result, several advertising "broadsides" were published by the advertiser, along with Western Union, claiming that this was the single greatest response to a broadcast in American history. It had set a record in the year 1934 and since there has been no counter-claim or dispute over the statistics the writer may assume that this Western Union stunt holds the record for a test of the audience (on the basis of a single invitation to express an opinion free of charge). This further demonstrates the popularity of Lowell Thomas as the then-dominant news figure.

Summary

Chapter III has had a dual mission: to trace the radio career of Lowell Thomas from its inception and to account for his survival to the present in competitive network radio. At the outset, one followed Thomas' preparation for the Literary Digest audition, and saw him succeed Floyd Gibbons on the air. One examined the prevailing atmosphere of broadcasting in the early 1930's and noted some of the colleagues and rivals of Thomas whose names were famous in the pre-World War II period. It seems that Thomas alone survives.

One also examined the "rise and fall of the radio commentator," to use Quincy Howe's phrase, and recognized

that Thomas has not followed the traditional pattern of the standard commentator. He has not attempted to be known as a pundit or intellectual commentator. His role on-the-air has been remarkably consistent, and has changed little since the original Literary Digest days in tone and manner. Observations from Harry Reasoner of CBS News, Don Mozley of KCBS, John Day of WHDH, and Louis G. Cowan of the Morse Communication Research Center at Brandeis University underscore different aspects of Thomas' popularity or durability.

On September 29, 1930 Thomas' association with radio began and has continued to the present. He began on CBS radio, then changed to NBC in 1932 where he remained until 1947. He rejoined CBS radio in 1948 and apart from one season (1960-61) on television, he has remained in radio.

CHAPTER IV

THE LITERARY PRODUCT

Books from 1924 to 1964

It should prove useful to examine the literary "product" of Lowell Thomas for merely by looking at the titles of the forty-seven books he has either written, edited, or collaborated on, we get a distinct idea of his activity, his interests, this "cast of mind" peculiarly his. Most of the books have had a modest sale. The only two which have caused some stir nationally or internationally are his first, With Lawrence in Arabia (1924) and History as You Heard It, published in 1957 by Doubleday. It is a rather conscious policy of Thomas to bring out a book on the average of once every two years; for he feels this is a way of keeping his name before the public. He enjoys the literary activity of assigning researchers to prepare a volume, and then to write an introduction or a chapter himself. The volume he is currently underwriting will deal with mountains of the world and Vincent Buranelli is researching it. Of the more recent volumes the writer felt that the 1960 "product," Cavalcade of Europe (with Charles Hurd) which is a handbook of information on 22 countries by 14 overseas

correspondents was a well-planned, and usefully informative "symposium."

Books by Lowell Thomas

With Lawrence in Arabia	Doubleday - 1924
India - Land of the Black Pagoda	Century Co. - 1930
Beyond the Khyber Pass	Century Co. - 1925
European Skyways	Heinemann - 1928
Count Luckner, Sea Devil	Doubleday - 1927
The Sea Devil's Fo'c'sle	Doubleday - 1929
Raiders of the Deep	Doubleday - 1929
Woodfill of the Regulars	Doubleday - 1929
The Hero of Vincennes	Houghton Mifflin - 1929
Lauterbach of the China Sea	Doubleday - 1930
The Wreck of the Dumaru	Doubleday - 1930
Old Gimlet Eye	Farrar & Rinehart - 1933
Rolling Stone	Doubleday 1933
Tall Stories	Funk & Wagnalls - 1931
Fan Mail	Dodge - 1935
The Untold Story of Exploration	Dodd Mead - 1935
This Side of Hell	Doubleday - 1932
The Boy's Life of Colonel Lawrence	Century - 1927
Adventures in Afghanistan for Boys	Century - 1928
Spain - The American Traveler's Handbook	Simon & Schuster - 1932
Kabluk of the Eskimo	Little Brown & Co. - 1932
Pageant of Adventure	Wilfred Funk - 1940

Pageant of Romance	E. P. Dutton & Co. - 1943
Pageant of Life	Wilfred Funk - 1941
Born to Raise Hell	Doubleday - 1933
Men of Danger	Stokes - 1936
Kipling Stories and a Life of Kipling	John E. Winston & Co. - 1936
Adventures Among Immortals	Dodd Mead - 1937
Seeing Canada with Lowell Thomas	Saalfield - 1936
Seeing India with Lowell Thomas	Saalfield - 1936
Seeing Japan with Lowell Thomas	Saalfield - 1937
Seeing Mexico with Lowell Thomas	Saalfield - 1937
Hungry Waters	John C. Winston - 1937
Wings Over Asia	John C. Winston - 1937
Magic Dials	Lee Furman - 1939
Great True Adventures	Hawthorn - 1955
In New Brunswick We'll Find It	Appleton-Century - 1939
Softball	Stokes - 1940
How to Keep Mentally Fit	Howell, Soskin - 1940
Stand Fast for Freedom	Winston - 1940
These Men Shall Never Die	Winston - 1943
Back to Mandalay	Greystone - 1951
Seven Wonders of the World	Hanover House - 1956
History as You Heard It	Doubleday - 1957
The Vital Spark: 101 Outstanding Lives	Doubleday - 1959
Sir Hubert Wilkins, A Biography	McGraw-Hill - 1961

More Great True Adventures (with Lowell Thomas Jr.)	Hawthorn - 1963
Lowell Thomas' Book of the High Mountains	Messner - 1964

Only two or three of his books have received national reviews, a notable example being The Wreck of the Dumaru as told by a survivor to Lowell Thomas. Thomas interviewed the man at length, wrote an introduction and assigned Prosper Buranelli to flesh out the book with the account as told by Fritz Harmon. In New Brunswick You'll Find It was partly paid for by the Canadian National Tourist Board, and done in conjunction with Rex Barton. Thomas was a co-author.

Thomas refers to his publisher as Doubleday for he has remained with them for about thirty years and about twenty of his books have been brought out under their imprint.

Magazine Articles

Virtually all of the magazine articles which Lowell Thomas has authored have appeared in the Reader's Digest. In so far as possible, this list is complete and shows Thomas' loyalty to a publication which he found just right for reaching a mass audience. Partly because of the generous fees paid to its authors, partly because of his good standing with the editors, and because he knows his name and his article will receive widespread circulation, he admits that

"I do not even think of submitting an idea to another publication."[1]

Articles by Lowell Thomas in Reader's Digest

"The Real Lawrence of Arabia"	June 1964
"New Guinea: The Land That Time Forgot"	Jan. 1964
"My Most Unforgettable Character--Bertha Vester"	Aug. 1962
"Terror in Tibet"	Dec. 1960
"Out of This World: A Journey to Lhasa" (by Lowell Thomas and Lowell Thomas, Jr.)	June 1950
"Imperturbable Eleanor"	April 1937
"Smashup for Safety"	Jan. 1937
"Men Who are Buried Alive"	Dec. 1932
"Don't Look at Your Feet"	Nov. 1932
"The Great American Whopper"	Jan. 1932
"Jimmie Doolittle: Scrappiest Pilot of them All"	Feb. 1931
"Germany's Greatest War Adventurer"	Aug. 1937
"The Tale of a War Raider"--joint author, Count Felix von Luckner	Nov. 1927
"Lawrence of Arabia"	Mar. 1927

A letter to the author from Alfred S. Dashiell, managing editor of Reader's Digest states:

> Mr. Thomas has not employed a literary agent to represent him here. He is both friend and neighbor to several members of the Digest staff. A casual interchange of ideas may well have

[1]Lowell Thomas, letter to Author, Oct. 15, 1964.

> sparked the development of any or all of the articles we have printed.[2]

Once again, the desire for wide popularization and dissemination of his ideas has led Thomas to concentrate on such publications as the Reader's Digest and to train himself to write and to think in their terms. After about 1930 one cannot find a trace of an article printed anywhere other than the Reader's Digest, although in 1928 and 1929 two articles appeared in the Sunday Magazine section of the New York Herald Tribune (June 18, 1928), and one by Thomas titled: "The World is Getting Smaller" in Liberty for Sept. 10, 1929. This accounts for virtually all of his short article production; and in questioning Thomas about this today, he is frank to admit that he cannot recall much in detail about these article-writing ventures, or even whether he or Prosper Buranelli authored them. However, he does stress that the last article he wrote for the Reader's Digest on Lawrence of Arabia (June, 1964) was entirely of his own conception and by his own hand.

One sees in looking over the list of books and magazine articles a certain boyish sense of adventure; and, indeed, several of the volumes were prepared for young boys. The volume titled Fan Mail which bears the subtitle: Humorous Sketches bore illustrations by the then-popular

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[2]Letter to the author from Alfred S. Dashiell, Managing Editor of the Reader's Digest, August 17, 1964.

cartoonist O. O. Sogolow. It is a curious hodge-podge of letters sent to Lowell Thomas with his often flippant and irreverent retort. This is not a reply such as he would normally give over the air, but a definite attempt to be humorous, to extract the humor from the inquiry itself.

In asking Thomas why he brought out this book (which had all but slipped his mind) he said: "Oh, we used to save every letter we got in the 1930's and we soon had a drawer-ful. Prosper Buranelli thought it would be amusing to have some fun with these letters, and he got Mr. Sogolow to draw some little sketches." He dismissed the book and perhaps it is, indeed, best forgotten. This would be an instance of what the author has called "curious lapses of taste" and it was also in the days in which Thomas was becoming a celebrity. Possibly he thought this would enhance his career somehow, possibly it would show that he had a rollicking sense of humor and further ingratiate him with his public.

Nonetheless, looking at the collected works a great deal is told about Thomas' interest in the world-at-large, his fascination for people and places by the very titles. There is also a clue as to his desire to popularize and to explain the remote to children or to the young. Some of the sweep of his mind is seen in the "Pageant" series. Upon examination, however, these books titled variously: Pageant of Adventure, Pageant of Life, and Pageant of Romance are at the same time naive in purpose and fall short of their

gloriously romantic titles. Thomas' Pageant of Life, for example, with the sub-title, "Tales of Adventure, Romance, and Passion" is a rather second-hand collection of often trivial fragments from the passing scene. These are regarded by newspapermen as "fillers"--the throw-away items which some wire services supply to fill space or elicit a laugh. These are mostly very short items, one paragraph in length which are something like Ripley's "Believe It Or Not" which was popular a few years ago. One of them begins: "Here's the most freakish hobby I ever heard of. Imagine a man collecting the skins of tattoed people? A Doctor Fukuski, a lecturer at the Tokyo Imperial University . . ."

The Adventure Formula

Perhaps a keynote to all of these publications is found in a book which he compiled titled Great True Adventures. This book was published by Hawthorn Books in 1955 and was followed in two years by a companion volume More Great True Adventures done in collaboration with his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr. The first book, however, was an anthology of "reading adventure." It contained essays about or by Lawrence of Arabia, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Antoine de St. Exupery, Cellini, and Thor Heyerdahl. In Thomas' words: "These are men, who by their spirit of adventure and their fearless advance into the unknown, have become the map changers, the history changers, the world changers--from

Joshu'a mission to Jericho to the voyage of the Kontiki."

In his introduction, Thomas recalls an advertisement that his friend, Sir Ernest Shackleton, the popular explorer, had placed in London newspapers in 1900:

> Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

The overwhelming response to this appeal, Thomas believes, illustrates the instinctive reaction of men to adventure and to the unknown. He concludes in the introduction, "for mankind has learned that it is adventure that will preserve the human spirit." One can discern in his writing a pattern which is made up of certain staple elements recurring again and again. Foremost among these is his almost evangelical belief in adventure for its own sake.

He writes about what interests him, and he feels that this, in turn, will interest the public-at-large. This cannot be reduced to a scientific formula, but there are certain "staples" in his literary product which rarely change. Indicative of these themes is his latest choice for a book on mountains of the world. There is, moreover, an interrelationship between all that Lowell Thomas does: reporting, exploring, book-writing. The themes and the styles are much the same; the "texture" is much the same.

H. V. Kaltenborn's statement that Lowell Thomas is essentially a story-teller puts one on the track of the major

motivation in Thomas' reporting career. He has admitted openly that he seeks out the human interest story and capitalizes on it. This, he feels, is what people really look for, and that is what he has been serving them for forty years in his books.

In the introductory chapter to the 1941 volume, Pageant of Life called "Assignment from the City Editor," Thomas speaks unabashedly of human interest as a primary force in his search for the angle of his stories.

> I grew up in the newspaper school of the human-interest story. Before college and then during collegiate years, I was a reporter and editor in mining towns of that greatest of all western gold camps, the Cripple Creek District. It was the era when the city editor's incessant command was--human interest.
>
> The cub reporter was hounded with the insistence that human-interest stories, were, more than anything else, what he was paid to get.[3]

Thomas relates that in "mining-town journalism" these human interest stories were not too difficult to gather. As a cub reporter he might be sent to cover the story of a bearded prospector who had finally "struck it rich." Or he might arrive to interview an eccentric miner who, on his deathbed revealed that he was an English nobleman. Finally, when Thomas got a job on a paper in Denver, he was deeply impressed by the command of the city editor: "Let's have more

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[3]Lowell Thomas, Pageant of Life (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1941), p. 18.

human interest." Thomas, according to his own account, came right after the Damon Runyon era. He was then competing with Gene Fowler, Fay King, and Nell Brinkley. These were his contemporaries and his colleagues in the newspaper world.

The next step in his professional advancement was Chicago. He relates that the "old-time Midwestern metropolis was an American Athens for the kind of story telling that concentrated on emotions and oddities of people in the news."

As Thomas recalls in Pageant of Life:

> A full reportorial day might go something like this: covering a Sicilian murder in Little Hell; and hour or two sitting beside Mme. Schumann-Heink at her divorce trial; the task of relieving some other reporter who had been covering a strike, and finally, ending the day by getting a story at a banquet of the Indiana Society where you listened to Wilbur Nesbitt, George Barr McCutcheon and George Ade.[4]

Thomas believes that in those Chicago days he trained with some of the greatest human interest experts of all time. His city editor was Dick Finnegan. Working out of Chicago, at that time, was Floyd Gibbons whom Thomas was later to succeed on the air. He came to know Ben Hecht, Carl Sandburg, and other reporters of fame for the Chicago Daily News or the Tribune.

Lowell Thomas has declared that "Chicago completed the task of giving me a thorough grounding the nature, value, and necessity of the human-interest story." He further states that it was there that he got plenty of practice, and

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[4]Ibid., p. 28.

he has referred to Chicago in the 1920's as an "American Athens."[5] In his later career of lecturing, a travel and adventure, he profited from these admonitions of the city editors and remembered the mass appeal of human interest. He practiced this in his books; the very titles are redolent of this kind of search for the emotional cue or key.

Later, in telling the news on the radio, he paid as much heed as ever to the echo of the city editor's voice: "We must have more human interest." Thomas further has stated:

> The recollection of that advice provided me with a number one point of news broadcasting policy--stress the human side of the tidings of the day. Play up the boy-and-girl story, the romance of swain and sweetheart, the pathos of mother and son reunited, the adventure of the daring individual, the alternations of tragedy and absurdity--human interest.
>
> This, I decided, was as important to a radio news program as the major events of the day--a necessary ingredient to go along with national affairs, with politics and war.[6]

And Thomas concludes this note on his gradually developing policy by saying that he has been a "lifelong gatherer of stories." He has collected endless tales about people, places, and things, from everywhere.

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[5] Ibid., p. 30.

[6] Ibid., p. 31.

A Question of Authentic Authorship

In addition to his pursuit of the "human interest" and the "adventure formula" to their fullest potential, one finds in the literary product of Lowell Thomas evidence of his own fascination with the map makers and the explorers' world which he has purveyed to the public in palatable terms. Some of his particular mannerisms and noticeable style characteristics will be discussed in the next chapter. It is, however, proper to conclude this chapter, which accounted for the literary product of Lowell Thomas, by raising the question of authorship or actual authenticity. It is known that Lowell Thomas assigns researchers to work out the substance of his books. His latest volume bearing his name, Lowell Thomas' Book of the High Mountains published in 1964 by Julian Messner was prepared for his signature by Vincent Buranelli who is on Thomas' staff in New York. It is not a widely known fact, however, that Thomas does employ ghost-writers or that he perpetuates what one critic called his "writing factory." Thomas regards the publication of a book as public relations stratagem: a means of keeping his name before the public and stirring interest in the name and exploits of Lowell Thomas.

Summary

This chapter has been concerned purely with what the author terms the "literary product of Lowell Thomas." It should prove instructive to review the types of books which have appeared under Lowell Thomas' name for forty years if only to detect a pattern. The titles themselves reveal Thomas' constant interest in adventure, travel, and exploits of exploration or discovery. His experiences in Denver and in Chicago as a young reporter served to emphasize his own belief in the human interest approach which he is convinced had a wide appeal in itself. The list of his articles for the Reader's Digest, again, shows something of his favorite formula: "the alternations of tragedy and absurdity--human interest." In brief, Thomas is properly seen as a lifelong gatherer of stories.

It was felt that by examining some of his prolific literary activity one would see more clearly the "whole man." It was felt, also, that these books serve to underscore interests and personality traits which he carries over into the news, and that they are part of an interrelated and consistent pattern. The ethical matter of assigning researchers and ghost writers to carry out the assignments which Thomas creates was raised in the discussion, "A Question of Authorship."

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THOMAS' NEWS STYLE

Lowell Thomas' highly colorful writing style, a bit flamboyant and over-rich at times, is quite aptly illustrated in the most recent article for the Reader's Digest. His use of the English language seems to have remained about the same. He uses "picture" terms, images that come to mind readily and fix in our minds. It is Thomas' way of expressing himself and reflects his romantic temperament.

> I first set eyes on him in a crowded street in Jerusalem in World War I. The dusty thoroughfare swarmed with Arab merchants in bright turbans and gowns, Greek priests in tall black hats, and bearded Turks in balloon-like trousers. Among them was a slight man who stood out in vivid contrast even though he was only about five feet, five inches tall. He wore the flowing robes of a Bedouin sheik, and the short curved dagger of a Prince of Mecca. Yet he was fair-skinned and clean-shaven with startling blue eyes.
>
> This young man so intrigued me that I asked his identity. No one seemed to know. Later, I questioned Sir Ronald Storrs, British governor of Jerusalem. The governor opened the door of an adjoining office and there sat the mysterious stranger, absorbed in a book on archeology.
>
> I would like you to meet Colonel T. E. Lawrence, uncrowned king of Arabia, the governor said.[1]

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[1]Lowell Thomas, "The Real Lawrence of Arabia," Reader's Digest (June, 1964), p. 253.

This is an example of the vivid, "high" style of Thomas. In so far as "the style is the man" we have something of a clue here to the way he conducts his writing for the news, the scripts for High Adventure on television, or the radio scripts for CBS.

Importance of Human Interest

A key word for the over-all effect of a Lowell Thomas script is the elusive "listenability" which he manages to achieve by a subtle combination of factors just discussed. In this section, however, we shall examine certain precepts and principles of news gathering followed by a break-down of a script into its component parts so that its stylistic structure becomes apparent.

Historically, it will be useful in the ensuing pages to understand how the broadcasting of news evolved. Its importance as a "sacred trust," to use the words of Eric Sevareid, should be clear to any student of broadcasting and to almost every citizen in the listening audience.

> At no period in our history has the function of news and public affairs broadcasting been so critical and important to our national life.
>
> We have today within our grasp the opportunity to provide an extraordinary service in a troubled world, and at the same time, to increase our stature and strength as broadcasters.[2]

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[2]William S. Paley, Chairman of the Board of CBS, quoted in Chester, Garrison, Willis, Television and Radio, p. 393.

Lowell Thomas has been handling the news for thirty-five years; he has evolved over that period of time a formula for assembling the news into an acceptable commodity that is most palatable. We have examined a few of the techniques and devices used, but the putting together of a given newscast raises certain problems or questions which are still basic to this discussion, and still unique to the Thomas organization. First of all, Thomas believes that "the news is mental," and that radio does a superior job of delivering the news.

> News exists in the minds of men. It is not an event; it is something perceived after the event; it is an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of the event--essential being defined against a frame of reference which is calculated to make the event meaningful to the reader or listener.[3]

The structure of a given set of Lowell Thomas newscasts is directly related to his philosophy of the news. Because he has not set forth his views in any systematic fashion, nor written for the learned journals on his philosophy of the news, it will be necessary to put together assorted fragments that shape this philosophy. It is one based on practical experience. Stemming from the few basic ideas on news style given in interviews, the writer will set forth certain precepts with which Thomas is in accord, and conclude this section with a direct statement received in a

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[3]Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of News," Journalism Quarterly (September, 1949), p. 259.

recent letter.[4] "News is related to events which in some way interest people" Thomas told the writer in New York.

It is a truism that people are interested in reports of events which directly or indirectly affect their lives, and in reports of any irregularities in the course of human affairs which arouse intellectual or emotional curiosity. News of natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, and fires interest many people. Departures from moral and legal codes of behavior interest people. The commission of a crime, the apprehension of the suspected criminal, and his trial, conviction, or acquittal are events reported as news. Important governmental actions, such as the enactment of a new tax law, the issuance of an executive order, or a court decision are reported as news when they affect lives in some substantial way. Speeches and interviews by important people are newsworthy, because they provide clues to future governmental action.[5]

Lowell Thomas makes use of or covers each of these "sectors" of public interest, including Presidential Press Conferences, now and then,[6] if it suits his convenience. He makes no special effort to track down a story in the active

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[4]Lowell Thomas to the author in letter dated July 5, 1964.

[5]Chester, Garrison, and Willis, op. cit., p. 394.

[6]Lowell Thomas air-check (broadcast from New York), August 12, 1964 refers to his attendance at President Johnson's press conference.

sense of doing "leg-work" or special research, other than telephoning to confirm sources and accuracy.

The order and importance of items, however, he usually arranges himself or advises his writer by telephone. In the actual news-gathering process Thomas has long ago distinguished himself, and no longer bids for the breathless "eye-witness" report. He is not an on-the-scene reporter any longer nor does he wish to do this unless there is some exceptional account or "first" which warrants it, such as his October 7, 1949 broadcast from Lhasa, Tibet.

Lowell Thomas is given virtually carte blanche by CBS in the selection of items. He is, as Marya Mannes phrased it, "a trusted hand" and this responsibility he honors and respects. Mr. Friendly also has complete confidence in his good judgment, so that no screening or "checking" is necessary. It is up to Buranelli to take the initiative to telephone the CBS Central Newsroom in the event something controversial, highly inflammatory, or decidedly "touchy" arises and needs either clarification or guidance.

As is the case with any news program, local or network, the main problem in constructing the program is deciding what items to include, in what order, and how to present each. There is also the matter of the graceful transition and avoidance of the stereotype clichés whenever possible.

A fifteen-minute sponsored newscast actually runs about twelve minutes allowing time for the commercial announcements. Thomas was accustomed to this for thirty years both with NBC and with CBS. For the past four years he has had a ten-minute newscast which involves the preparation of between seven and a half and eight minutes of news. Seldom do Thomas' stories run over one minute in length, unless they are of unusual interest. Trite transitional phrases such as "on the labor front," or "turning now to Washington" Thomas manages to avoid entirely.

The choice of stories and the structure of Thomas' newscast are influenced by the audience to be reached at the time the program is broadcast: the dinner hour. The time of day also influences the kind of news material available for broadcast. The press services now have a fairly well-established schedule, and Thomas is dependent on these when the composition of the 6:45 program actually "jells" about 4:00 P.M. He avoids the "last-minute-bulletin" unless it is of genuine importance. Dinner-hour newscasts usually have an abundance of news material covering the entire day's activity, and this is essentially what Thomas provides. He characterizes it himself as "the major or prime wrap-up of the day" or as he said in an interview, "the basic meat-and-potatoes" that people expect along with their dinner.

Thomas feels that he could substantially agree with ten "rules" elaborated by Chester, Garrison, and Willis in

their chapter on the news.[8] These guide posts were submitted in correspondence with the request that Thomas underscore or check those which he felt were of primary importance. He was also asked to delete any point or points he felt unimportant; and he was asked to contribute a new suggestion or point if he wished. The list came back essentially unchanged. He had put exclamation points after Numbers 7 and 9, and added these comments after Numbers 3 and 10. "Maybe I'm guilty of this now and then." "Why retract? Why get into hot water? This one doesn't apply much to my way of handling the news, but then, I'm not a crusader."

Here is the list which Thomas checked over:

1. Separate facts from opinions; and clearly identify the source of each.
2. If you are advancing an argument, state the premises on which you base your reasoning.
3. In your choice of topics, don't ride a hobby horse by harping on the same subject day in and day out.
4. Check and re-check all statements of fact to verify accuracy.
5. Avoid exaggerations.
6. Do not attempt to make yourself appear infallible.
7. Do not induce panic or extreme insecurity in listeners through emotionalism.
8. Do not prejudice listeners through innuendo, distortions, or suppression of vital information.
9. Don't dramatize an opinion on one side of an issue only.

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[8] Chester, Garrison, and Willis, op. cit., p. 404.

10. Be prepared to make a sincere and equal retraction if necessary and to provide reply time to those you have unfairly attacked in a broadcast.

As noted above, the check-list drew comment only in four places: Numbers 7 and 9, and 3 and 10.

Because this chapter is concerned with analyzing Lowell Thomas' style, it may be fitting to introduce a summation of an investigation conducted by Frederick R. Dowling.[9] It should be emphasized again that the style--based on Thomas's scripts and the content--based on a breakdown of factual material in his scripts--are much of the same fabric and texture. They are closely interrelated as Dowling concludes.

Dowling made a rhetorical study of five newscasters based on (1) word choice, (2) sentence characteristics, (3) rhetorical devices, (4) delivery. In sentence characteristics he was concerned with length, kind, and use. Under point (3) rhetorical devices, he selected seven criteria: transitions, humor, emotional proof, ethical proof, repetition, questions, and topical sentences. His final point (4) delivery, was weighted on (a) pitch, (b) force, and (c) rate of speed.

Suffice it to say that for the purpose of this chapter, the most pertinent factor coming from this study is found in his conclusion about Thomas' style which he believes is based

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[9]Frederick R. Dowling, "The Style of Five Radio Commentators" (doctoral dissertation, the University of Wisconsin, 1956).

on his colorful vocabulary and "emphasis on pageantry." Dowling also recognizes that Thomas "scores quite high" on his use of rhetorical devices and delivery.[10]

In brief, he states that radio commentators can be clearly differentiated on the basis of style differences and of content differences. Word choices make significant differences; certain commentators are consistent in the use of words of various levels of difficulty; but each commentator is relatively inconsistent in his day-to-day use of words on different difficulty levels.

The die is cast

Partly because of its historical value, partly because of the manner in which it introduces Lowell Thomas, the first script (Sept. 29, 1930) is reproduced here. These pages were photostated from Thomas' files with permission. They run from pages 79 to 84.

The obituary of Daniel Guggenheim which made the second page of the New York Times of the same date shows Thomas' life-long interest in mining and prospectors of the West. The item of the island of St. Kilda is noteworthy as an example of the "folklore" filler he would use continually. The final page of script pre-heralds much of the "tone" of Lowell Thomas to follow in subsequent years, with its light-touch, its curiously up-beat flair for romance, science, odds and ends, but "news aplenty."

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[10] Ibid.

The author feels that these pages which follow merit inclusion especially for the student of broadcasting because they represent a definite beginning and they have launched a career. The announcer's introduction of Lowell Thomas is that amalgam of fact and fancy that has blurred-over reality. In truth, Thomas did not accompany Allenby in Palestine; he met him. Thomas encountered the Prince of Wales in India, he did not actually tour India with him. This is also the beginning of the Thomas legend. Henceforth, only excerpts will be used from the scripts and not tne entire body of script itself.

6:45 - 7:00 P.M. LITERARY DIGEST MONDAY

SEPTEMBER 29, 1930

LITERARY DIGEST BROADCAST BY LOWELL THOMAS AT THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY.

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT:

The Literary Digest speaking - to announce Lowell Thomas, the Digest's new radio voice informing and entertaining you with the latest news of the day.

Of course you remember Lowell Thomas, famous war correspondent of whom the late Lord Northcliffe said, "He saw more of the World War than any other man."

You know him also as a world traveler, explorer and author.

You know the Lowell Thomas who was sent to Europe by President Wilson to be with the Belgian, French, Italian, Serbian, American, British and Arabian armies, and bring back a popular account of the Allied campaigns.

You know the Lowell Thomas who accompanied General Allenby during the conquest of Palestine, and who was the first to discover and tell the world of the amazing career of Colonel Lawrence, the mystery man of Arabia.

You know the Lowell Thomas who began life out in the Cripple Creek mining district in Colorado and who since then has been a ranger, a traveling salesman, and who was managing editor of two daily newspapers before he was twenty.

You know the Lowell Thomas who toured India with the Prince of Wales and spent two years in exploring remote parts of that country as well as Malaya, Upper Burma and some of the wildest corners of Central Asia, such as Waziristan and Afghanistan.

You know the Lowell Thomas who was the first person of the outside world to reach Central Europe after the Armistice and bring back a record, both in picture and story of the German revolution.

You know the Lowell Thomas who has addressed audiences of 4,000,000 people in various parts of the world, who have been held by the magic of his voice and have traveled with him to the ends of the earth.

And this is the Lowell Thomas you are now to hear recording the latest news of the day for the Literary Digest.

INTRODUCTION:

I wonder if any of you will believe all that, or all of the awfully nice things that Floyd Gibbons said about me Saturday night? If you do, I am sure you must put me down as an old man with a long beard trailing in the dust.

I called Floyd Gibbons on the telephone Saturday night, and told him what a great fellow he was to spend so much of his final hour in giving me a boost. But the things he said were much too flattering. After all, I am just a chap who started out as a newspaper man, and with an overwhelming desire to see the whole world, and to spend my life acting as an observer. It's rather curious that Floyd Gibbons and I have followed somewhat parallel trails much of the time. Before the War, when he was a star man on a morning paper in Chicago I was a cub police reporter chasing news for a Chicago evening paper. Then as the years went by, we both travelled to the ends of the earth. I crossed his trail hundreds of time during the war and after - Africa - Asia and almost everywhere. And here I am, asked to take up his trail of radioing the news for the Literary Digest. When I talked to him on the telephone Saturday night, that was the closest I had ever come to actually meeting him in the twenty years or more that we have been dodging each

other around the globe. One of the things he said to me was:"It's interesting how you seem to get to known people over the radio. Although you may be talking to millions you have the feeling that they are all your friends." And I can understand this in the case of Floyd Gibbons. For I doubt if the man ever lived who endeared himself to more people in as a short a time as Floyd Gibbons. It was fine of him to give me his blessing and such a send-off.

As I take up his trail to scan the last editions of the newspapers and pass on to you the dispatches that have been coming in to me all day, I felt as though I had been abruptly pulled away from my farm up in the New York hills and tossed back a dozen years or more into one of my old jobs in the whirl of a modern newspaper office.

Adolph Hitler, the German Fascist chief, is snorting fire. There are now two Mussolinis in the world, which seems to promise a rousing time. Adolph is one. He has written a book called the German Fascist Bible. In it this belligerent gentleman states that a cardinal policy of his now powerful German party is the conquest of Russia. That's a tall assignment Adolph. You just ask Napoleon.

I happened to pass through one German revolution, and it was complicated enough. But the present political situation over there is getting to be another frightful tangle. I understand it a bit better now, after having read the article on "Germany's Radical Ballot Revolt," in the current issue of the Literary Digest. At the top of the article are three photographs of the leaders of the principal elements in the confused German political mix-up - the Fascists, the moderates, and the Communists. A study in faces, and that is always interesting and sometimes revealing.

From across the Atlantic drift other reports - all the way from grave agitations in Spain to new sentimental sidelights on King Carol's love-lorn court. The rise of the Fascists of Germany is an anti-republican, monarchist movement. In Spain the drift is the other way. Madrid witnessed a great political meeting in a fmous old bull ring there. Political meetings and bull seem to be natural together, but the Madrid gathering appears to have been very much in earnest. With government machine guns trained on the crowd, a succession of prominent speakers denounced King Alfonso and demanded

a republic. There was a wild demonstration, fortunately without bloodshed, against the monarchy.

Right next door to Spain there are violent threats of war in the tiny republic of Andorra. This miniature nation lies on the Franco-Spanish border, and is under joint control of France and Spain. The Andorran government is ready to go to war with the French. An ultimatum has been sent. The Andorran army of seven men and two guns has been mobilized. The cause of this imbroglio lies in the desire of the Andorran republic to have a race track and a gambling casino, which would attract the festive francs of foreigners - including Americans. This would help the republic's finances considerably, but the French government cruelly forbids it.

You may recall the excitement stirred up last week by a so-called revelation to the effect that Bolshevik representatives from Russia were trading on the Chicago wheat market and driving down the prices of grain. John Bunnell, president of the Chicago Board of Trade, according to an AP dispatch that has just come in, today told a special congressional investigating committee that Russian operations on the Chicago exchange were what is called a "hedging operation," and not a gamble. He said he had investigated and was certain the operations of the Russian representatives in Chicago were not carried out to depress the market.

Whether there is anything wrong with what Russian representatives do, they get blamed for most things these days. For instance, the last time I was in India, my British friends were telling me that the Indian revolution was largely due to Bolshevik agitators and Russian gold.

An example of Thomas' personalizing the news can be seen in the last sentence: ". . . the last time I was in India, my British friends were telling me . . ." It is this kind of direct, personal reference to a place, person, or event which became Thomas' stylistic hallmark, and which represented a departure from the standard procedure of impersonal news presentation.

I have known that name Guggenheim from childhood. My youth was spent in a mining camp, and out in Colorado Guggenheim to us meant wealth and power beyond all dreams. Later, when I went to Utah, I found still more Guggenheim mining properties, more than I had supposed any one man or family could control. Then when I went to Alaska I travelled over a Guggenheim railroad up the Copper River to Kennecott, the richest copper mine on earth. Hundreds of miles still farther north, in the Klondike, I found Guggenheim dredges eating up thousands of tons of gold-bearing gravel along El Dorado and Hunker creeks, those magic tributaries of the Klondike River made famous by the early miners in the days of '98.

Years afterward, on an expedition through the jungles of the Malay Peninsular I took a string of elephants and crossed a region where I thought no white man had ever been. Deep in the forest I came to a hut, and from the door emerged a man with a long beard. When I asked him if he could speak English he roared with laughter and said "Why man I'm from Trenton, New Jersey, and I can tell by your accent that you're no Britisher either. I'm a mining engineer working for the Guggenheims. I've been buried out here for two years hunting for some of the lost tin mines of the Malays." Wherever I went, no matter to what continent, I found the representatives of the Guggenheims.

Daniel Guggenheim who has just died was the second of seven sons of Meyer Guggenheim, who came to Philadelphia from Switzerland to engage in the lace business. But the family soon shifted from lace to metals. Some promoter talked the immigrant merchant into buying shares in a mine out in Colorado. They didn't suddenly strike it fabulously rich, but the elder Guggenheim and his seven sons turned definitely to extracting rich metals from the earth and every one of the seven sons became a multi-millionaire. One of Daniel Guggenheim's sons is our present ambassador to Cuba, Harry Guggenheim.

Daniel Guggenheim was perhaps the most prominent of his family, a clan that dominates in the wealth of the world second only to its original prototype, the Rothchilds. Daniel's most notable work aside from mining and innumerable philanthropies was the establishment of the famous Guggenheim Foundation for the Advancement of

> Aviation. He supplied the funds that enabled Lindbergh to make his triumphal flying tour of America. He supplied the funds that enabled that amazing flier, my friend Jimmy Doolittle, to experiment with ways of overcoming the grim hazzards of fog flying. And he gave vast sums for the promotion of Aeronautics in other ways. What a man and what a family - these Guggenheims!
>
> The obituary of the colorful Daniel Guggenheim gives me a brief moment of wonder and musing. Well, tomorrow evening we shall have another special news item of the day. What will it be - comedy, adventure, romance, tragedy, science, business, or some international event of cardinal importance? What is your guess? In any case, there will be news aplenty.

Much of the flavor of the news style developed by Lowell Thomas may be traced to this initial, original script of September 29, 1930. In several ways, it is a landmark in the development of Lowell Thomas' style. The initial script tells us something about Lowell Thomas as he saw his own role and what the national audience began to expect of him as a rather different kind of newsman on the air. In some ways, it might be argued, the "die was cast."

The one and a half page introduction was trimmed to a single page for the next two newscasts and subsequently limited to a very short: "Here is Lowell Thomas with today's news." Thomas, however, on page two of the September 29 script uses the first person frequently in paying tribute to Floyd Gibbons. This had been, as indicated in Chapter I, a diplomatically difficult matter. There is also an example of Thomas' mock-humility in stating that he did not expect anyone to believe "all those nice things said about me."

But his conception of his role is stated simply: "After all, I am just a chap who started out as a newspaper man, with an overwhelming desire to see the whole world, and to spend my life acting as an observer." Thomas had been remarkably consistent in his professional purposes and this statement clarifies and identifies his objectives.

Personalization

Further personalization continues as he states: "I happened to pass through one German revolution, but the present political situation is complicated, too." And then he extols the late Daniel Guggenheim. This obituary of the man who died that day is a page and a half in length. It might be argued that it was disproportionate to the importance of the item, yet it afforded Thomas a chance to tell a story about the Guggenheims: weaving in a picturesque tale about the jungles of Malay, where with a "string of elephants" Thomas himself visited a region no white man had seen before.

These items reflect some of Thomas' slowly crystallizing philosophy of the news. Namely, that what interested him would capture the imagination of a mass audience if it was tied to a credible source: Lowell Thomas. And one goes back to a 1924 article which describes the "magic web" Thomas has spun for so many years: "Lowell Thomas' profession is the presentation of illustrated records of romantic lands and

events."[11] Moreover, it may be basic to an understanding of Lowell Thomas that he has consistently followed the statement in the opening announcement by the Reader's Digest: "informing and entertaining you with the latest news of the day." The entertainment and the showmanship factor are closely related to his unique handling of the news and to his particular style of news writing.

Unwritten Policy for the Daily Newscast at Present

This section of Chapter V will deal mainly with the radio scripts of Lowell Thomas, and certain aspects of his style. It is the contention of this writer that the first scripts of Thomas were artfully compounded: news items of national and international significance blended with a few regional, humorous items so that the over-all effect was cheerful and promoted a sense of "good feeling." Later, however, under wartime pressure, the style deteriorated to a degree (especially in the 1940's and 1950's). Although the essential elements of a Lowell Thomas script are usually discernible, the personalization and odd-item closers were not always so apt; and finally, in the 1960's there would appear to be a maturity and an upgrading of these several elements--again done in the distinctly individual style of Lowell Thomas. Yet, as Thomas has said, "a good script

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[11] Rhodes, op. cit., p. 60.

often makes bad reading" and the test of any of these segments under scrutiny is how they sound on the air delivered by Thomas himself.

Eric Barnouw has stated that there are only three basic tools in a radio script: sound effects, music, and speech.[12] Lowell Thomas, somehow manages to bridge speech with a kind of emphatic vocal music, so that the listener has almost two dimensions or two elements to deal with: news content projected in a distinctive, dramatic delivery.

"Lowell Thomas' profession is the production and presentation of illustrated records of romantic lands and events."[13] Even though this statement was written forty years ago, when radio news was scarcely a profession, it is a fairly apt description of Thomas' daily newscast. It was written at a time, too, when Thomas was a lecturer and was making his fame with the illustrated talks described in Chapter II.

A month after he had made his air début, a short article appeared in the Literary Digest stating that "his broadcasts consist entirely of actualities of the day projected against the background of Lowell Thomas' picturesque, strange, and adventurous experiences as a war correspondent,

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[12]Eric Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1950), p. 29.

[13]John Kidder Rhodes, "3,000,000 People Have Shared His Adventures," American Magazine (September, 1924), p. 60.

world traveler, and explorer."[14] Furthermore, the article declares, "he rarely allows controversial matters to enter his programs."

Maurice Zolotow believed that Thomas was "probably the least-opinionated person alive,"[15] and this politically unidentified quality of his programs may account for some of his popularity. According to Thomas, "radio is a type of reporting, and I've always liked reporting. And I've tried to write the kind of story that would enable me to come back and get another if that should be necessary."[16] Thomas does tend to see projects in very long-range terms, and he embarked on a radio career fully cognizant that "I might be at it for a few years, if all worked out well. It was a branch of the same service, nonetheless, reporting."[17] In a recent statement about news policy which proved philosophically orienting, Thomas declared that people in the news were of supreme importance, and that he "preferred to emphasize drama and personality in the news."[18]

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[14]"Lowell Thomas--Digest Broadcaster," Literary Digest (October 11, 1930), p. 12.

[15]Zolotow, op. cit., p. 170.

[16]Lowell Thomas, interview with author, June 3, 1964 in New York.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Lowell Thomas, interview with author, June 2, 1964 in New York.

Settling into the role of a newscaster, then, was not purely experimental or something undertaken lightly. There were few precedents and few predecessors, for that matter. So Thomas thought about his policy from the first broadcast onward and has been remarkably consistent in his approach to the news since. If a controversial subject arose, Thomas would not comment on it, one way or another; but merely state the facts, possibly labeling it "controversial" and attempting to throw as much light as possible on the matter.

A Newsweek article states that Thomas is perhaps the only newsman who has made his reputation on his voice alone;[19] he is, indeed, an "impressario of the news." The article goes on to state that the news script is the concoction of Prosper Buranelli and Louis Sherwin; and that Thomas merely reads their manuscript which he has edited before going on the air. The point is raised that

> . . . it is impossible to determine whether he talks as they write, or they write as he talks. They are careful to stress Americana, with accent on adventure and tear-jerking anecdotes.[20]

Preparing the newscast for CBS

The routine for preparation of the daily newscast has not varied much during thirty-five years. When Thomas is at his home in Pawling, he uses a specially designed small

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[19]"Lowell Thomas--Impressario of the News," Newsweek (October 13, 1947), p. 56.

[20]Ibid., p. 57.

studio, and although he does not have a producer, his secretary, Mrs. Electra Nicks, times the program with a stop-watch. She gives him the cues for the cut to the studio, where Dick Noel, the current CBS staff announcer assigned to the program, partly ad-libs the introduction to the commercial, and then returns to Thomas for a "final word."

Vincent Buranelli makes a rough outline for the script about 2 P.M. In the late afternoon, segments of the script are filed via teleprinter to Thomas' home studio and office. There, a secretary retypes the material and Thomas goes over it with his editorial pencil. His job is to re-shape the words into his colloquial vernacular. This is the end of a process which starts in Rockefeller center, from the small newsroom which contains only one U.P.I. machine and several telephones. There are also several small radios tuned to stations such as WOR and WPAT because Thomas will not use an item on the 6:45 program if it has "been played to death all day by the other stations." He likes to have Buranelli monitor the radio stations and check the daily newspapers. Thomas may bring in some anecdote or use a clipping from The National Geographic if a story has struck him as noteworthy. Rarely does he need or take any directions from CBS News, although Buranelli stated that he frequently checks

with CBS on the telephone to get their particular slant on the story and learn further details.[21]

There are several techniques which Thomas uses in his treatment of the news. First of all, to remind the listener that he is partaking of a Lowell Thomas newscast, items are personalized rather frequently. For example, in his program of November 29, 1951 Thomas referred to General Douglas MacArthur's statement about having the Korean troops home by Christmas. Thomas said: "I shook my head, and told my associates I was positive that he (MacArthur) never said it." And he said it in a manner that makes the listener believe that the listener, perhaps, said it. Later in the same broadcast, he referred to Tibet. He said: "I wonder what's in that caravan--how many of the priceless things we saw just last year."[22] These are typical of the highly personalized copy which characterizes Thomas. In the script he departs from the actual hard news about Tibet--which is only an item about the Dalai Lama seeking refuge in India--and uses this as a point of departure to reminiscence about his trip, the things seen and done, and his interview with the Dalai Lama.

In fact that Thomas has been to this place (and the average listener seems to know this or to presuppose this)

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[21]Vincent Buranelli, in interview with the author, June 3, 1964 in New York.

[22]Lowell Thomas radio script, Nov. 29, 1950.

gives an indisputable authority and authenticity to his broadcasts which few other newsman have. He makes his travels live; he can put the listener right in the place he is talking about. This is partly a rhetorical gift, partly a way of stylizing the copy so that it reaches and informs the average man. "He is the best man at spinning a yarn I ever heard, for he has the knack of making his own experiences personal affairs."[23]

Other Stylistic Devices

In so far as there are any directives or actual policies concerning writing, the one cardinal rule for the Thomas staff which Thomas himself, with Prosper Buranelli, laid down thirty years ago is to try to achieve listenability. This Thomas believes is essential in order to capture the radio listener's ear. As Charnely has stated

> In the newspaper, it is readability that the editors strive for; on the air it is listenability. The Thomas scripts are excellent examples of this. They are designed for the ear.
>
> Short sentences, lack of unfamiliar words and phrases, a rich vein of human interest, fun and chuckles from time to time ('comic relief') . . . all these pay off for Thomas.[24]

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[23] Literary Digest, Oct. 11, 1950, p. 12.

[24] Mitchell Charnley, News by Radio (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 85.

The choppy sentences

An example from the November 27, 1950 script will illustrate what Paul White has called the "choppy sentence mannerism." The excerpt illustrates, as well, colorful language and a desire to economize somehow by highlighting only essentials:

> The lame duck session of Congress began today in Washington--77 members in that class limping birds. Chief among them, the Truman senate leaders . . . caught in the Republican tide three weeks ago, now hobbling back to Washington today . . . lame ducks.[25]

Thomas alone seems to use this rather telegraphic style in his treatment of the news; and when used four or five times in the body of a newscast it perhaps serves its purpose: to break up the regular rhythm or the continuity of prose. "Thomas is of the choppy sentence--or no sentence at all school, leaning heavily on human interest, and skipping some of the required elements of a good sentence."[26]

Use of the present participle

There is also the penchant for the running sense of the present which is achieved by use of the present participle or gerundive; it gives an active sense of immediacy although it may cheat a bit in a strict time sense. Here is an example:

> Hordes of Reds sweeping down the central mountains, confiscating supplies, stealing and pillaging,

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[25]Lowell Thomas radio script, November 27, 1950.

[26]White, op. cit., p. 145.

> setting fire to buildings, and finally, looting everything in sight in the Korean village.[27]

Many journalists, English teachers, and home listeners upbraid Thomas for this over-use of the present participle, and he is conscious of it, but steadfastly sticks to it; it is his style, and part of his trade-mark on virtually every script aired.[28]

Another stylistic device which he sometimes uses is the "teaser" or the fragmentary headline." It is used in the over-all format of his program at the outset, over the telegraph key signal wherein the announcer says under a recorded sound effect: "The News is coming tonight from Bucharest, from Chicago, from New Delhi, and from Cairo." But Thomas himself gives a bigger hint in the opening paragraphs of his script. These examples could be considered short headlines: "Russia to support Egyptian demands for the withdrawal of British troops from Suez. That was the word in Cairo today." Or, "President Kennedy in Chicago tonight makes fervent plea for civil rights legislation." And finally, "India tries to mediate in Korean war. Prime Minister Nehru declares he will arbitrate if belligerents will come to New Delhi."

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[27]Lowell Thomas radio script, November 29, 1950.

[28]Lowell Thomas, in interview with author, June 4, 1964 in New York.

Yet another use Thomas has for this "choppy sentence--no sentence" structure is to summarize the story just told by him. It is a repetitive device for hammering the point home. After relating the events or incidents concerning a paralyzing snow storm in November, he summed up: "Far and wide, people today cleaning up after the big win, the big rain, the big snow." Conspicuous by its absence in these "no sentence" examples is some form of the verb "to be." Bothersome as it may be to grammarians who read this material, when it is heard, delivered by Thomas, it can be effective:

> News from Sicily, telling of weird volcanic activity. Craters opening up, spurting streams of lava; craters dying down, new ones appearing, new streams of glowing fire. Mt. Etna in eruption again! Thirty-seven craters in all, bursting forth near the summit of that famous volcano.[29]

Human Interest and Humor

Evidence of stress on the human interest story can be found in almost every script. After reporting the relatively grim war news about Korea in a serious vein (Nov. 29, 1950), Thomas demonstrates his ability to judge human nature by saying "it's time to turn to the brighter side of the news," or "here are a couple of items which won't weigh us down so heavily." The first of the two stories which he uses to

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[29]Lowell Thomas radio script, November 27, 1950.

close the newscast deals with a report about an odd bit of New York history that came out of London. To paraphrase the actual text, a certain British nobleman, in 1938, had been invited to New York to join in an anti-noise campaign. He did that type of work in England. Mayor LaGuardia sponsored a drive to make New York a quiet city, and he invited the Englishman. He also stated that there would be police cars equipped with sirens to facilitate his arrival to City Hall." So the anti-noise visit was made to the shrieking sounds of ear-splitting sirens. Sounds like New York."[30]

The above story was followed with an account of a Cleveland man who had the misfortune to be name King Solomon. Everywhere he went, he was kidded about it and finally the last straw came from a judge who handled his case in court based on mistreating his wife. The judge said: "The original King Solomon had a thousand wives, and you have trouble with only one."[31]

The homespun quality

Illustrative of the homey or homespun quality which Lowell Thomas aims for can be found in such an item as this:

> London reports a boom at Britain's first clinic for headaches, which comes under war news, by the way. The labor government with all that

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[30]Lowell Thomas radio news script, Nov. 29, 1950.

[31]Ibid.

> socialized medicine has a clinic for the familiar pain in the dome, and during the past few days there has been a rush of patients. Well, that Korean situation certainly is a headache.[32]

This is use of the colloquial and vernacular, his reference to "dome" and his conclusion, beginning with "well." Not all of his "closers" or "fillers" at the end are humorous. Some are pathetic stories of human interest which play on sentimentality. There is the story concerning a child's love for her dog. A little girl and her dog were inseparable companions. Then the dog ran away. The child refused to eat; and had to be fed intravenously. Thomas, in his friendly way ended compassionately by saying: "The thing to do is to find that dog, to bring back the child's health."

For the closing story Thomas may be quite serious and straightforward; or he may tell a simple tale of human plight and suffering such as this one:

> A freight train rolled across the Yugoslav frontier today. That hardly seems an important news item, but to the people of Yugoslavia, faced with famine following a drought, it means a lot. The train was loaded with the first shipment of flour from America. Its destination a village in Bosnia--a village badly hit by the famine.[33]

The change of pace "closer"

From time to time, Thomas likes to close the newscast with gossip items about celebrities. For example, he is fond

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Lowell Thomas, radio script, Dec. 5, 1950.

of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Here was his closing item for November 29,1950:

> In New York today an emphatic denial was made in the form of hugs and kisses between the pair. In that way, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor said "no" to rumors of a rift in the fabulous romance.
>
> I remember how, thirteen years ago, at the time of the royal abdication, the wonder was: How long will it last? Well, this union for which so much has been sacrificed seems to be going strong still.[34]

It is stories like this which pepper the regular and more conventional news items and which provide a "change of pace." Such stories also follow Thomas' precept that "everything is news."[35] It is for this reason that Thomas' news programs seem to have something of a kaleidoscopic quality, and that they reflect what he terms the "human cavalcade." Finally, the author learned in interview with Thomas that he conceives his audience in the same broad sweep as he does his reading audience for articles in the Reader's Digest; it is made up, for the main part, of "Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen."[36] As one listener put it: "Lowell Thomas to me, means a good newspaper in the house."[37]

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[34]Lowell Thomas, radio script of Nov. 29, 1950.

[35]Vincent Buranelli, interview with the author, June 3, 1964 in New York.

[36]Lowell Thomas, interview with the author, June 3, 1964 in New York.

[37]Wecter, op. cit., p. 15.

Summary

Chapter V, in analyzing Thomas' news style, has taken its premise from an observation of John Kidder Rhodes that "Lowell Thomas' profession is the production and presentation of illustrated records of romantic lands and events." To a degree, then, this justifies his uniquely colorful written style. Among criteria used for examining Thomas' news style were: listenability, evocative images, odds and ends in the news which "interest" people even if this might be classified as "gossip," a homespun quality which makes the listener feel that Thomas is a "regular, average fellow," strong reliance on human interest, "change-of-pace closer," and other devices such as humor, pathos, and extensive "personalizing."

One followed the preparation of a typical newscast from its planning stages to its 6:45 P.M. on-the-air broadcast and saw that this follows a well-established schedule. And one used supporting statements about Thomas' rhetoric from Frederick Dowling's dissertation on the style of radio commentators, and from Paul White who felt that Thomas belonged to the "choppy-sentence school of writing." As an historical point of departure almost all of the original Literary Digest script for Sept. 29, 1930 was included and the conclusion drawn that the "die was cast." Much of the tone, the flavor, and the style of the present newscasts can be traced to that initial presentation.

Thomas' gradually evolving philosophy of the news was indicated, and in the final segment of the chapter his precept that "everything is news" serves to underscore his continuing belief that he serves a wide audience rather than any particular sector of that audience, and that his task is to reveal the "pageantry of the news." As seen from his scripts and from the special style which governs them, Thomas uses vivid language and a dramatic tone of delivery. As Dixon Wecter stated: "He uses simple language, a stress upon human interest, spotted frequently with humor and amusing anecdotes, delivered in a warm friendly voice, completing a kindly but hopeful outlook over-all."[36]

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[36]Wecter, op. cit., p. 15.

CHAPTER VI

AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED RADIO NEWS SCRIPTS

The Scope of the Commentator

In this chapter we shall be concerned with Lowell Thomas' scripts from the point of content analysis. Certain of his radio scripts in the 1930's, the 1940's, and the 1950's will be examined against the semi-official record of the New York Times for the identical days, and we shall see what items tend to be given priority by Thomas, and to learn more about his sources. Immediately, however, the growing role of the radio commentator and the part Lowell Thomas played in its evolution warrants consideration.

According to Quincy Howe, news programs fall into three main categories:

> First, there are the straight news broadcasts, read by an announcer or newscaster and prepared by one of the press associations.
>
> Second, there are the news analysts or commentators as they are now called, some of whom specialize in forecasts, analysis, and news behind the news, but most of whom do little more than summarize the news bulletins, throwing in an occasional editorial comment. Although the radio commentator corresponds to the newspaper columnist, he keeps his own opinions much more in the background. What he exploits is not a point of view but a voice, a manner, a distinctive way of speaking. Finally,

> to provide a clash of opinion, there is the forum, debate or round-table type of program which has become increasingly popular and which specializes in opinion.[1]

Howe cites some of the personality differences between the nation's most popular figures: H. V, Kaltenborn and Lowell Thomas. He feels that while Thomas ministers to the American people's love of sensation, Kaltenborn ministers to their moral sense. What he further expresses somewhat diplomatically accounts for Thomas' mild and non-controversial content; that is, the substance of what Thomas delivers on the air, Howe feels, is "cheerfully non-intellectual." He states that the "amount of work he does and the wide audience to which he must appeal have prevented him from expressing any opinion with which the great majority of the American people are not already in agreement. Indeed, ever since his early days, he has steered away from controversial subjects and has preferred to emphasize drama and personality in the news."[2]

Thomas has never purported to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders; he has stayed away from opinion and editorializing and has decided to work in the broad middle ground that is labeled conservative. Paul White, in a chapter of his book bearing the heading, "No One Knows That

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[1]Quincy Howe, The News and How to Understand It (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 171.

[2]Ibid., p. 172.

Much," examines the scope of commentators. He raises the question of how much solid grounding they really have in world events, how much expertise is required, and what responsibility they have to the network. To permit certain analysts to preach their own views, he states, would create a super-editorial page and would be an abuse of freedom of the air. Paul White quotes a memorandum written by Edward Klauber two years before Pearl Harbor, which was widely praised in the industry. This is part of the 1939 memorandum to the CBS staff on war coverage:

> Columbia's announced policy of having no editorial views of its own, and not seeking to maintain or advance views of others will be rigidly continued.
>
> In being fair and factual, those who present the news for Columbia must not only refrain from personal opinions, but must refrain from microphone manner designed to cast doubt, suspicion, sarcasm, ridicule or anything of that sort on the matter they are presenting.
>
> What news analysts are entitled to do and should do is to elucidate and illuminate the news out of common knowledge, or special knowledge possessed by them or made available to them by this organization through its news sources. They should point out the facts on both sides, show contradictions with the known record, and so on. They should bear in mind that in a democracy it is important that people not only should know but should understand, and it is the analyst's function to help the listener to understand, to weight, and to judge, but not to do the judging for him.[3]

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[3]CBS News Dept. Memorandum by Edward Klauber quoted in White, op. cit., p. 199.

It is impossible, within any reasonable limits, to define completely this last-mentioned aspect of news analysis. Fairness and temperateness are of its essence. Thomas observes these two qualities in his coverage, but his might be called the kaleidoscopic method, for he covers a wide range of topics in any given newscast.

Comparison with the New York Times

For the purposes of this dissertation, it was felt that the complete files of Lowell Thomas constituted the single greatest asset to the researcher. Photostated copies of the original scripts for the following days were made:

September 29, 1930--the initial broadcast.
September 30, 1930
October 1, 1930
October 2, 1930
October 3, 1930
October 9, 1930
October 10, 1930
October 11, 1930
March 2, 1939
March 15, 1939
March 29, 1939

March 21, 1945
May 24, 1945
June 11, 1945
June 12, 1945
June 14, 1945
June 15, 1945
June 20, 1945
June 21, 1945
June 25, 1945
June 26, 1945

August 27, 1951

February 26, 1962
October 10, 1963
November 27, 1963

The author devoted a total of two weeks to the scripts in Thomas' offices in New York. He read through most of them from the 1930's up to the 1960's; but selected the representative view as samples of the best and the worst of Lowell Thomas on the basis of their news content. Each of these was checked against the equivalent day's news as reported in the New York Times. It should be noted, however, that the average length of the Times was between 50 and 60 pages daily; and that these items of principal concern were found only on the first ten pages; they were not checked beyond page 10.

In the radio script of September 30, 1930, the first news item reported by Thomas was the nomination of Franklin D. Roosevelt for governor of New York for a second term. His account took one and a half pages. This was also the number one story in the Times. However, Thomas, in his second item delves into the passion play at Oberammergau, Germany. This is not mentioned at all in the Times. Thomas, therefore, skips over a dozen or more important stories in order to bring this kind of "color":

> The world-famous passion play at Oberammergau Germany is over for another ten years. This story is the portrayal of the life of Christ from Bethlehem to Calvary. 383,000 persons from all over the world saw the great spectacle. The

> receipts exceeded one million, two hundred thousand dollars. A sixth of that came out of pockets of fifty thousand Americans there.
>
> Among the spectators was our own Henry Ford and his wife. So delighted was the automobile king that he gave a flivver to Anton Lang (long famous in that role of Christ). And now in the soft moonlight, to the tinkle of monastery bells, high up in the snowclad Bavarian alps, the Thespian Christ and Pontius Pilate, the Oberammergau Judas and Mary Magdalene climb into their Ford at night and chug home.
>
> I used to know Anton Lang and his picturesque fellow townsmen. Back in 1918, when the World War ended, I crawled through the lines to see what had beengoing on in Central Europe. And on Christmas Day I went to Oberammergau and brought the first news from the outside world to the Passion Players.[4]

In view of the heavy news of a typical depression day, it seems that this "odd" item about Oberammergau caught Thomas' attention and afforded him a chance to "personalize" it further by relating how he "crawled through the German lines" to report the news to the Bavarians. Allowing for some distortion in the account, it nonetheless typifies the Lowell Thomas posture or stance; it replaces hard news with color, and it symbolizes what Thomas will do with content if it strikes his fancy.

A classic "color" story

In this same September 30,1930, newscast there is one further "feature" item somewhat similar to the Oberammergau item; and this might be called a "classic" Lowell Thomas

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[4]Lowell Thomas radio news script, Sept. 30, 1930.

story. It concerns an oriental monarch and his jewels, and Thomas can succeed in personalizing it, for he was a guest of Amanullah Khan in "forbidden" Afghanistan. According to present world atlases, Afghanistan is not "forbidden"; it is merely difficult to traverse and holds little attraction for the traveler. The researcher queried Thomas about his use of the word "forbidden" and Thomas parried with the term "forbidding" saying that it might have been a mistake; but it made Afghanistan sound more intriguing. The news style is in that highly palatable, relatively plain and simple style which the Reader's Digest itself used. It is eminently readable and effortless to digest. It is reproduced herewith as an example of the early Thomas style and as a classic forerunner of much of his later Cinerama and High Adventure narratives. According to Thomas, both Prosper Buranelli and he worked on this story. It was Buranelli who called it to his attention, suggested he use it, and that he "personalize" it.

Note the occasional use of "well" to make familiar the narration, and the exclamation "Yes, boy!" on page 109 which might be thought to be a trifle boyish. The whole story, which this author believes is disproportionately long, is used instead of more substantial stories; there is no criticism or complaint about its truth; but there is question of its relevance on a day when the Times highlighted a

rebellion in Havana, a speech in Berlin by Hindenburg, plans for new German fiscal reform, and Japan's acceptance of the London (Naval) Pact. The story is reproduced as follows:

> Persia, today flashed a wireless across the world stating that the Afghans are demanding that their former king, Amanullah Khan, divy up the Afghan crown jewels and send them back to Kabul, so Nadir Khan, the new king, can use them. You doubtless will recall the Amanullah Khan was deposed from his Central Asian throne last year. I knew him and was his guest before he was ousted. Afghanistan is one of the so-called forbidden countries of the world.
>
> While Amanullah Khan was still king out there, and when he was still wearing these state jewels that the Afghans are now demanding, I tried to get into Afghanistan. But they wanted no travelers there. However, after trying for two years, Amanullah relented, sent a camel courier down from the mountains of Central Asia, and invited me to his court. I journeyed through the Khyber Pass, the most strongly fortified mountain gorge in the world, and then plunged into the Afghan desert. When we got to Kabul--or Kabool as we used to call it in school--King Amanullah placed one of his palaces at our disposal.
>
> Afghanistan is the most orthodox Mohammedan country in the world. An Afghan will often go wild with religious frenzy, and when that happens to him he is called a ghazi--a conqueror--and he starts out with a knife in his hand, his mind made up not to stop until he kills an unbeliever, preferably a dog of a Christian. So whenever we wanted to prowl around the romantic but rather dark and sinister bazaars of Kabul, King Amanullah would insist on sending his personal bodyguard along--much to our satisfaction!
>
> Well, when Amanullah fled from Afghanistan with the jewels that his people now insist upon having returned, he got away <u>just in time</u>. The Afghans are now calling Amanullah hard names for taking the State diamonds and rubies and emeralds. But when I was with him they called him "The Light of the World." They kept right on calling him that until he made the mistake of leaving his country for a trip to Paris. In fact

> Amanullah was the first Afghan monarch ever to visit the outside world. But Amanullah and his Queen wanted to see Paris and the wonders of Europe. And when they arrived in Europe the King took off his bulging turban, his loop-the-loop shoes and his baggy pantaloons, and he bought himself a silk topper, a tail coat, striped trousers, spats and a cane. You should have seen Amanullah in Paris! But that wasn't the half of it. The Queen took off her veil, and appeared in knee-length Parisian frocks. She was easy to look at, too. But Amanullah's enemies got hold of pictures of them dressed like that. The pictures were rushed back to Central Asia. Thousands of copies were spread about the country, and when Amanullah got home with his top hat and all of his comical new western ideas, the warlike Afghans shook their heads, stroked their beards and got busy. They quickly pushed him off the throne. But he was luckier than most Afghan kings, for he escaped without having his throat slit. Poor fellow, he got away with only about fifty million dollars, and now he lives in retirement in Europe, on the Italian Riviera.
>
> It's a long way from Italy to Afghanistan, so maybe Amanullah will laugh at his former subjects and refuse to return the crown jewels. Knowing the Afghans as I do, if I were Amanullah Khan I think I'd give them up. Yes, boy! Because if he doesn't--well, some Afghan knifeman may come half way round the world to get them! And he may do it stealthily. And I can think of a lot of unhealthy things that might happen to Amanullah, on a dark night.

Thomas concludes his fifteen minute report that day by inviting the listener to speculate on what may be the most interesting news item tomorrow, from the human interest point of view. This gives a basic clue as to what Thomas includes, excludes and finally highlights (as in the story from Afghanistan). But as he put it just before closing:

> I wonder how you like this idea of picking a news item of the day. For me there is a real thrill in it--finding the story that somehow hits me

> hardest--guessing what it will be tomorrow. Of course, what is the most interesting to one may not be the most interesting to another. Some prefer comedy, others pathos, adventure, science, romance, important events. What's your choice?
>
> It is always interesting to get the other fellow's slant. And that gives me an idea. Tomorrow, I'm going to ask someone else to do the picking. Let's see. Just before I go on the air, I'll put my sheaf of news before the editors of the Literary Digest and ask them to pick out the news item of the day. I wonder what they will select? And let us see if we'll all agree with them. Good night.[5]

In trying to trace a pattern or to find evidence of a design for the newscast which Thomas would practice and follow to some extent in his broadcasting career, the stylistic devices and the content-treatment gradually emerge more clearly and they seem to remain quite the same. For example, Thomas tells the listener what it is he's looking for in the news item of the day; it is the memorable, philosophical "thought for the day" practiced by many regional and local newscasters. As Thomas put it in his second news show for the Literary Digest:

> You know, I'm selecting each day the bit of news that hits me the hardest, not the most important, necessarily, or the most spectacular, but the most interesting--the news item of the day.[6]

His declared criterion, then, is the most interesting, the most attention-getting, possibly the most bizarre or fanciful. And this might well be proferred in lieu of a

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[5]Lowell Thomas radio news script, Sept. 30, 1930.

[6]Ibid.

strict news item, for the time and space given to the Afghanistan item illustrates this. However, in the October 1, 1930 newscast, he did say when the time came for "News Item of the Day" that he asked the editors of the Literary Digest to pick the item for him. He relates it this way in the radio script: "And what do you think those serious gentlemen selected? They said: 'Why, don't you know the World Series is on? Take that home run Simmons hit.'"[7] The incident that Lowell Thomas selected related to a ball player in Philadelphia.

For October 2, 1930, Lowell Thomas wrapped up two "birthdays" in one account, which the Times mentioned on pages 2 and 3 respectively. President von Hindenburg of Germany, on page 2; Mahatma Ghandi's sixty-first birthday celebrated in prison on page 3. Thomas opened with the item and succeeded in personalizing them in this fashion:

> Von Hindenburg, at eighty-three, is one of the most amazing figures of modern times--in a sense, the Washington of the German Republic. I talked with him in 1918 when the German Revolution was in full swing and it looked as though his life had been a failure.[8]

And when he then made a transition to Ghandi, who was sixty-one, Thomas said:

> He can enjoy himself even in prison. That's where philosophers have the advantage over the

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[7]Lowell Thomas radio news script, Oct. 1, 1930.

[8]Lowell Thomas radio news script, October 2, 1930.

> rest of us. I met Ghandi in Bombay when he first started his famous non-cooperation movement.[9]

The item, however, selected for scrutiny in this day's newscast is notable only in that it contrasts with the Times' account. The story was told on page one in two columns under the headline: "Irish Ask Freedom As Empire Parley Opens" and it continued on to page six for another hundred words. By comparison, Thomas who made it the second item of importance in his newscast either failed to grasp the significance of it at all or glossed over it in such light-hearted manner that it hardly seemed important when he finished. He said:

> The British Imperial Congress over in London got down to work today. Just wait a minute--I'm not going to smother you with any dry facts and figures. But think of the glamor and romance that surrounds such a congress!
>
> What a fascinating picture it is to think of that conference, with its representatives from Borneo, Scotland, Uganda, Malaya, and a hundred other picturesque corners of the globe![10]

October 3 and October 9 both present items roughly in correspondence with the weight and importance which the Times for those dates accorded, leaving aside Thomas' "News Item of the Day" on October 9, for example, which dealt with James Doolittle, the flier who barely escaped death in a freak accident that was not reported by the Times. Accounts

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[9]Lowell Thomas radio script, October 2, 1930.

[10]Ibid.

of the rebellion and the labor strikes in Brazil were reported by Thomas with sobriety and in a straightforward fashion. His items which dealt with Brazil were shorter. He did not mention the near-bankruptcy of Spain reported at length on page 3 of the Times, nor the closing of the Phillippine National Bank branches, the student riots in Lahore, and the fact that Britain would place the jobless on farms. These last-mentioned items come under the classification of "unpleasant or troublesome," and Thomas avoided them entirely. He did mention the flight of Canadian pilot Captain Errol Boyd who steered through the fog to land in London by dead reckoning. The Times carried the story in a boxed paragraph on page four; Thomas gave it one page on October 9.

In a chapter called "Telephonities" in his book, I Live On Air,[11] A. A. Schechter, then working for Lowell Thomas as a special events reporter, and later, to become head of NBC, accounts for some of the means of gathering the news for Thomas. His account is informal and at times almost flippant, but he fills in with valuable information in the early 1930's when, as he says, "radio was the prize exhibit in American journalism's doghouse." During the Press-Radio War, for example, Schechter and Thomas relied

[11]A. A. Schechter, I Live On Air (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1941).

on the telephone as a means of pinning down a story, investigating a story, or developing a story.

At one point, Schechter states, "Before the rapprochement which led to the formation of the Press-Radio Bureau things were so tough that Lowell Thomas, the star of our principal news program was without any source of news."[12] He relates how he could "dig" for a story for Lowell Thomas and sometimes run across an exclusive item or ferret-out news that the regular wire services did not carry; and these items were reflected in some of the unusual human interest stories which his newscast specialized in.

> The newspapers from abroad yielded up a fair amount of foreign copy--not exactly spot news, but it helped. Then I developed telephonitis, which proved to be a real contribution to the solution to our problem.
>
> I made the discovery that by saying I was talking for Lowell Thomas or the News Department of the National Broadcasting Company, or both, I could get practically anyone on the telephone.[13]

Schechter tells about the Peggy McMath kidnapping case with the Thomas "exclusive" obtained by telephone. This actually embarrassed reporters on the assignment, for Thomas had the "news in depth" so to speak. Thomas announced one night that the kidnapper would plead guilty the next day. An hour or so after the broadcast, it was confirmed

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[12] Ibid., p. 13.

[13] Ibid., p. 2.

to newsmen. The judge (Edward Hanify) explained: "Lowell Thomas' office has been calling me up in chambers every day and I've been telling them what developed."[14]

Schechter makes a final point by showing that in those hectic days of rivalry and experimentation with the new medium, "all was fair in peace and war." He believed that they were lucky in discovering that "people considered us so important that we could crash through almost anywhere by telephone."

Suffice it to say, that throughout the Depression-ridden days, especially during the Press Radio War, it must have been a period of "heady improvisation, luck, and fierce competition"[15] in order to survive. It was also during the first year or two that Thomas was on the air that he arrived at his definite format for opening and closing the program. He had experimented with several beginnings, discarded them, and finally decided on "Good evening, everybody" which has stuck with him since. There is no truly definite beginning date for this familiar opening phrase, because he had "tried it out" as early as October 3, 1930, and then reverted to "Hello, everybody." He used as many as six different openings in the period, as a check through these scripts reveals. It was also about 1933 that he stuck to his closing line: "So long until tomorrow."

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[14] Ibid., p. 4.

[15] Ibid., p. 9.

On March 2, 1939, the Times ran a banner headline of four columns across the front page: "New Pope Elected: Pius XII." This was the outstanding news item of the day, and was supplemented by a second story on the lower half of page one titled "Profile of the Pontiff." Inside the Times on pages 3 and 4 were photographic treatments of the election. It is informative to compare the severely measured account of the Times with the Lowell Thomas account that evening. Thomas opened with the election of the new pope as the lead item and plunged right in. He told about his telephoning Father O'Harra, president of Notre Dame. Thomas begins his account in this manner:

> Right after the news of the papal election today, I put in a telephone call to South Bend, Indiana--and it was okay. That's the keyword of this story, okay. I 'phoned Notre Dame and talked to its President, Father O'Hara knowing that he was well acquainted with the Cardinal who has become Pope.
>
> 'How is the English of the newly elected Pope,' I asked.
>
> 'Okay, he replied,' and when he was at South Bend we found him quite an expert at picking up American slang.'
>
> As His Eminence Cardinal Pacelli, now Pius XII got into his plane to leave he cried out: Okay!
>
> And that is what the Catholic world is saying today about the result of the Papal election--Okay.[16]

On March 15, 1939, the Times used a full-spread or banner headline of five columns to announce: "Adolf Hitler

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[16]Lowell Thomas radio script, March 2, 1939.

Marches into Prague." This was obviously the number one story of the day and it was so treated by Lowell Thomas speaking for the Sun Oil Company.

> Today Adolf Hitler rode triumphantly into Prague. A dramatic symbol of his complete control of the ancient countries of Bohemia and Moravia.
>
> Bismark once said: "Who holds Bohemia, holds Europe." Historians have been speculating about that bit of rhetoric ever since. Actually, the last ruler of Bohemia who had an important voice in Europe was the Emperor Charles the Fifth. Since then, numerous rulers have held Bohemia, such as the late Emperor Franz Josef. But he didn't hold Germany and he didn't hold Europe.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> One part of the day's news is more than a trifle puzzling. As we learned on Monday, Hitler decreed that Czechoslovakia should be partitioned into three divisions. One, Bohemia and Moravia; two, Slovakia, three, Carpatho-Ukraine. But today Carpatho-Ukraine disappears as a nation. A Hungarian army burst into that short-lived republic, marched over it all the way to the Polish border. So tonight there's a common border between Poland and Hungary.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Why does the Nazie Fuehrer want the Hungarians in that strip of land? How will it help him grab the Ukraine? Most of the Fuehrer's political moves are explained in his book, Mein Kampf. But in it I can find no indication not even a hint of this Hungarian business.[17]

It may have been that Thomas was gradually becoming more genuinely absorbed by European events or was reading Mein Kampf with more professional expertise, for one senses in this sample of his comment that he toned down his entire newscast considerably. The closing item for that date was

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[17]Lowell Thomas radio script, March 15, 1939, pp. 1-3.

only mildly cheerful; it had to do with a man entering a coin shop in Detroit to have a rare coin appraised and what amusement ensued. One may say that by looking at the closing items for a period of months in the "stress and strain" days of 1939 and 1940 or even 1941, that although there is the "rainbow in the sky" at the end of the show, there is very little of the hale-and-hearty approach to the news that one found in the Literary Digest days. It is this writer's conviction that this came about for two main reasons: (1) Thomas' gradual maturity in the medium, (2) strengthening of the whole CBS News operation under Paul White and others who felt that all of their newsmen should be fully responsible and "inform" rather than entertain.

One further reference to the 1930 period is illustrative of the basic differences between Thomas and the Times in content and emphasis. On March 29, 1939, the Times mentioned on page eight that Richard Halliburton the writer and adventurer was "apparently thought lost off the coast of China." The item was one long paragraph of about 50 words. Thomas, however, mentioned the disappearance of Halliburton mid-way in his newscast and gave approximately 300 words to the story. His treatment of the story is a typical play for the "sense of adventure and romance" evoked by the name Halliburton, and the item affords Thomas a chance to speak of adventure in the old-fashioned sense which he had not

been able to do owing to the grimness of the news. He reported:

> Why so much solicitude about the lost Chinese junk? Because it is a craft on a romantic voyage and aboard it is one of the prime romancers of our time.
>
> Richard Halliburton--that Halliburton who has been up to all sorts of novelty adventure. Swimming the Hellespont, as the Sighting Leander did in Greek legend. Swimming the whole length of the Panama Canal, bit by bit crossing the alps on elephant- a la Hannibal.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The Sea Dragon has been slapped down by a typhoon. A calamitous end to the latest Halliburton adventure. But a fitting one for Richard-the-Romantic.[18]

From here to the end of the specific scripts examined (through November 27, 1963) there will be no reference to the Times for a check on how the items were deployed. Generally speaking, Thomas followed a pattern of his own only at times related to the hard news content as revealed in the first pages of the daily Times. It proved fruitless, owing to the nature of Thomas' newscast with its strong emphasis on the human interest story and its sudden departures from important news happenings, to pursue the comparison much further. Both are valid entities in their own right, however, and the comparison was not altogether profitable.

Turning to a script of May 24, 1944, in the last days of the war with Japan, Thomas refers to the bombing of the

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[18]Lowell Thomas radio news script, March 29, pp. 5-6.

port of Kobe, then departs from the news item proper to recall his days in Kobe. It is a skillful blending of techniques and it achieves as much impact, perhaps, on the listener for it makes Kobe more personal and removes it from the anonymity of a remote geographical place-name.

> The latest air assault against Japan was delivered by nearly five hundred B-29s which dropped thirty-three tons of incendiary bombs. Returning pilots tell of smoke billowing up to twenty thousand feet--nearly five miles.
>
> I new Kobe very intimately, for I spent many weeks there while hunting whales for the American Museum of National History, off the tiny island of Oshima, a short distance away.
>
> The city sprawls along the shore in a long, narrow line. Just behind it, a range of mountains rise in a series of ragged peaks covered with a green blanket of luxurious vegetation. I used often to visit a great bronze Buddha, the second largest in Japan, that sat placidly in a courtyard watching the changing currents of history pass before its half-closed eyes.[19]

Thomas, who had done a book on Japan for children in the 1930's, retained his affection for the Japanese people and recalled his days in Japan with pleasure. The above instance in recollecting Kobe illustrates the even keel of his mind, showing no bitterness or animosity despite the war. It was noted in going over his references to the Axis powers in his war-time scripts that references to Emperor Hirohito, to Mussolini, and to Hitler were remarkably free of caricature, invective, and name-calling. His chief target seemed

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[19]Lowell Thomas radio script, May 24, 1944.

to be Hitler. Thomas admitted in a conversation that although he admired the German people as a whole, he had "difficulty in warming up to them."[20] He did single out Hitler now and again for being a "strutting buffoon." His most frequent reference to him, however, was simply Adolf or "old Adolf." One might conclude that the various stages and developments in World War II were reported calmly and without hysteria or melodrama. Only V-E Day and on V-J Day did he indulge in a bit of natural ebullience.

Thomas accounts for a trip to Manila on June 22, 1945 and this script is cited as an example of Thomas' best narrative style. The segment of this script marked "Okinawa notes" runs for 5 pages, or approximately ten minutes of air time. Thomas began his program in this manner:

> This week I have been shuttling back and forth between two groups of islands, the Marianas and the Ryukyus, between Admiral Nimitz's headquarters on Guam and the island of Okinawa where the recent desperate fighting has been going on, and has just come to an end.
>
> And the distance between the two islands is almost as great as from North America to Europe. Each time I made the flight, one way, we spanned the ocean for one thousand four hundred miles.
>
> Okinawa is a lot bigger than you might think. It's big enough for a population of six hundred thousand civilians and a couple of hundred thousand soldiers locked in that most desperate battle of

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[20]Lowell Thomas interview with the author, New York City, June 3, 1964.

> the Pacific war. Also, big enough for several enormous air fields with plenty of room for a dozen more like them. And with all of that, as you drive around it, Okinawa doesn't seem crowded.
>
> Many of the men who drive over the Okinawa roads are wearing special dust goggles. But some are even wearing gas masks. Our boys all told me they much prefer Okinawa dust to Okinawa mud.[21]

Thomas had a key observation post, a vantage post from which he witnessed the fighting from the air, at a time when the Japanese were making their last stand. The Marines and the Army infantry were cutting them up into smaller and smaller pockets with heavy losses on both sides. It happens that Thomas was in his specially shielded observation point when General Buckner was killed in a jeep not far from the observation post. He reported this matter-of-factly in the same script.

On July 25, 1945, Thomas was back in San Francisco and there is a portion of his script which again reveals something of his insight as an observer and as a good reporter. Two passages from this newscast illustrate how candid and revealing Thomas can be, still pegging this item or "slant" from the human-interest level alone.

> One reason I was pleased that my return from the Far East came at the time when the San Francisco Conference was in its closing hours, was that I wanted to see and hear President Truman. The last time I had seen and talked with him was when he was still just another United States Senator. And I had never visualized him as President.

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[21] Lowell Thomas radio script, June 22, 1945 from Manila, P.I.

> Mr. Truman more than lived up to the advance billing he has been getting, the word that I've been hearing about him around the world. He is a far better speaker than he used to be. Something must have happened to him. It was a warm, friendly speech that completely won the delegates from the fifty nations and the rest of the crowd that jammed the San Francisco Opera House. He had poise. His voice was well-modulated. He had change of pace. His gestures were natural and appropriate. What he had to say was right in every way, just right, without overdoing it. With his smile and genial manner in that assemblage Harry Truman of Independence, Missouri stood out. It was his day.[22]

This appraisal by Thomas tells us as much of Thomas as it does of Truman, for we see the importance he attaches to the skilled and polished speaker, and what attributes of effective speech-making appear to count to Thomas: change of pace, poise, gestures and a well-modulated voice to begin with.

It is also relevant to include one specimen of a story on Australia which Thomas had gone over with his red pencil and marked for air delivery, September 7, 1947. This is an example of a script written by Prosper Buranelli but which Thomas has carefully trimmed to fit his speaking style and the way it will read most comfortably. He has crossed out an "as it were," and he has inserted a "will be able to" after Britain in the sixth line. He has changed the last sentence in the first paragraph, or rearranged the word order

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[22]Lowell Thomas radio script, June 22, 1945 from San Francisco.

to make sharper sense. He has changed the verb "means" to "meaning" and shortly thereafter indicated a new paragraph. Perhaps this was intended as more of a breath-pause, or some similar indication for smoother reading. The word "export" is underscored for emphasis. Thomas frequently underscores; and abundant examples of his emphasis marks can be found. A slight and final alteration occurs at the end when he has inserted, "from now on" in lieu of "being." This is the only example of a page of Thomas' script corrected in his handwriting that will be submitted. It follows on page 125.

The Sponsor Relationship

It is fitting that somewhere in the discussion of Lowell Thomas' career some observations about his sponsors be made. They have been important in his career, and the writer believes, in the case of the Literary Digest, "mutually enhancing." This is true, also, of the Sun Oil Company, for as Thomas stated in his "farewell" broadcast for Sunoco, he had been given complete freedom of subjects to air and had worked harmoniously for fifteen years with the company without once having an altercation. At any rate, it is worth including in this investigation of the "whole man" for one sees how Lowell Thomas is able to make lasting relationships and to promote good will and acceptance for his sponsors.

Australia to the rescue of impoverished Britain - a generous gesture. Five million dollars' worth of gold on the table, ~~and it were~~, and a pledge of the entire Australian gold production, valued at twenty-three million dollars a year, as it is mined. ~~This~~ Which means that Britain ~~can~~ will be able to get dollars, immediately, in the United States, in return ~~x~~ for this Australian gold, the United States being obliged by law to buy any gold offered ~~at~~ us --- buy it at thirty five dollars an ounce.

Australia's surprise present to the mother land will put Australians on short rations, less whiskey, and fewer ~~imports~~ imports of crockery and cutlery from England. Other measures introduced by the Australian Government include a ban on importation of numerous items from the dollar area ~~that~~ means ing America. Measures to save eight to five million dollars a year. Australia, however, has no intention of restricting the importation of American movies; but the Dominion "down under" is restricting the export of Australian money, ~~visiting~~ visiting stage entertainers and other artists from now on ~~being~~ allowed to take only three thousand, two hundred dollars of their earnings out of the country.

Mr. Joseph Pew, chairman of the Board of Sun Oil, was sitting next to Thomas the evening of September 26, 1947, which was to ring down the curtain on the fifteen-year association, and Pew spoke for about two minutes. His little talk is unique in that he reviewed the status of news broadcasting a bit and praised Thomas for his presentation of "truthful, clean, wholesome news, without bias or favoritism." Mr. Pew elaborated:

> Back in 1932 when Sunoco first sponsored Lowell Thomas, there was only ten full-time network news reporters and commentators. Today there are over 125 full-time news broadcasters and altogether some 6,000 men and women are engaged in gathering, preparing, and broadcasting news.
>
> This growth in news broadcasting indicates how greatly the American people have come to rely upon radio for the news of the day and all the facts which shape our destinies. It demonstrates need for great vigilance and to assure accurate, complete, impartial and wholly objective reporting.[23]

Pew added that the company had regarded the news program as a public trust. He believed that through Lowell Thomas "with his sincerity and deep human understanding" it had fulfilled that trust. He then explained that it was a matter of regret to see Lowell Thomas go: "during these years we have come to admire, respect and love him." Pew stated that he had become "one of us" and wished him well in his new (unspecified) venture.

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[23]Mr. Joseph Pew, speaking on Lowell Thomas news program Sept. 26, 1947.

It follows in short order that Monday, September 29, 1947, with only the week-end intervening, Lowell Thomas began at 6:45 P.M. his radio news program over CBS without a hitch. His opening words again reflect this personal policy of keeping working relationships smooth.

> After many long years of broadcasting nightly over one great network, for one great sponsor, I am transferring to another great network and another great sponsor.
>
> In coming to CBS, I don't exactly feel like a stranger. When I first came into radio, the man who first lured me to the microphone was an attractive, brilliant young man named Bill Paley, the founder and still the head of this great Columbia Broadcasting System.[24]

Thomas then elaborated what might be interpreted as his role in the news, his view of the news, that essential service which he fulfills on the air. Thomas stated that he would continue to bring Americans "the pageant of the events of the day: the important headlines, the dramatic twists, the cheerful as well as the ominous, the gay as well as the serious." And just before plunging into that day's news round-up he prefaced his remarks by saying that it had been a vivid news day--" with contrasts of the serious, the important, the dramatic, and the lighter side, too."

This researcher was able to obtain an answer from Thomas concerning the lighter side. After reading his opening newscast for Procter and Gamble, and knowing that the

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[24]Lowell Thomas radio script, Sept. 29, 1947.

stage was different, the setting different, perhaps it was time to re-shape the format. Thomas said that he had told Procter and Gamble he would continue with precisely the same style; it was the old style they liked, without any thought of change. Thomas firmly believes in the "brightener" or closing humorous story, and he explained: "I have always liked to wind up the program with a little smile. There is no point in ending on a sour note as though we had just heard a severe sermon. Mine are little slices of life that show the absurdity of the human situation and I think people enjoy them."[25]

In this chronological survey of Thomas' radio scripts and the attempt to separate fact from fancy, to see the blending of hard news with feature materials, one must admit that the "recipe" is one which Thomas alone can concoct and serve. Whatever the actual ingredients, the staple elements are clear enough: romance, adventure, personalizing, stretching his listener's imagination and mental horizons by invoking the remote and faraway and yet keeping this all on the human scale.

The Lhasa Script

The first broadcast script of September 29, 1930, was included for historical value and now what the writer considers the single-most "important" script in Thomas'

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[25]Lowell Thomas in interview with author, June 3, 1964, New York.

broadcasting career will be examined in its entirety. This is the October 7, 1949, report from Lhasa, Tibet. The recording was made on portable battery-operated equipment, handled by Lowell Thomas, Jr. Its story has been well publicized and CBS freely distributed copies of the program afterward. It was written by Lowell Thomas himself by candlelight in his room in the monastery. It is this unique kind of feat at which Thomas excels, and which justly belongs in the "firsts" he has achieved.

Lowell Thomas was the first person in history to speak to the outside world from Lhasa. The excerpt from his script below was recorded by him in the long-forbidden city of the Dalai Lama, chief high priest of the millions of followers of Buddha. Unlike earlier references to Afghanistan which Thomas claimed was "forbidden," the mountain-top city of Lhasa actually was inaccessible physically. Thomas' recording was carried by yak from Lhasa to India, by courier to Calcutta, and by airplane to New York where it was broadcast. The writer talked with Thomas at length about this admitted highlight of his career and observations of Thomas will follow the portion of the script he prepared for CBS:

> It hardly seems possible, but here we are at last at Lhasa! Almost a month went by and we were still on the trail; it seemed as though we never were going to reach the forbidden city of Tibet. But we made it this morning. . . .

> Outside our window, less than half a mile away, is the Potala, one of the most impressive buildings in the world, the palace of the Dalai Lama.
>
> You can only come by caravan, scrambling over the greatest of all mountain ranges, riding over the empty Tibetan plateau.
>
> We caught our first glimpse of Lhasa last night from the saddle, still 11 miles away while in the village of Shingdanka.
>
> Early this morning, our caravans set forth in the rain. We approached the Lhasa Monastery, the largest in the world, with almost 10,000 monks.
>
> As we entered the city, we met streams of people. We were arriving near the end of a week-long annual dance festival. Tomorrow will be the final day and we hope to mingle with that stream of Tibetans and to film it in color and try to describe it in words. Entering a gate, we found ourselves directly beneath the combined Vatican and St. Peter's of the Buddhist world, the vast Potala, in the city nearly every traveler dreams of but so few have seen.[26]
>
> When you come to Lhasa, there is a strict rule that you must pay your respects to the Dalai Lama before you see anyone else. In other words, you practically go into hiding before seeing him. About three days must pass before you are permitted to enter the audience hall. For us, however, that rule was broken. Having broken that old tradition, the Tibetan government went all out in order to make sure that we missed nothing.[27]

The foregoing account of Thomas' broadcast from Lhasa is included because he was enterprising enough at fifty-eight years of age to tackle this kind of reporting and filming expedition. How can one put this kind of item under

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[26]Lowell Thomas, excerpts from radio script written in Lhasa, Oct. 7, 1949.

[27]Lowell Thomas in interview with author, June 4, 1964, New York.

strict scrutiny for content? It seems to defy the regular rules of reporting, unless it is classified as "color" or background material.

The writer attempted to obtain copies of the script which Thomas prepared for the November 22, 1963, date in American history, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. However, because his 6:45 P.M. programs were pre-empted for one week, Thomas simply did not prepare any radio news program at all. He was in Detroit at the time and had started to form his newscast, and had sketched out a rough outline when a call came in from the CBS station to his hotel advising him that his program was cancelled. The first date after the death of Kennedy on which Thomas spoke was November 27, 1963. He wrote the script himself, for he had followed the news very carefully, watching television in his hotel room in Detroit and thinking over the tragedy in his own terms. When he resumed broadcasting, he did not offer a word of editorializing, of condolences, or expression of sympathy. He said: "It has all been said, and I think we had best resume with our normal tasks."

This excerpt is from the November 27, 1963 radio news script:

> As for President Johnson's speech today, which you probably heard, it was a call for national unity and was roundly applauded by all members of Congress.

> All over Europe today President Johnson's address was received with sighs of relief. It seems as if the President, by quickly stating his intentions and his continuation of his predecessor's policies has broken the spell of uncertainty and alarm which has been paralyzing our allies since President Kennedy's assassination.
>
> As one high diplomat in London said: 'It looks as if we can take up just where we left off.' This seemed to be the general reaction.
>
> Toward the end, President Johnson again went out of his way to mention his enormous respect for Congress, concluding with the well-known lines about brotherhood, from 'America, the Beautiful.'
>
> Then he was gone, amid the enthusiastic applause from both sides of the House and Senate. He delivered his first address to the Congress, which you of course heard, Dick, apparently a most successful first appearance for our new chief of state.[28]

The Evolution of a Format

It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that the main problem in constructing a radio newscast is deciding what items to include, in what order, and how to present each. These problems become obvious when a news program's content is analyzed. Certainly there must be some stories which will be used and others discarded. Certain stories are more important than others, and still others serve as springboards for the personalization and the identification that Lowell Thomas likes to give to some of the events of the day.

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[28] Lowell Thomas radio script November 27, 1963.

As has been indicated there is no golden rule book, no printed set of rules for his writers to follow, but these things over a period of many years have become involuntary or semi-automatic. Like his father, Vincent Buranelli writes news copy that sounds the way Thomas likes it to sound; yet Thomas is his own final authority and he gives the copy the final check. The main responsibility has always rested with Thomas for judgment and for news evaluation; and in keeping with his earliest days with the Literary Digest, he has sought principally to instruct and to entertain. Paul White cites James Barrett's guiding principles for news writers:

> The selection of news is based:
> First on its intrinsic importance,
> Second, on its human values,
> Third, on its general appeal,
> Fourth, on its suitability for radio broadcast,
> Fifth, on its constructive value,
> Sixth, on its importance from the standpoint of public welfare, and
> Seventh, the most important, the editor is guided by his instinctive news sense which is difficult to define.[29]

It boils down as Presley D. Holmes, Jr. stated in his "An Analysis of Lowell Thomas, Newscaster," to the fact that there is no set standard, there are no guide rules for the perfect newscast. Actually, there cannot be, for they change from day to day, as does the news.[30] As a matter of

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[29]White, op. cit., p. 174.

[30]Presley D. Holmes, "An Analysis of Lowell Thomas, Newscaster" (Master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1951), p. 17.

fact, few editors have ever been brave enough to try to provide a yardstick for news evaluation. Perhaps, when it comes to Thomas, one is faced with such a maze of psychological factors that the success of Thomas eludes one if he applies the usual criteria. Even William Brooks's observation that "a straight newscast must have every story important to the mass audience--everything of front-page caliber."[31] This hardly offers a firm criterion for the news editor. What to include, then, turns out to be a matter of personal judgment on the part of the script editor, or in the case under study, on the part of Lowell Thomas himself. The problem does remain, however, if one ought to consider his radio program a newscast, or whether another term such as "pageant of the news" might not be more fitting.

Stunts and Features

Thomas has no specific features that he must include every day which would limit or restrict the script content. The "News Item of the Day" was tried for two years with the Literary Digest, but it was not consistently used or included. He uses whatever he feels should be included in that particular day's program and may toss out what Buranelli has written if something else has struck his attention on the way to the studio. This part of the total "chemistry" of a news

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[31] William F. Brooks, Radio News Writing (1st ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1948), p. 25.

program might be called intuitive or it might be called the "showmanship" aspect. Thomas does improvise a great deal. He shows originality of mind in his ideas for the sites of remote broadcasts. One time he insisted on broadcasting from the club car of a Santa Fe train despite the noises. He will go in for stunts such as letting a total stranger take over a leased home of his in London. Mrs. Louis Cochran from Houston, Texas, wrote him saying she had no place to stay in London for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. Thomas impulsively fired back a reply: "I can't make it due to a change of plans. Take my home."[32] It happens that Mrs. Cochran did take over the Thomas-leased home, and even provided a two minute eye-witness report of the ceremonies for the broadcast.

This kind of thing tickles Thomas' fancy; it appeals to his originality. He does believe in stunts, in improvised ideas, and he tries them out on the air.

Lowell Thomas follows few of the standard news procedures. He, of course, speaks to a national audience and therefore is not concerned with state or regional news. There is no geographical, topical, or departmentalized structure evident in any of the scripts examined. The structure of any given newscast of Thomas' is dictated more by the nature of the news that evening, and how Thomas

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[32]Lowell Thomas in radio newscasts May 16, 1952.

decided to play it, than by any pre-determined pattern. Thomas' construction of a newscast might be explained by Carl Warren's statement: "Several factors--logical, rhetorical, and psychological as well as topical and geographical may influence the arrangement of a newscast."[33] This broad statement might cover any leading radio commentator's structure and arrangement.

Concerning the individual items themselves, the experts' advice is to "make the various news items short."[34] The longest items should be about two minutes in length and the shortest ones about twenty seconds. Allowing for time consumed by commercials and the opening and closing announcements, a fifteen-minute newscast can comfortably handle about twenty or twenty-five items. Thomas' current format of ten minutes maximum time would allow between fifteen and twenty items. Yet once again Thomas has differed from the beginning from the accepted standard. The average number of items per program was about twelve. The average time which Thomas spoke was slightly more than eleven minutes per show, which means that he spent an average of about one minute on each item. Included in this figure, however, are items which Thomas disposed of in twenty seconds or less;

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[33]Carl N. Warren, Radio News Writing and Editing (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 207.

[34]Waldo Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1941), p. 57.

others on which he spent up to six minutes. He adhered to the time limit on the short items as would be expected, but he dwelled longer on the "maximum" time recommended.

Another important factor in evaluating the newscasts of Thomas is his rate of delivery. There is considerable difference among newscasters on this factor. "The speed with which some announcers speak is greater than most people would guess, anywhere between 150 and 240 words a minute. Yet people hear most effectively at the rate of 160 words a minute."[35] Thomas' rate according to Dr. Presley D. Holmes of Ohio University's Speech Department is "an average of 164 words a minute" on his newscasts.[36] The fact that his rate is so close to the average number of words people can intelligibly hear and digest per minute is another strong indication of why he maintains a large following.

The treatment of the final portion of a newscast is a subject of disagreement along the leading authorities. Some say that this is the place for recapitulation, the place to repeat the highlights of the newscast. Thomas has never followed this practice at all. There is always room for another story, hardly time to recapitulate. Still other theoreticians of the news claim that there is valid justifi-

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[35]Abbot, op. cit., p. 58.

[36]Holmes, op. cit., p. 21.

cation for the final upbeat of a program to be humorous, and to "leave 'em with a laugh."[37] Those journalists who oppose this idea say that on many days "humorous stories are sad indeed."[38] It would seem from past evidence and statements about the "smile at the end" that Thomas does endorse this view in theory and in practice.

This is one place where Thomas is markedly consistent in all of his broadcasts. He closes every program with a story not necessarily humorous, but of a human interest nature as we have pointed out. It is this last "taste in the mouth" which Thomas leaves that may perpetuate the notion that he is not a serious newscaster and is best thought of as a "color" reporter.

Newscast a Vehicle for Personality

Reviewing the construction of the standard newscast as compared with Thomas', the whole thing may be explained by the fact that Thomas is a personality using his newscasts as a vehicle to express this personality. This would naturally affect the construction of his programs. The extent to which he does personalize his newscasts and his treatment and handling of the news has been discussed.

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[37] Warren, op. cit., p. 211.

[38] Charnley, op. cit., pp. 120-21.

In striking a fair balance, then, between Thomas as something of a maverick and the quoted journalism authorities, it must be said that "news broadcasting is not old enough for ossification to have set in; and no pattern or format has had time to become rigidly fixed as has the newspaper tradition."[39]

Lowell Thomas has said that the subjects of his news programs were freely selected by him and his chief writer. There was never any interference by either NBC or CBS except, as we have seen in the case when his time was preempted due to an emergency or crisis. Friends, collaborators, family, government officials, newsmen occasionally suggested items for inclusions, but at the last minute Thomas decided whether they were to go in the newscast. What he puts in "is selected on the basis of its news value and not because of my pre-disposition toward certain topics."[40] There are certain patterns in the selection, however. Three of the most dominant themes pervading his scripts are (1) anniversaries, (2) personality sketches, and (3) curious reflections and observations on Americana.

Thomas does keep records of significant events, and frequently will include anniversaries or holidays in his

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[39]Ibid., p. 119.

[40]Lowell Thomas, in interview with the author, June 3, 1964.

comments. These topics will range from Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrations to Army Day, July 4, Bastille Day, the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War II. He seems also to have made something special out of Herbert Hoover's birthdays and paid tribute to him on August 13 on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday.[41] The personality sketches are a rather special device, a kind of cameo in words which he achieves with polish. Thomas describes "great men" in easy-to-understand terms, sketching their weaknesses, their attitudes, their strengths, and then relates these factors either to the news or to an occasion when Thomas and the person in the news met. From a July 13, 1942, script, he referred to Mahatma Gandhi and said:

> I think that Gandhi, with his sense of patiently waiting for a resolution to problems can out-fox the British and he will then push a step further ahead for freedom in this non-violent manner. I wasn't certain when I met him in New Delhi whether he was a charlatan, or the most effective spokesman for his cause the world has ever seen. I now think it's the latter.[42]

Here is an instance of the personality sketch with a rare divulgence of Thomas' personal opinion. It is similar to the comment on President Truman's speech cited earlier. But that kind of journalism which occupies a kind of twilight zone between "mood piece" and personal reflection,

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[41]Lowell Thomas radio script, from an air check, Aug. 13, 1964.

[42]Lowell Thomas radio script, July 13, 1942 from New York.

coming from a seasoned observer and which the author has called "observations on Americana," is where Thomas performs at his best. No one questions either his right to deliver this kind of mood piece, this kind of putting his finger on the pulse of a situation in his own individual way; nor does one doubt the validity of his findings.

These are invariably pieces that Thomas has written himself, for there is no possibility of "ghost-writing" the impressions which he relayed on his long trek through small towns in the West in 1963. Of the three "themes" which recur regularly in almost all of Thomas' scripts it is these "impressions" which the author believes he handles most skillfully and which also contribute to his popularity.

Thomas began his observations at the outset of his newscast of October 10, 1963:

> I am back in my New York news headquarters again, from the longest jaunt around my own country that I have made in years. One conclusion I came to after I had been on the road for less than a month was that every newsman should, every year or two, make a down-to-earth trip through the smaller places of this country of ours.
>
> Take Boise, for example, where all the news they use comes over the intermountain regional wire. Out there in Idaho, I noted how fresh and human the line of news appeared to be. To make room for all the local news they have to throw out a lot of foreign dispatches. But the press association men keep all the dramatic, the colorful, the odd items, all the human stories.
>
> So no wonder it's a bright wire--lively with the doings of people, a pageant of mankind, instead

> of a compendium of solemnities of international politics.[43]

Thomas has also inadvertently restated some of his own philosophy of the news in that last line: a "bright wire" as opposed to the "solemn."

The Human Interest Reporter

It would be a mistake, in the opinion of this writer, to cast too heavy a mantle on Thomas who is avowedly a "troubador," a reporter of the "pageantry of all life." He may or may not be a serious news analyst and it is doubtful whether he is truly a moulder and shaper of opinion.

In the 1945 round-up of fourteen leading newspaper and radio commentators by Bulman, Thomas is not included. Yet Walter Winchell, Drew Pearson, and Dorothy Thompson are included. In his foreword, Bulman expresses some views concerning the rising importance of the commentator in American life:

> These columnists and commentators are the Delphic Oracles of today. To them the American public goes in search of special news tidbits, to have its curiosity satisfied by the airing of political and social backstairs gossip, to seek help in disentangling and co-ordinating complicated and conflicting news reports, and last but not least, in search of ready-made opinions which one may adopt as one's own without indulging in anything so unpleasant as mental labor.[44]

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[43] Lowell Thomas radio news script, October 10, 1963.

[44] Bulman, op. cit., p. vii.

Bulman goes on to explain that the American public is offered a considerable variety of comment on the air. This ranges from Walter Lippmann, "a man of rare intelligence and broad experience," to Walter Winchell whom he decries as a keyhole peeper. But he does believe that columnists and commentators have a tremendous influence in molding the opinions of adult Americans. He says: "What these oracles think represents in a very large measure what the great American public thinks."[45]

Concerning the place and the relative importance in news broadcasting which Lowell Thomas occupies has been one of the tasks of this dissertation. One is obliged to offer a definition of "commentator" and "analyst" at the end of this chapter to see how Thomas measures up to expectations. It is known for certain, however, that he capitalizes on the human interest story; and with this in mind the author turned to Frank Luther Mott for a final word on the place of the human interest story in the news gathering and dissemination process.

First of all, Mott defines the concept: "Human interest news is a report which is interesting not because of the importance of the specific event or situation reported, but because of its amusing or pathetic, striking or significant as a bit of the texture of our human life."[46] It is also

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Frank Luther Mott, The News in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 64.

known that commonly human-interest stories get an easy emotional response. They are attractive and readable; they are "soft" news. Mott points out that perhaps it is enough that human-interest stories should be entertaining." We all need diversion, and such writing, if done with skill and restraint, makes admirable reading. Moreover, a good case may be made for the essential importance of little stories of common life."[47]

Mott concludes his observations about the nature and effectiveness of the human-interest story by saying that these items have meaning only as they are expertly drawn and chosen to represent the life about us, and then "presented with the deftness and restraint of the literary craftsman."[48] Occasionally a talented reporter writes a masterpiece in this genre; he may, therefore, be a minor Balzac or Dickens. The danger, as Mott indicates, is blatancy, striving for effect, insincerity, pat lessons in morality. One might state that so much depends on who is writing or telling the human-interest story.

Purposeful and informative writing has an esthetic of its own. "To really strenuous minds," said Walter Pater, "there is pleasurable stimulus in grasping the writer's challenge and in sharing his sense." Writing with the double purpose of instructing the mind and pleasing the

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[47] Ibid., p.65.

[48] Ibid.

taste is the best newspaper English, the best radio and television script style.

> A fundamental requirement of style is that it should be suited to its material and to the purpose of the particular piece of writing in question. The best reportorial style is singularly well-adapted to its aim. It has a sinewy movement; it is lean and well-trained; it is girt for speed and action. Matthew Arnold said that 'journalism is literature in a hurry.' Its swift registry on our minds is one of its chief beauties.[49]

One reverts invariably to Lowell Thomas' style whether it be his very own or the product of his writers. It is so engineered, nonetheless, to please that it is genial and friendly in tone; it does not offend; it is bold and vivid and informal. With Thomas voicing the news items, it becomes "the ingratiating conversational tone."

Summary

This chapter contains an analysis of the radio scripts of Thomas in some detail. It was seen that temperateness and fairness are characteristic of Thomas' news treatment. Certain of the scripts in the 1930's, the 1940's, the 1950's, and two in the 1960's were examined for the order and placement of stories, and a comparison with the New York Times suggested that no particular logic or method for selection and emphasis could be stated. In the days of the Literary Digest sponsorship, Thomas stated that he wanted to highlight

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[49] Ibid., p. 165.

the interesting items, the dramatic human interest story. From Schechter's book, insight was gained concerning extensive use of the telephone and certain "scoops" that Thomas gained in the early days. It was brought out that Thomas has gradually become more mature in his style. An examination of several personal accounts which Thomas wrote himself showed noted differences between his personal reminiscences and the usual, objective report.

The harmonious sponsor relationship with Sunoco, with Procter and Gamble, currently with Buick and General Motors[50] was examined; and the strength gained from "radio's longest continually sponsored program of 15 years without interruption." The chronological survey of Thomas' scripts continued until the admitted climax, his program from Tibet in 1949. It was suggested that Thomas is something of a maverick in that he does not adhere to any particular group of professionals, nor does he follow the main precepts of radio journalism. Concerning the evolution of his own format, he has established a definite opening, closing, and departure "joke" with his announcer.

Three of the dominant themes in his scripts are (1) anniversaries, (2) personality sketches, (3) reflections on

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[50]In November, 1964 Lowell Thomas shifted sponsorship to the Buick devision of General Motors.

an impressions of Americana. Thomas is the final judge and arbiter of what goes into the script at air-time. Items are selected for news value, not because of his predisposition to some topics. He was seen against the critical background established by Mott, and evaluated as an expert in the human-interest school.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LOWELL THOMAS

The Sound of Inherent Authority

This chapter will examine the over-all achievement of Lowell Thomas; it will indicate that he has succeeded H. V. Kaltenborn as the unofficial "dean" of American radio commentators owing to Thomas' seniority; it will examine further his impartiality, but stress his particular "point of view"; it will offer a brief comparison with Raymond Swing to point up differences between the two figures; it will discuss his innovations in newscasting and his honors. Additionally, Chapter VII will present a section of criticism from the press which will show Lowell Thomas at times in a favorable, at times in an unfavorable light.

To begin, a statement from John Day, Director of News and Public Affairs at Station WHDH, Boston, will serve to emphasize Thomas' professionalism:

> Lowell Thomas has helped to make the news meaningful over the years. He has served faithfully and reliably as a resourceful backgrounder.
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> The sound of inherent authority which makes for believability is part of his 'achievement." He has the sound of one who is talking about something he knows and understands, as opposed to simply reading news copy. This, to my mind, is the essential attribute of the broadcast newsman--an understanding of what he is broadcasting.[1]

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[1]John Day, in letter to the author, Dec. 22, 1964.

The statement by Day underscores a point made by Charnley who felt that top-flight newsmen must go a step beyond the wire services in order to have impact on their listeners.

> It is not enough merely to give listeners the factual picture of the day's events. The mass public is a lay public--inexpert in politics, medicine, psychology, etc. It cannot understand the interrelations and impingements--the real heart of the news--without more help than mere information gives it.[2]

In this area alone, what Charnley has called "the real heart of the news," the author believes that Thomas has created an appetite for more information about remote places and has offered "personal vignettes" or explanations of the behind-the-scenes motivations of leading figures which throw light on the world scene.

It has long been known that news broadcasts are the public's favorite type of radio program.[3] With all of the changes in taste, and alterations of format, Thomas nonetheless has survived and continues actively in the news field at the network level. An observation by Don Mozley of KCBS, San Francisco, may illustrate the "ageless" quality of Thomas:

> Lowell Thomas was the first broadcast journalist to understand that a story's dramatic impact is not measured by the hard news alone, but by the personal detail, the fascinating sidelight, the

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[2]Charnely, op. cit., p. 301.

[3]Chester, Garrison, and Willis, op. cit., p. 393.

> human experience handled in such a way as to create an emotional impact.
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> His vibrant voice and dramatic style are as compelling today as they were thirty years ago. There simply is no one else whose "on the air" delivery has remained ageless. This is surely part of Thomas' achievement.[4]

According to Gary Steiner, in a chapter titled "What Viewers Say," it is known that the general public increasingly requests more information about the world-at-large.[5] Since World War II, there has been an increased appetite for more precise geographical information, and for feature material about people and customs in every region of the globe. It seems reasonable to assert that Lowell Thomas has provided this kind of information and that he has stretched the minds of his listeners or viewers over a period of time. In fact, as one listener wrote Thomas:

> I always make a point to hear you over the car radio while driving home at night. I'm only an armchair traveler, but your programs have made me familiar with all the countries in the spotlight of the news.[6]

Although no very accurate estimates of the automobile-listening audience are available which bear on Lowell

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[4]Don Mozley, Director of News and Public Affairs, Station KCBS, San Francisco, California in a letter to the author, Jan. 3, 1965.

[5]Gary A. Steiner, The People Look at Television (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 158.

[6]Unsolicited letter from a listener, November 5, 1964 addressed to Lowell Thomas. From the Lowell Thomas collection, New York City.

Thomas' newscast, there was a report issued two years ago which indicates something of the "Lowell Thomas audience." The assertion is made in a booklet published by the Oldsmobile Division of General Motors that Thomas' audience at home "seems to remain constant" but the automobile audience would appear to be increasing.[7]

At CBS, Lowell Thomas is now the acknowledged "dean" of radio commentators. CBS Radio uses this term in describing him, and perhaps a further word of definition concerning this term is in order to see if Thomas fulfills his own standards.

> *Commentary*, in radio news usage is generally taken to be explanation of a news event in the light of the speaker's personal knowledge and judgment. Its essential difference from backgrounding lies in this subjective element.[8]

Charnley further explains that backgrounding builds a framework for the listener to enhance his understanding. Thomas assuredly does some of that. But the commentator goes a step further in expressing a judgment; it is qualitative. He seeks not merely to inform the audience so that it can come to its own conclusions on the basis of presented evidence, but also to lead the audience's thinking in the direction he thinks it should go. Is Lowell Thomas that much of a prompter of the public conscience?

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[7]CBS Radio publication, "A Stewardship Report to the Oldsmobile Division of General Motors," April, 1963, p. 8. The report quotes a Nielsen figure of 1,810,000 families a week who listen to Thomas.

[8]Charnley, op. cit., p. 308.

Insofar as Thomas succeeds in explaining, clarifying, elucidating, and elaborating the news, he is an "analyst." Thomas extols impartiality; he decries the thundering opinions of the "experts," and as he does not harangue or tell the public how to think he endures year after year, decade after decade. It is this researcher's conclusion that Thomas is not a pure newsman, and that he is not a commentator in the usual sense. He is definitely a "backgrounder" or an analyst according to the terms set forth above; and although he strives for impartiality, he has not set a perfect record in this matter. But he has been consistently fair-minded, and has whetted the audience's appetite for more information about remote places by a process of slow accretion.

On the matter of objectivity, we have already seen that Thomas does not seek out items for his newscast that he might be predisposed to, but selects them on their intrinsic news value. And H. V. Kaltenborn offers a common-sense stricture to the matter:

> The radio news analyst cannot and should not function as an opinion maker. He cannot make himself the medium for the passionate expression of beliefs or the views of minority opinions.
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> No news analyst worth his salt could or would be completely neutral or objective.[9]

Obviously, a subjective element enters into selection of material and we have seen Thomas' "side-excursions" into

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[9] Ibid., p. 313.

feature material which he thought highly interesting. Most newsmen, moreover, think that the dispute over terms is somewhat academic. "Analysts" and "commentators" alike have said that the CBS definition of Paul White or any other definition makes little difference in their work. Thomas, for instance, likes neither term.

In Chapter V it was seen that Thomas had a more or less regular format for his news show, and a set of principles operative to help him select items; but that he played each evening's program "by ear." However, one of the standards by which Thomas himself judges a commentator is whether the man enjoys and exercises freedom of expression. He has stated both to his sponsors and to network officials and to this writer that he has always enjoyed unhampered freedom. He is not a crusader or an "up-lifter" but he does have a point of view.

That point of view is actively international; it goes so far in a concrete fashion as to prompt him to state on his own letterhead "Support the U.N." An examination of Thomas' scripts reveals that he never advocated any one course of action, but that he has been sympathetic to various causes from time to time, to certain figures from time to time (Hoover, Dewey, Landon, Doolittle, the astronauts, and Wehrner von Braun)--but this is barely

perceptible. He does, then, fulfill his own requirements, his own standards for an analyst by retaining steadfast impartiality and no dominant political bias.

A Comparison with Swing

The author had been reading Raymond Swing's Good Evening: A Professional Memoir after it appeared and felt that a short comparison with Thomas would be useful. In one sense, they are at opposite extremes of the news commentary spectrum both in style and in personality. To contrast the "high seriousness" of Raymond Swing with the merriment and playfulness of Thomas might not be profitable, for the two men are of distinctly different temperaments. Swing evidently lays claim to far greater intellectual acuity and depth than Thomas. Partly because of his more reserved personality, Swing did not join the Association of Radio News Analysts, founded in 1942. This is an organization in which Thomas has been a past president (1945-46) and is today an officer.

Swing, however, has recently completed a "memoir" which reveals his particular "cast of mind." This is in sharp contrast with Thomas' background, training, and

interest. It is decidedly intellectual. Swing has had financial troubles, and has had difficulty getting jobs from time to time owing to his outspokenness. Thomas has no financial difficulties, and has literally "been on top" since 1930. Swing makes two references in his book which indirectly throw light on Thomas. First of all, he states that Thomas has been a public figure far longer than he, and that Thomas has worn the millionaire's cloak of success with becoming modesty for a very long period: about thirty-five years. Secondly, Swing has stated, on the matter of "fame":

> Not that I am so ascetic as to disparage success; far from it. I enjoyed it immensely. It was intoxicating, challenging, and rewarding in many ways. One of them was that it brought me into contact with the men who were leading the country. It gave me status and won me respect. But I am more normal and spiritually better off being obscure.[10]

If the writer may hazard an opinion at this point, it can be said that Thomas also profited from being well ensconced in the "establishment" and that he, too, profited from having the ear of Presidents, statesmen, and the VIPs of this country. But he is temperamentally more of a showman and better used to the spotlight. Thomas thrives on it. It is normal for him to be in the thick of things, and he would

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[10]Raymond Swing, Good Evening: A Professional Memoir (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 189.

not understand obscurity. Yet it is also true that Thomas is entirely geared for popular, commercial success.

Swing continues with his "memoir" and speaks of the apex of his career, when in 1938 he was the third most popular commentator in the nation:

> As a result of addressing a larger national audience, my name by 1938, appeared for the first time in one of the polls of radio editors voting for what they considered the best programs of radio. I came in third after H. V. Kaltenborn and Lowell Thomas as the best news commentator.
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> There were many others. Each had his different background, different style, different impact. Many of them were highly competent. It was a good epoch for commentators.[11]

Thomas has won a number of popularity polls, and had scored first in a Variety poll, first in a Fortune poll. He did not, however, win a Peabody award as did Swing. These awards may indicate that Thomas draws or relies more directly on popular support than critical acclaim and that also his sticking to radio (in an age of television) is shrewdly calculated. Thomas has found his medium--the medium which serves him best, and perhaps which he best serves. "I still think radio is a better medium for disseminating news than television because most news is mental not pictorial."[12]

Concerning his achievement, however, part of it is attributable to his voice. Few of the other analysts or

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[11] Ibid., p. 196.

[12] Lowell Thomas, in interview with the author, June 1, 1964 in New York.

commentators had that particular resonance, that sense of command and authority which characterize Thomas. His durability may be directly due to his effective radio voice. As cited earlier, the resonance of Thomas' voice, its depth and color and variety are "the envy of public speakers and even opera singers." His achievement in radio may be that he was, as Buranelli dubbed him, "the Caruso of the airwaves."

The Magnetism of Travel

It is not possible to calculate the total miles Thomas has traveled; but it is safe to say that he "has been everywhere." CBS states that "Lowell Thomas has traveled more than five million miles--by every known transport--covering news for CBS Radio. He's a legendary figure, but the facts are more fabulous than the fables."[13] His travels have given him the background which he constantly draws upon; his travels have enriched his life and his career, and as he manages to share these travels with a national audience, they must have had some impact on the audience. His travels have been related in written form (magazine articles such as The National Geographic, books and newspaper accounts); his films have been in the form of documentaries (on India, on Arabia, on Alaska in the the early days) and a reference source in his radio news-

[13]CBS Radio publication, "A Stewardship Report, op. cit., p. 12.

casts. It might be said that when he travels, this makes news itself--as in the case of the Tibetan visit.

The excitement of travel as seen in the Cinerama films[14] is part of the appeal of Lowell Thomas. He evokes travel to many people. Newsweek asked him about the importance of travel and he replied:

> Travel should hinge on a deeply personal philosophy. In my own case a determination to see as much of the globe, its people and their customs as I could in a lifetime. I happen to think that the travel-wish is deeply rooted in us all. Given three wishes, few people would fail to name travel. In childhood or manhood, it is associated with attractive days, pleasurable and informative experiences. My travel experiences are etched on my brain. I forget other things, not my travels.[15]

Directly related to his early travels, was Thomas' discovery of Lawrence of Arabia which started him on the long road to fame. Out of this experience came a book, ten years of lecturing, many articles, and finally a film which paid him for the rights to the story. Thomas admits, "It was the luckiest thing that could have happened to me."[16]

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[14]Cinerama, a copyrighted film projection process involving the use of three cameras was discovered by a French optic researcher in Grenoble. Thomas formed the American company known as "Cinerama, Inc." in 1952 and became its first president. He has recently stepped down from a controlling interest to that of an officer of the company.

[15]Newsweek, Nov. 11, 1954, p. 84.

[16]Ibid.

Innovations

Thomas experimented with the new medium of radio to test its flexibility. He succeeded often, he avers, "in testing the ingenuity and patience of engineers assigned to cover a story with me."[17] He has broadcast from the air, from a submarine, from a pullman car in California going ninety miles an hour, from Tibet with a battery-operated portable, from the shaded grove of the Bohemian Club retreat near San Francisco, and most recently from the General Motors Building at the 1964 New York World's Fair. He has used his own sense of showmanship, his innate sense of the unusual to succeed in taking radio with him wherever he goes. Moreover, he believes in the "mobility and flexibility of radio." Schechter recalls in his book, I Live on Air that Thomas was the first to use the telephone as a news source during the Press-Radio War. His "scoops" in this field have been mentioned in the preceding chapter.

In 1937, Thomas reported to America the coronation of Britain's King George VI. He was successful in describing the pageantry and could talk at length without a prepared script.

Cesar Saerchinger in his volume dealing with radio broadcasting in Europe states that Thomas might possibly be

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[17]Lowell Thomas in interview with author June 4, 1964, in New York.

considered the first "diplomatic correspondent for NBC in Europe" because he executed his reporting task in London with such charm that he won over the English listeners as well.[18]

Thomas also broadcast from Paris and Rome that year for NBC. In 1939, he broadcast the first television news program for NBC. In 1940, his news commentary became the first daily sponsored television program. These may not be, properly speaking, "innovations" but they are milestones in broadcasting's history. Three years later, Thomas left for Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, and Lima on an expedition and took a recording engineer with him. His five-minute reports, on transcription, were used by NBC as inserts in his news program. In 1945, at the end of hostilities in Europe, Thomas served for about six months as an accredited correspondent roving at will, and broadcast short-wave from London, Paris, and Luxembourg. He has done the same from the Pacific area; and the same from countless cities and towns in the United States.

Influence on other newscasters

This is the most difficult phase of Thomas' long career to assess. It is as difficult as attributing direct influence to Gertrude Stein when it comes to the subsequent

[18]Cesar Saerchinger, Hello America! Radio Adventures in Europe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938), p. 46.

writing of Ernest Hemingway. Influence is a subtle and elusive matter. There may be conscious imitators of Thomas on the regional or local scene; but none on the national and international level. Indirectly he may have contributed to such diverse figures as Harry Reasoner, Paul Harvey, Chet Huntley, or John Day of Station WHDH, but this becomes guesswork and speculation. There is nothing confirmed or confirmable in their cases. But it seems certain that Thomas has no disciples on the air today. His is the only "excursion into heartiness, into cliché" as Marya Mannes reported and CBS seems to allow this one special preserve to Thomas alone. This researcher believes that more work could be done in investigating the influence of Thomas on other newscasters in America.

Accomplishments

In each of the more than 70 foreign lands to which he has journeyed, Thomas has faithfully recorded the sights and sounds of the world's peoples and curious civilizations. In doing so, he has tended to make friends in those lands he has explored. From letters shown this researcher in Thomas' office, he was invariably invited "back." He managed to ingratiate himself with the people in the country he "researched." He never persona non grata after a filming expedition, and this might be considered a minor accomplishment in an age of difficult relationships among the "underdeveloped" countries of the world.

Thomas helped to pioneer the documentary film which derived partly from the technique of the newsreel. This was first seen in his twin lecture: With Lawrence in Arabia and With Allenby in Palestine when he combined visual, musical, and narrative techniques. These were of his own invention, and this may have influenced the Cinerama productions. During the 1957-59 television seasons, he served as host-narrator for High Adventure. He prefers to regard himself as the producer, however, of the High Adventure series.

Thomas pioneered television on NBC. In addition to conducting TV's first news program, he served as host during 1939-40 for television's first regularly scheduled night-time program, "A TV First Night." During 1941 he conducted the first simultaneous radio and television broadcasts for NBC. And he contributed financially and artistically to the exploitation of a new entertaining medium, Cinerama in the 1950's.

Noteworthy, also, was his fifteen-year record as the voice of "Fox Movietone News" which had the largest theater audience of its kind in the United States. Important, then, is his claim that his voice has been heard more frequently and with greater "saturation" than that of any other living American. That statement is found in the pamphlet issued by his office "Lowell Thomas--Some Biographical Notes." The pamphlet also claims that Thomas' voice has been heard by more people than any other voice in history.

Furthermore, Thomas was historian for the "First World Flight" in 1925, and he reported both in book form and later on the air the story of man's first circumnavigation of the globe by air. This steadfast identity with flying, with airmen, with the Air Force, has partly accounted for some of his popularity.

Honors

Thomas is a director of the Explorer's Club of New York, having been a President of the club in 1960. He is a fellow of the American Geographical Society, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. He is a member of the American Museum of Natural History; an honorary life member of the English Speaking Union. He is an officer of the Association of Radio News Analysts. Thomas is a Mason, a member of Kappa Sigma, Tau Kappa Alpha, Phi Delta Phi, Sigma Delta Chi, and Alpha Epsilon. He is a former vice-president of the Overseas Press Club. He belongs to the Dutch Treat Club, the Marco Polo Club, Saints and Sinners, various lodges, and other social clubs. He is on the board of directors of the American School for Boys in Baghdad.

It would fill too much space to list the citations given with the honorary degrees Thomas has collected from 19 colleges and universities. His latest commencement speech, however, was at Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, Utah, in June, 1964 and his topic: "The Strenuous Life."

Thomas has received the French Legion of Honor, the Cross of Belgium, the Cross of Norway, Knighthood from the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, and the Italian Croce di Guerra.

No small part of the particular "gift" of Lowell Thomas, and one which is directly related to his durability, is his own manner of dealing and working with people. His staff in New York and in Pawling attest to this. Miss Mary Davis, his secretary, has been with him 33 years; Mrs. Electra Nicks, his secretary in Pawling, 30 years; Prosper Buranelli was with him for 30 years; Prosper's son, Vincent has been with him eight years. The atmosphere is relaxed but completely professional.

His record of harmonious length with his sponsors attests to his personal charm in these matters. When he left a sponsor, he was given an almost embarrassing send-off and sentimental tributes. Thomas' relationship with NBC is still cordial, as this researcher found in using the library, and in soliciting comment. His relationship with Arthur Hull Hayes of CBS is friendly and cordial, although Thomas retains his "independent status" as contract-personnel rather than staff membership. Hayes introduced him at a banquet of the Broadcast Pioneers as "Mr. Radio." And Hayes still jokingly refers to him by that nickname in conversations with others or to Thomas directly on the telephone.

As an indication of listener-loyalty, the "stunt" which Western Union devised for him in 1934 brought a quarter of a million telegrams in an hour, and to the knowledge of this writer is a feat which has not been equaled since.

Finally, as proof of his enduring fame, there are two things which should perpetuate the memory of Lowell Thomas for a number of years to come. First, an island in the Arctic was named for Thomas by Admiral Donald MacMillan, the Polar explorer and last survivor of the Peary expedition. Secondly, a mountain range has been named for Thomas in the Antarctic by Navy explorer Captain Finn Ronne.

There are, then, honorable assurances that Thomas' collective contribution to the seven lively arts will give him a respected place in an unofficial "American Hall of Fame," which is perhaps more than other radio or television commentators can claim. But this scarcely comes from his radio career alone; it is rather the "whole man" who is judged again. The image of Lowell Thomas is a multifaceted one, not restricted to "Mr. Radio." His name has garnered a certain measure of distinction in radio news, books, travel, adventure, and films; but his activities have also included those of war correspondent, cowpuncher, reporter, editor, college instructor, special plenipotentiary to

Nepal,[19] and commencement speaker. His interests, wide as they are, appear to dovetail. His inventiveness follows a certain pattern, and it is the broad pattern which we are obliged to assess in evaluating the "whole man."

Thomas' Contribution to Broadcasting

In sum, what is his contribution to broadcasting? It is not limited to the rhetorical or for setting a certain style in newscasting. The writer proposes that Thomas is broadcasting's most durable personality and is a living example of stamina in the ephemeral world of broadcasting performers. He may serve to prove to students of broadcasting that one can, indeed, make a lifetime career of professional broadcasting, and in this sense he stands like a Rock of Gibraltar. Moreover, Thomas' contribution may be partly "inspirational" or psychological in that he stands as an example of the rugged individual who did more or less what he wanted to do in life and has survived in a conformity era.

In the words of F. Yeats-Brown, "Thomas' personality is clear. What he <u>is</u> comes over the air with a grand

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[19]Thomas was appointed special plenipotentiary to Nepal by President Eisenhower in 1954 and flown there "to bear friendly greetings from the United States to the people of Nepal." This coincided with a filming expedition for the series, <u>High Adventure</u>, and Thomas' 'mission' expired automatically when he left the country.

simplicity: a gently paternal voice of authority."[20] This was written in 1936, and Thomas has not changed appreciably since that was written.

Criticism: Negative and Positive

In this section of Chapter VII, the author presents a digest of the criticism which has appeared over the years either attacking or praising Lowell Thomas. It is important, however, to bear in mind two facts: (1) the great length of time which Thomas has managed to remain in the spotlight and (2) that he has never been subjected to systematic review and criticism, but only intermittently commented upon as the occasion warrants. Returning to the first point, Thomas' office issues this statement in a release:

> His voice probably has been heard by more people than any other voice in history. His total radio audience during his years on the air has been estimated at 60 billions.
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> For seventeen years, he was the voice of Movietone News which means he was heard, via the screen, by another 40 billions.[21]

If these figures are accurate, it is to be expected that a man's voice heard over such a stretch of time will bring a goodly share of sharp criticism, parody, satire, and

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[20]F. Yeats-Brown, "He Tells the World," in "This Week" of the New York Herald Tribune, Feb. 23, 1936, p. 21.

[21]Mimeographed release, "Lowell Thomas, Some Biographical Notes." Undated. Released by Thomas' staff in New York, Suite 1536, Rockefeller Center, New York 20, N.Y.

downright antagonism. But to summarize the point made concerning the magnitude of exposure alone: "In all history, no one person has been so long, so often, and so successfully before the public as Lowell Thomas."[22]

Lowell Thomas, has never engaged a publicity agent. This may possibly be because he is his own best publicist, and knowing the proper channels for calling attention to a project, he can turn the spotlight on a program or an idea when needed. At any rate, he states that he relishes more and more a kind of "institutional obscurity." Since 1936 he has refused to give interviews, has shunned publicity, and until 1949 did not allow a press interview. But in 1949 he was visited by Maurice Zolotow for Coronet magazine on two occasions. There then appeared an article of five pages in length in the June, 1949, issue titled: "The 2,000,000 Words of Lowell Thomas"[23] which dealt mainly with his "writing factory," his staff of researchers, his secretaries, and gave some brief insight into his method of working and conducting his news program and his speaking engagements.

There was also an authorized article by Russel Crouse for the Reader's Digest in April, 1961, titled: "Yes, There

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[22]F. Yeats Brown, "Voice Familiar to Millions," The Literary Digest, CXX (March 21, 1936), p. 24.

[23]Maurice Zolotow, "The 2,000,000 Words of Lowell Thomas," Coronet (June, 1949), pp. 167-172.

Is a Lowell Thomas."[24] It is written in a flamboyant style which makes Thomas appear to be a creation of Hollywood. It is one of those lapses in taste which will be mentioned again in this dissertation. But the 1959 television program, "This Is Your Life," illustrates Thomas' extreme hesitance and reticence about his career and his life, when the full spotlight of national publicity intrudes upon him and his family. To this kind of publicity he very strongly objects, and feels it serves no purpose whatsoever. Moreover, for a final word on that ill-fated program of Ralph Edwards ("This Is Your Life--Lowell Thomas" of October, 1959), Thomas added recently: "It was an abuse of my good nature. I resented it then as I do now. My only thought was how I might escape when the trick became apparent."[25]

Therefore, this investigation (which has been approved by Thomas) represents something of a departure from his policy and indicates a decided change from his stringent 1936 refusal to grant interviews.

Of the fifteen references to him in Newsweek since 1932, two short features are revealing:

"Report from Everywhere," Nov. 11, 1957, pp. 73-76.

"Man in Perpetual Motion," Nov. 25, 1957, p. 84.

These articles add fuel to the popular legend of Thomas as

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[24]Russel Crouse, "Yes, There Is a Lowell Thomas," Reader's Digest (April, 1961), pp. 232-252.

[25]Lowell Thomas, letter to the author, Dec. 2, 1964.

a latter-day Richard Halliburton, and although essentially truthful, do not come to grips with anything either new or meaningful about Lowell Thomas.

A total of twenty-three references to him in Time add up to very little that is relevant to this dissertation; for these "spot" items concern his commencement address at Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City,[26] a sponsor change in 1947, the beginning of Cinerama, the round-up of commentators after the war in which he was pictured with Boake Carter, Kaltenborn, and Howe,[27] or possibly a business venture; and on one occasion, a review of one of his books.

Other articles which were perceptive and incisive about the whole status of radio news have tended to dismiss him. One writer for the Reporter dismissed him in a line as "the resonant vacuity." Charles Siepmann, in the Nation gave him fleeting reference as "a middle-of-the roader who manages to hold his own among the New Turks of electronic journalism."[28] Siepmann's article dealt mainly with the disappearance of Raymond Swing, whom he hailed as the outstanding commentator on the air. By implication, the fact that Lowell Thomas remained, had a satisfied sponsor, and

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[26] Time, June 5, 1964, p. 45.

[27] Time, Jan. 18, 1946, p. 23.

[28] Charles Siepmann, "The Shortage of News Analyst," Nation, Jan. 24, 1948, p. 51.

still commanded a wide audience was attributable to the decline in radio generally and the constant lowering of public taste.

Marya Mannes in the Reporter tackled the whole matter of prestige news as aired by CBS, and she separated the routine spokesmen from the pundits. Lowell Thomas was among the former in her caustic article.[29] Yet this does serve a purpose in showing the growth, maturity, and evolution of news handling as well as the rhetorical styles of certain well-established newsmen. Miss Mannes believed that Thomas was not merely old-fashioned; but that he was definitely out-dated.

The hundred or more references to Thomas in the various trade journals (Broadcasting, Radio Daily, Sponsor, Television Age, Television, Variety, etc.) have proved of virtually no value to this researcher; and there was almost no mention of Thomas as a performing artist or reporter. Rather, the trade magazines dealt, by and large, with his pilot films, his newest ventures, his business acumen in acquiring radio or television interests. Hence, the body of references extant in the trade publications will not suit the purposes of this paper. Variety called him the "number one showman on the air" and proferred a short sketch which

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[29] Marya Mannes, The Reporter, "Views and Reviews" (August 4, 1953), p. 17.

again was in the tradition of the Hollywood magazines writing about a star.[30]

Newsweek reported that Walter Winchell's "Jurgen's Journal" was the most popular broadcast of its kind on the air in 1945 based on CAB ratings. The article continued:

> Jumping 1.5 points, the program heard over 65 stations of the NBC Blue Network hit a 7 year peak of 16. 3 points, a rise of 25 per cent in a year. Winchell, however, is topped by one commentator, Lowell Thomas; but Thomas broadcasts five nights a week, instead of Winchell's one night a week.[31]

Returning momentarily to the article by Marya Mannes in The Reporter wherein she judged the whole corps of practicing American newsmen and gave them a kind of rating:

> It is true that a network is known by the news commentators it keeps. There was some objection to signing on Lowell Thomas in 1947 for it was known that he had a script writer by the name of Prosper Buranelli who prepared his news copy for him daily. This was not considered cricket aboard the good ship CBS News.
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> Yet, NBC offered Mr. Thomas a ten year contract when he announced he was withdrawing from them. He philosophized that he didn't want to be tied down to the strictures of a news contract.
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> 'I've never wanted to do merely one thing, and if I had signed a long-term contract, it would have curtailed my explorations and junkets around the globe.'[32]

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[30] Variety, August 6, 1945, p. 21.

[31] Newsweek, March 25, 1940, p. 53.

[32] Mannes, op. cit., p. 18.

Miss Mannes did seem to put her finger very accurately on the pulse of the CBS heart. Following are her words about the entire news reporting enterprise:

> To anyone who ranges repeatedly through the spectrum of radio news, the color of each broadcasting system emerges clearly. The key of CBS is reason and reliability, with not one note of sourness, hysteria, innuendo or rabble-rousing among its whole stable of commentators.
>
> To one broadcasting system in particular, however, must go the greater credit in maintaining the inestimable privilege of hearing the whole truth and delivering the whole truth. It is doubtful whether any news organization anywhere (the press included) has a better staff of reporters than CBS.
>
> And . . . finally, Lowell Thomas, beloved of his audience, is CBS's only excursion into heartiness, color, and cliché.[33]

This homage to CBS centers around a key word: integrity; and Miss Mannes then goes on to praise her favorite, Eric Sevareid, not only for his "independence of judgment and clarity of thought" but for his "intellectual supremacy" over the whole staff of CBS newsmen.

Miss Mannes states that when CBS hires a man "it is because it trusts him. Once hired, he has virtually complete freedom in his field. No directives are laid down, no guidance exerted." Further, she quotes Fred W. Friendly as saying that each newsman on the CBS staff abided by his own code and conscience. If, for example, he should use the air for his personal prejudices or ambition, or as a

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[33] Ibid., p. 19.

"spokesman" for partisan interests, he would be cut off in five minutes."[34]

Objectivity

Maurice Zolotow made a point in his "portrait" of Lowell Thomas worth underscoring at this time:

> A lot of words have flowed through his microphone and a lot of world-shaking history has been made, but through it all Lowell Thomas has managed to maintain his equanimity.
>
> During the rousing New Deal years, so impartial was Thomas' approach that listeners did not suspect that he leaned to the Republican Party, or that he was a crony of Governor Thomas Dewey.
>
> Lowell Thomas is probably the least-opinionated person on the air. This is hard to believe in a radio commentator. He never intrudes his viewpoints into a discussion.
>
> Although presumably an expert on issues of the day, Thomas steadfastly refuses to be a political pundit. He never analyzes the "news behind the news" for friends.[35]

Zolotow concludes this point in his appraisal of the "official stance" so to speak of Lowell Thomas by stating that it is probably just this noncommital quality which makes him so popular. It is, furthermore, a contention of this dissertation that this impersonal quality, this noncommital quality of the "disembodied voice"--to use Thomas' own phrase--which keeps him popular in an age of thundering opinion-peddlers.

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[34] Ibid., p. 19.

[35] Zolotow, op. cit., pp. 170-172.

Entering still further into the critical field, the syndicated television critic, Harriet Van Horne commented on one particular performance of Thomas. Lowell Thomas spoke on "The United States Steel Hour" about some simple points of Americanism, some points rather close to his beliefs during the time usually allocated for the commercial. Miss Van Horne objected strenuously to his "non-commercial" on the grounds that it was "out of place."

In a film clip, Thomas was shown in his study at Pawling, N.Y. and he looked up from some papers to comment casually about the positive qualities in this country which he feels "good Americans share." He had apparently been asked by the producers of the U.S. Steel Hour (and the management forces of U.S. Steel itself) to counteract some of the negative and deliterious views we tend to take of ourselves and even to project about ourselves overseas. Thomas said that he would like to take a few moments to "talk about America. About things which are familiar, sometimes forgotten which make us strong." But Miss Van Horne found his "message" childish and naive. She felt that it accomplished no purpose on a drama hour; and she condemned Thomas roundly for giving a pep talk of any kind, and for presenting a "glib and oily little talk."[36]

In another vein, the American historian Dixon Wecter, in The Atlantic Monthly nearly twenty years ago appraised

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[36]Harriet Van Horne, syndicated column, New York Telegram, Sept. 8, 1950, p. 44.

the lofty position of H. V. Kaltenborn, the acknowledged "dean" of radio commentators. Wecter described him as the "perfect type of German schoolmaster, stubborn, humorless, and pompous."[37] He then turned to Lowell Thomas whom he called a "glorified newscaster, rather than analyst." For several paragraphs, Wecter reviewed the "extroverted life" of Lowell Thomas. Wecter pointed out that Thomas offers the public "a competent news digest, phrased in simple language, concentrating upon human interest stories, delivered in a warm, likable voice."[38] Wecter also detected a "strain of optimism" in Lowell Thomas, which, he maintained, provides a "hopeful outlook" for the end of each broadcast.

He also referred to the Fortune poll in 1940 which placed him in top position in that year, and again to the (then current) 1945 Radio Digest popularity poll which placed Lowell Thomas first in the nation.

> Coming on the air earlier than other major events commentators, Thomas is a great favorite with farmers who like his plain, conservative talk.
>
> 'Lowell Thomas to me means a good newspaper in the home' was a typical listener reaction in a study made by the Office of Radio Research.
>
> He is no deep thinker, but balanced. Thomas is not prone to espouse daring causes or points of view. Yet as an instance of the hard row even

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[37]Dixon Wecter, "Hearing is Believing," The Atlantic Monthly (July, 1945), p. 40.

[38]Ibid., p. 40.

> this mildest of commentators must hoe, Thomas was roundly upbraided by a listener of Polish descent for omitting the name of a Polish player in the World Series.

Further on, Dixon Wecter concludes:

> Lowell Thomas is almost unique among commentators for his reliance upon a staff of ghost-writers, the chief being Prosper Buranelli, a former newsman of the New York World. Indeed, Lowell Thomas is a figure created by the sweat of others' typewriters; he is not a man of flesh and blood, but a collective product.
>
> He is the end product of a collective enterprise, a word factory which produces great quantities of copy, and which Thomas articulates in a crisp voice.[39]

Scattered through the national magazines in the 1930's and the 1940's there are mainly feature articles which mention Lowell Thomas, and only a handful of which give adequate time and space to make a substantial commentary. Some of these comments snap at the personality of Thomas, some dislike his treatment of the important issues in world news generally, still others find him unctuous or vacuous. Possibly the most severe comment came from the far left politically, from a radio column by Bob Lauter in the Daily Worker:

> Lowell Thomas continues to play his recent trip to Tibet for all it is worth. What started as a story of mild interest, much hoopla, and dubious political aspects is now full-blown burlesque.
>
> Those of you who are confused by Lowell Thomas' hysterical defense of Tibet from the Communist

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[39] Ibid., p. 40.

> menace must understand that Tibet is a stronghold of democracy. This 15 year-old Dalai Lama was selected for instance in a thoroughly democratic fashion.
>
> Thomas, by the way, failed singularly in giving his audience what might have been vital information about Tibet. He glossed over issues and crises in order to give us The National Geographic picture. He might just have mentioned the rate of infant mortality among Tibetans which is among the highest in the world.[40]

Documenting Thomas' Professional Life

In preparing materials for a doctoral dissertation based on Lowell Thomas, the danger seemed to be inherent that one would see Thomas altogether too positively. That is, that the over-all tone of the dissertation might be adulatory. When it became apparent that the most reliable source for a living biography, was Lowell Thomas himself, and a dependence upon his memory and his files developed, the researcher became aware of the problems in writing about a living figure who has managed his professional career so successfully. Time and time again, the author returned to type up the materials or information gathered during the day, and found that he had merely obtained interesting anecdotal "asides," colorful bits and pieces, often irrelevant chunks of information; and that these all added up to an extensive public relations treatment. Part of the prob-

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[40]Bob Lauter, "Lowell Thomas, Commentator and Defender of the Faith," Daily Worker (Nov. 17, 1949), p. 5.

lem, however, is that solid materials for research simply do not exist, owing to the particular nature of Thomas' place in broadcasting. Part of the problem, also, stemmed from a somewhat sentimental view that a beloved figure deserves only kind things said about him, in the bland tradition of the Reader's Digest.

Partly to secure an "outside" view or to obtain a different perspective on Thomas, contact was made in New York City with the following:

1. Charles Siepmann at New York University, by telephone.
2. Marya Mannes at the Reporter magazine, by telephone.
3. Quincy Howe at Atlas magazine, in personal interview.
4. Edmund Allen assistant editorial director at United Press, International, by telephone.
5. Richard C. Hotellet at CBS News, by letter.
6. Frederick W. Friendly at CBS News, by telephone.
7. Vincent Buranelli, script writer for Thomas, in interviews.
8. Miss Mary Davis, Thomas' personal secretary, in interviews.
9. H. V. Kaltenborn at his home, by telephone, and by letter.

No lengthy comments are included by Richard C. Hottelet because he replied to the author, "There are no grounds on which I would want to be critical of Lowell. He is a most appealing individual with a narrative gift. He is

a national figure. He belongs to our culture."[41] Much the same kind of comment was provided by Friendly and other CBS officials and has not, therefore, been given any weight or space in the dissertation. Results of the telephone conversations with Miss Mannes, Siepmann, and Allen have not been developed because of their fragmentary nature and lack of value. The names are listed merely to indicate some of the extent of research undertaken, even if it proved to be unproductive.

H. V. Kaltenborn spoke on the telephone for about twenty minutes and reminisced about adventures shared with Lowell Thomas. He said that it would be difficult to be objective about "such a hallowed institution as Lowell Thomas." A recurrent word which he used to describe Thomas was "lovable." Here is the part of the note from Kaltenborn:

> Lowell Thomas has outstanding ability as a raconteur. He is a masterful story teller who knows the value of color and brevity. So long as we enjoy hearing a man tell a story, Lowell Thomas will have an audience. He gives his listeners what they want and commands a loyal audience.[42]

Quincy Howe, an intellectual reporter and editor, sometime professor of Journalism at the University of Illinois, now prepares a fifteen-minute weekly commentary on world

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[41]Richard C. Hottelet, letter to the author, Aug. 19, 1964.

[42]H. V. Kaltenborn, letter to the author dated June 18, 1964.

affairs for ABC Radio, and participates on one or more television public affairs programs. He is principally occupied at the present with Atlas magazine. Howe has shared administrative duties with Thomas both at the Overseas Press Club and the Association of Radio New Analysts, a group of news analysts who meet about four times a year in New York City. This latter is the elite of the reporting corps in the United States and forms a kind of unofficial guild with no other purpose than keeping professional standards high. At these four annual meetings, a noted speaker answers questions on an issue of vital concern. Thomas was president in 1945 and Kaltenborn in 1946-47, and Howe has been a charter member since 1942 although not an officer.

Possibly Howe's best observation on Lowell Thomas was this: "He describes the news, I explain the news." Quincy Howe explained that Lowell Thomas' particular, even unique, perspective on the news makes him report it in the jocular vein he sometimes does. There is one incident which Howe related which tells something about both men. It was during the 1956 GOP Convention in San Francisco, and at one point in the proceedings, that Howe bitterly lamented the fact that there were no real issues--no matters of intellectual substance coming from the speakers which he might report to listeners. He turned to Lowell Thomas in exasperation and said: "What a dull affair!" Thomas replied with astonishment: "Dull? Why just look for yourself. The

President of the United States has arrived at the front door preceded by a motorcycle escort of some 25 policemen. A band is playing 'Hail to the Chief'; the skies are a halcyon blue; the crowd outside is cheering; and security guards are now rushing down the aisles to prepare the way for Mr. Eisenhower's walk down the aisle. This is dramatic!"[43] Howe cited this incident as illustrative of the ways of perceiving the news and illustrating the basic differences in the two men.

In another vein, however, Howe was critical of Lowell Thomas. He realized that Lowell Thomas had developed along entirely different lines; that his career had a different shape, so to speak, a different mission. He recognized readily that Thomas brought a different dimension to the news entirely; but he felt that "color" and feature materials have their limitations. "They dilute the news," he said. Moreover, he could not understand why Thomas had his manuscript prepared by others. This, he felt, was unprofessional and unbecoming a man who handles such vital matters. He stated that he knew Thomas could write his own news script if he wanted to; but that he had decided early in his career to delegate it to an editorial assistant, and this habit had become standard operating procedure.

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[43]Quincy Howe to the author in an interview, June 3, 1964, in New York City.

Prosper Buranelli and Vincent Buranelli

Currently in Thomas' employ is Vincent Buranelli, who holds a doctorate in history and political science, from Columbia University and is the son of the late Prosper Buranelli, Thomas' long-time associate, confidant, and partner. Vincent Buranelli has worked for Thomas for about eight years, and his main task is the preparation of the daily CBS newscast. He has also done research for some of the Cinerama productions, and one or more books. Vincent Buranelli had begun to work for Lowell Thomas as a researcher several years before his father died, and he states that he "inherited" the job of the news in 1959.

It was Prosper Buranelli who called Thomas the "Caruso of the airwaves," a term which many newsmen seemed to relish in referring to Lowell Thomas. Yet it is Vincent Buranelli who sees Thomas as a raconteur, a troubador simply telling about the adventures of mankind. Thomas, in his view, is "an observer of the human shadow show. He is an experienced and wise observer, and knows how to handle people and the news itself most skillfully."[44]

Prosper Buranelli, the self-educated Texan who became Thomas' "right-hand man" for over thirty years, was really responsible for many of Thomas' ventures, such as Cinerama

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[44]Vincent Buranelli, interview with the author, New York City, June 4, 1964.

and was involved in almost all of his enterprises and projects. Prosper Buranelli was essentially a writer and a creative idea man. The talents of the two dovetailed perfectly, and Thomas speaks of Prosper Buranelli with deep affection and warm praise.

Lowell Thomas spent one entire interview period discoursing about Buranelli and referred to him candidly as a "genius." He hired him away from the old New York World in 1930 where he was a reporter and columnist, and put him to work on a book he had contracted to do with Doubleday. Altogether, he co-authored or "ghosted" several dozen books for Thomas.

References to Buranelli are hard to locate. There is still comment available from newsmen and editors in New York who knew him; but it dwindles to little that is useful.[45] This review from Time scarcely confirms Thomas' opinion:

> "United We Stand" released by 20th Century Fox stuffs world history into 7 lean reels of film. The narration by Lowell Thomas is patronizing. The script by Prosper Buranelli is undistinguished and at times corny.[46]

It was Prosper Buranelli who worked on all of the Cinerama scripts, and reviews of these are easily found; but little or no mention of Buranelli is made. He died in

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[45]Edmund Allen, assistant editorial director of UPI, NY. in interview with author, June 4, 1964.

[46]Time, July 27, 1942, p. 58.

1959, and shortly thereafter Thomas voluntarily stepped down from Chairman of the Board of Cinerama, International, to become an officer of the company; he sold some of his stock and wished to play a less active role. However, for the purposes of illustration of the constant background role which Buranelli played for thirty years, this dissertation must indeed make the point that Mr. Thomas is in a sense the product of a team of writers, producers, technicians, secretaries, and determined showmen.

One comment which addes to the "criticism-negative" side of this discussion comes from the Reporter evaluating the fourth Cinerama production:

> It is surprising that those responsible for Cinerama could manage to make so little of their immense potential.
> The ear is offended and the mind insulted by what Mr. Thomas has offered us.[47]

In this article, Albert states that the Cinerama technique is unsurpassed in presenting scenes of wide dimension and brilliant colors. It is an ideal vehicle for projecting the faraway places and glamorous geography of Lowell Thomas, he maintains. However, the title of the piece is "Three Cameras--No Perspective" and it severely criticizes Thomas for having no particular point of focus or central philosophy to expound. "Unfortunately, the real focus is on Lowell Thomas. He is script writer--along with Buranelli--star,

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[47]Robert H. Albert, "Three Cameras--No Perspective," The Reporter (August 12, 1956), p. 18.

musical composer, narrator, and our gentle companion and guide."[48]

The world of Lowell Thomas

In several ways, the above review indirectly underscores a problem which the writer found in assessing the creative energies of Lowell Thomas. There is, if one may attempt a psychological insight, Thomas' rather fixed romantic view of the world which he expects the audience to share as entertainment. Maps, atlases, globes, talk of heroic exploits, and conversation about explorers he finds highly stimulating and these things frame the "world of Lowell Thomas." There is very little in the field of mass entertainment that Thomas has not attempted at one time or another, and apparently even at 72 years of age, is not willing to tackle. This might appear to be laudable, but one should ask if today Thomas is the best person qualified to examine Africa, for example, or to interpret this continent to a vast audience.

Lapses of taste

Finally, there are simply curious lapses of taste. These lapses in taste and judgment are not unusual perhaps for a man who has purveyed so much over so long a period; but this researcher was unable to find any satisfactory

[48] Ibid., p. 19.

answer for Thomas' predilection for choosing Col. Stoopnagle, the comedian, partner of the vaudeville team "Stoopnagle and Bud" to take over his newscast on several occasions in the 1940's when Thomas was out of the country. Was this merely because Stoopnagle was a neighbor of his in Pawling, or because he was then tremendously popular, or because he was entertaining and sometimes funny, or because it would be novel to have a comic substitute for a newsman? Secondly, in 1935, Thomas brought out a book titled Fan Mail in conjunction with the popular cartoonist O. O. Sogolow. The book contained both fictitious and real letters sent to Thomas on points raised in the news; and Thomas answered them irreverently. It was designed to be amusing and light-hearted.

Occasionally, he had a certain ad-lib freedom on Fox Movietone News in the 1130's and the early 1940's. Thomas' audience for this weekly newsreel was considerable, and he became something of a celebrity in his own right merely as the "voice" for Fox Movietone. But Time in September, 1935, belabored him for a lapse of taste:

> The Thomas news monolog, in its effort to be harmlessly funny is objectionable to many a cinema-goer. Last month, in describing a dogteam sled race in New Hampshire, Thomas went

pretty far afield to say, 'This is a mushy story . . . mush, mush, mush.[49]

Summary

This chapter set out to assess the over-all achievement of Lowell Thomas. Statements concerning his stamina and durability were offered by John Day of Station WHDH, and by Don Mozley of Station KCBS which attest to Thomas' agelessness and his ability to make the remote and distant event more familiar. Thomas has become the unofficial "dean" of CBS news commentators, replacing H. V. Kaltenborn in this role. A short comparison with Raymond Swing brought out differences in temperament and in practice and partly accounted for the wider popularity of Thomas. Such factors as these have contributed to the achievement of Thomas: impartiality and relative freedom from political bias, exploitation of the magnetism of travel, the authority of the experienced news man. In looking at Thomas' use of radio, it was found that he believes in radio's flexibility and mobility, and his various "stunts" have helped him to win popularity. Cesar Saerchinger stated that Thomas in 1935-36 might have been listed as NBC's first "diplomatic correspondent" so well did he serve both the British and the American radio audience.

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[49] *Time*, Sept. 22, 1935, p. 61.

The gregarious side of Thomas was brought out in showing his extensive membership in clubs and organizations throughout the country. The most prized of his honors: (1) having an island in the Arctic named for him, (2) a mountain ranged named for him in the Antarctic, (3) becoming a director of the American School for Boys in Baghdad, and (4) receiving the French Legion of Honor. The twenty honorary degrees he has received from colleges and universities he deems to be of lesser importance.

A summation of both negative and positive criticism was presented in the second section of the chapter, showing that Thomas had not received any serious critical attention until World War II either as a commentator or as an author, although he had won popularity polls. Thomas as a public figure did not escape the brick-bats of criticism and came in for some strenuous panning by Harriet Van Horne and Marya Mannes on several occasions. Moreover, he has been found guilty of lapses in taste in his attempt to be "folksy" or humorous at times. The writer accounted for his efforts to find objective statements about Thomas' career among newsmen in New York, and he also suggested that the "special world of Lowell Thomas" sometimes coincides with successful mass entertainment and sometimes it does not. As Thomas defined his own modus operandi: I am not concerned with doing an educational show or with social significance. If

education is a by-product, fine. The important thing is to entertain. Adventure is probably the key word with me. There is so much to learn from adventure, and so much inspiration in it."

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Each of the previous chapters has been concerned with one particular phase in the development of Lowell Thomas' broadcasting career or has related to some aspect of his professional growth. Chapter I, in introducing the study, laid the groundwork for the dissertation. The purpose and design of the study were stated, as well as some of the inherent difficulties in writing about a man who is still living. After carefully examining previous research, both academic and popular, there seemed to be room for a probing study of Lowell Thomas as "the whole man." The approach would be both historical and critical with the aim of assessing Thomas' place in American broadcasting. The writer's *modus operandi* was described because it is central to an understanding of this study to know that Thomas himself became a primary source for much of the information, and that through personal interviews with the subject much of the biographical material was obtained.

In Chapter II, the family background of Thomas was sketched; and the dominant influence of his father, Dr. Harry

G. Thomas, was shown as significant in young Lowell's decision to make a career of public speaking. It was Dr. Thomas who first stressed the importance of Lowell's voice and predicted that he would earn his living from it. The young Thomas was then seen against the background of Cripple Creek, Colorado, the mining camp, and other informative influences at this time. Next, his college experiences at Northern Indiana University, Chicago Kent, and, finally, Princeton were reviewed in order to find a pattern. Gradually a pattern of dominant interest developed which expressed itself in Thomas' lecturing on Alaska, his film-making there, and his desire to see or explore the globe.

Chapter III outlines Thomas' radio career as such, discussing it in terms of an opportunity to enhance his lecturing as well as to replace Floyd Gibbons. Thomas came into radio in 1930 with ten years' experience as a platform lecturer. It was this background which brought him to the attention of William S. Paley and the Literary Digest. The audition for the initial broadcast of September 29, 1930, was chronicled in detail. The writer believes that the die was cast for much of Thomas' subsequent style of reporting from those two years with the Literary Digest. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the ways of emphasizing and dramatizing human interest in the news which became Thomas' trademark and which account, in some measure, for his durability as a news personality. One instance of his popularity

was cited in 1934. This was the Western Union telegram promotion done in conjunction with Sun Oil which brought Thomas 265,576 telegrams in two days' time.

A list of Thomas' literary endeavors was provided in Chapter IV. A chronological list of the forty-eight books published under his name is provided, beginning with With Lawrence in Arabia (1924) and continuing through Lowell Thomas' Book of the High Mountains (1964). These volumes were seen from several points of view: (1) intrinsic literary merit, (2) projections of the adventure-exploration-travel formula, and (3) part of an extended public relations which keeps the name "Thomas" before the public. It is also understood that most all of these volumes have been ghost-written. Almost all of Thomas' articles for magazines have appeared in the Reader's Digest, and this is because he reaches the largest possible reading audience through this magazine. His latest article, appearing in the June, 1964, Reader's Digest was discussed.

Chapter V examines Thomas' style as the public has come to know and recognize it through his radio newscasts; but his style is also discussed in a larger sense. Separate elements of his style are evaluated: human interest, the pathetic or the comic, the change-of-pace "closer," vivid "picture terms" or images which add up to what Thomas strives for in "listenability." As one critic phrased it, "Thomas does achieve the perfect conversational tone." The

writer illustrates how the radio news script is shaped today, and how it is put together step-by-step. It is emphasized that Thomas has no written policy for news style, but his principal writer, Vincent Buranelli, knows how to make the news sound interesting when read by Lowell Thomas. There are no restrictions imposed by CBS News, although a daily check is made pro forma with CBS News to establish the order of items. The chapter also contains, mainly for historical interest, much of the original script for the Literary Digest for September 29, 1930.

In Chapter VI, academic references are drawn to define the role of a commentator, and Thomas is seen in the framework of a commentator. However, the main point of the chapter is content analysis. The radio scripts of Thomas are compared with the New York Times for certain dates in the 1930's, the 1940's, the 1950's, and the 1960's to see what variations of stress, importance, and space allocation are made. In many instances, when international news was of primary importance, Thomas and the Times almost coincided in their allocation of items. At other times, Thomas appeared to go far afield in pointing up a lost adventurer (Richard Halliburton) or the missing jewels of a former king of Afghanistan. It was brought out that Thomas' broadcast from Tibet in 1949, the "Lhasa Script," is possibly his most important "scoop" and one which he today regards as his most important. The hard-news value of it may be questioned, but

it typifies both the content and the style of Thomas. Finally, the newscast of the type which Thomas has evolved over the years is seen in his case as a vehicle for his personality; and it is suggested that Thomas is more accurately seen as a radio news personality today than as an analyst.

Chapter VII assesses the over-all achievement of Thomas. It is stated by a colleague that Thomas has the sound of inherent authority; and by another that he has remained "ageless" for thirty-five years. Impartiality, lack of political bias, temperateness, bouyant optimism or cheerfulness, a proven stamina in getting to news sources are offered as reasons for his survival and his appeal. A short comparison with Raymond Swing illustrates the basic differences between a "pundit" and a popularizer. Thomas' contribution to American broadcasting is suggested in his willingness to experiment with the medium, to believe in its flexibility and mobility, and possibly to inspire others. Some of his national and international honors or awards are listed. And Chapter VII also bridges the achievement with a measure of criticism. A section of the chapter takes into account certain brickbats which have been thrown at him over a period of time. The writer believes that this section especially tends to balance some of the adulation accorded a revered broadcasting figure and to bring the study more into proper perspective.

The Essential Role of Lowell Thomas

The author believes that Lowell Thomas deserves a thorough investigation because his name has become something of a household word, and because he has been broadcasting over national networks for a continuous period of thirty-five years. He has been listed in Who's Who for forty years, and Current Biography for a similar period of time. His honors and achievements have been discussed in the preceding chapter.

It was part of the task of this paper to see how Thomas conceived his own role and to evaluate him as a news personality rather than a newsman in the strict sense of the term. This study has attempted, also, to assess the special world of Lowell Thomas, and to evaluate his perspective on the news, world events, and the informational films he produces. Whatever medium he engages in, books, films, or radio news, the stamp of Thomas is much the same and those particular "ingredients" have been analyzed earlier. It has led the author to conclude that there is definitely a "romantic cast of mind" which colors all of Thomas' work.

This study has attempted to separate the man from the myth and to call attention to what the author feels may be fraudulent or distorted in Thomas' background. The critical examination of this "legend" has been the most difficult part of this researcher's work. One finds that Lowell Thomas is respected throughout the broadcasting industry as a kind

of "living institution"--a venerable and almost revered figure--whose past exploits are remembered with affection. But it is difficult to find colleagues and working associates who can recall the early phase of his career. It would seem, too, that he has made virtually no enemies. He has, moreover, a gift for harmonious relationships with sponsors, with his own staff, and his broadcasting colleagues. Hence, this writer conceived the problem partly as being one of the "inside view" versus the "outside view." The inside view comes from his colleagues at CBS and his staff, and this tends to be uniformly affectionate. The outside view is derived from those who had no official connection with him, such as John Day of WHDH, but it is difficult to find a peer-group of critics, newsmen, writers, producers, or those associated with broadcasting who could offer knowledgeable comment about Thomas with a certain detachment. And this goes back also to an earlier observation by the author that Thomas has rarely been taken seriously in his career. Quite frequently he has been ignored.

In looking at the "whole man" as the nucleus of this study one discovers the interrelatedness of all Thomas' effort. Chapter IV which dealt mainly with his books might be considered a good index of his temperament; that is, the book titles themselves underscore the adventure-exploration-travel motif again and again. In brief, he is a successful entrepreneur of the entertainment media, a man who has

capitalized on serving the public colorful programs which stir the imagination but may not be profound. In sum, the essential role of Thomas may be that of the reconteur of travel-adventure, the popularizer of the remote and the strange, the "human interest" reporter who set out to bring home the seven wonders of the world.

Dependability and Stamina

This study has stressed Thomas' long record in radio news. His wide popularity with a national audience may be due to many factors: (1) the conservative, Middle Western tone of his program; (2) the usually cheerful after-effect of a Thomas broadcast; (3) emphasis on virile exploits; (4) fairness in controversial items and non-variance in his public stance; (5) sticking to radio, which is undoubtedly his best medium.

Thomas has worn the mantle of success well. He delivers a certain middle-of-the road product dependably and can be counted on for an informal broad spectrum account of the news. Moreover, there have been no scandals or upsetting incidents in his personal life to cause a blemish on his public image. He has steadily built a career on reporting adventure, and the public seems to know this.

Lowell Thomas shows every evidence of stamina in broadcasting. His career has launched at the top and has remained at the top for over thirty years. By the same

token, sheer force of habit may account for some of his popularity among listeners. That is, the regularity of his 6:45 news program may have instilled the "Lowell Thomas habit" among an older generation, especially in rural areas. It has been pointed out both in the chapter on Thomas' style and in the one on the content of his radio scripts that he succeeds in stretching his audience's mental horizons. As William Randolph Hearst said of him: "He engenders excitement through sheer verbal magic." Additionally, it was pointed out that Thomas is temperate in his presentations of explosive items, even to the extent of avoiding the tragic and depressing. These qualities stem directly from his personality, and this writer maintains that the newscast is an extension of his personality.

Areas for Further Research

While the writer has touched on as many areas of Thomas' public and private career as have seemed germane to the topic, he believes there are still some areas of investigation which might prove fruitful. In order to present a completely satisfactory portrait of Thomas in considerable depth, it might be profitable to pull together systematically (through questionnaires sent to newsmen in large cities) an assessment of his influence on younger newsmen. If there have been any conscious imitators of Thomas in the last few years or any "disciples" one would wish to document this influence.

Secondly, more precise knowledge about Thomas' actual radio audience today in terms of sex, education, buying power, location, and so forth would be useful. The Oldsmobile "Stewardship Report" of 1963 and other data have not been completely clear on this subject and have only hinted at the "growing automobile-listening audience." Thomas' new sponsor, the Buick Division of General Motors, might be willing to undertake such an investigation.

Thirdly, the enigmatic figure of Prosper Buranelli, Thomas' chief script writer, confidant, and partner in many enterprises, should be given more time and attention. A full study of Buranelli, whom Thomas candidly refers to today as a "genius" would throw light on the early Thomas' lecturing career, his business involvements, and his investments in Cinerama, International.

Fourthly, a factual report on Thomas' business activities would illustrate the entreprenurial aspect of the man. The writer was able to learn very little of Thomas' now-declining interest in Cinerama, Internationalor about his "advisory" capacity with Capital Cities Broadcasting in New York. This organization now owns five radio and five television stations.

Had these aforementioned areas of inquiry with respect to Thomas proved fruitful, this study would have been much more complete. But they were felt by Thomas to be confidential in nature. The writer regularly sensed as the study

progressed, and even after the six extensive interviews with Thomas were concluded, that Thomas' staff preferred to substitute public relations materials. Nonetheless, the author is grateful for what he was able to discover and is obliged to conclude that, in numerous ways, Thomas himself is a product of the medium. By this, the writer means that Thomas has grown accustomed to the role of the stellar performer, that he can grant or refuse interviews, that he can control information about himself, that some of his notions about himself may have been reinfored by NBC or CBS publicity writers.

New hypotheses

The author has suggested at one or more points in the study that it has been difficult to separate Thomas the man from his legend. By this he does not mean to imply that there exist outright fabrications but rather some exaggerations concerning his early lecturing career, his film-making after World War I, and his world travels. This has proved to be a somewhat troublesome area, for there are no sources able to affirm or to deny the validity of some of the claims. Moreover, it may be the plain truth that everything written about Thomas has been accurate and is incontestable. But the author retains an impression that to some degree Thomas has been influenced or affected by the network public relations writers who are skilled in the creation of alluring

images. On the other hand, there is no proof to the contrary. Hence, the author believes that he has not written the definitive work on Lowell Thomas and that this may not be possible for some years to come.

Secondly, on completion of this study, the author sees Thomas as a product of the times, a fortuitous blending of talent and a new medium (radio) which could use this particular skill. The world around Thomas has radically changed but he has remained virtually the same and he continues to deliver much the same staple product of information and entertainment. The author thinks that Thomas is unique and may be the last of a particular kind of news commentator. By this he means that there may not be room for a second Lowell Thomas on the air today owing to the change in public taste and sophistication. News in the 1930's was an unsophisticated art; today it follows an altogether different pattern of presentation and, in this sense, Thomas is, perhaps, somewhat dated.

Thirdly, it developed that Thomas is looked upon with genuine affection by his colleagues and that no one on the network level has any desire to say anything uncomplimentary. Part of this almost-universal sentiment may be founded on respect for a senior newsman who has become something of a "living institution." Furthermore, the author recognizes that he may have been unnecessarily on guard in trying to avoid an adulatory tone in the study. From virtually all

quarters, the response to questions about Thomas has been "positive."

Fourthly, this study of one newscaster might lead to some more precise methodology for examining newsmen in the future. The modus operandi outlined in Chapter I might or might not apply to other contemporary figures; yet it is recommended that the researcher spend time with his subject in order to benefit from personal contact. Moreover, historical research in personalities in the broadcasting field is still somewhat experimental, but a series of similar studies might prove profitable to students of broadcasting who would then have a more complete picture of the early days of American broadcasting, the various competitive forces and influences at work, and these could then yield a more accurate understanding of such factors as success, survival, and popularity.

Finally, as a result of this study, the author suggests that durability among newscasters may be directly related to their political posture; that durability may depend on an even-tempered blandness, an avoidance of controversy and strong opinions and require a cheerful disposition which cultivates friends and makes few enemies. This contention remains to be proved or to be disproved.

Summation

The author has not suggested in this study that Thomas is a very profound person; but that he is original and resourceful. His conceiving the project of broadcasting from Tibet and carrying this out is an instance of his personal adventuresomeness; his presence in East Africa at this writing to inspect the game preserves and wildlife sanctuaries while on safari attests to his flexibility and his constant "movement." Thomas has fully exploited a basic formula of adventure-exploration-travel to excite the public imagination and to win for himself a place in the public esteem. Moreover, Thomas is seventy-two years of age and has not yet written the final chapter to his performing career.

The author does not overestimate his subject; but he does believe that Thomas has been somewhat underrated especially by the younger generation, and that possibly this study might serve to place him more correctly in perspective as a unique personality in broadcasting. Partly because of the nature of his institutional sponsorship, partly because of the unchanging hour and the habit many listeners have formed over the years, Lowell Thomas continues to hold a large national audience. As stated earlier in the study, "the resonance, color, and tone of his voice" were the foundation stone in the early days for his fame. Yet the fountainhead of Thomas' career and his success in the medium

derive from what the author has called Thomas' "romantic cast of mind."

The more demanding intellectual may argue that Thomas has not measured up to the highest expectations or responsibilities of the objective newsman, that Thomas violates possibly what Eric Sevareid called the "sacred trust" of the news reporter. And the critic of contemporary broadcast news may feel that Thomas has not only passed his peak but is definitely an anachronism. Again, the author believes that Thomas should be seen as a news personality rather than a newsman, and that in his attempt to reveal the pageantry and the humanity of the news he is decidedly a showman.

Finally, one comes face to face with the elusive matter of wide popularity which seems to defy scientific analysis. As H. V. Kaltenborn observed: "The first fact about Lowell Thomas is that he is pre-eminently likable. He has no enemies." And Kaltenborn also remarked in speaking of Thomas' basic appeal: "as long as there is an audience for the story-teller, Lowell Thomas will have an audience."

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, John Hoy Lerch, was born in Detroit, Michigan, on September 23, 1922. I was educated in the elementary and secondary public high schools of Columbus, Ohio. My college education was interrupted by war-time military service in Europe, where I served as an interpreter with the 7th Armored Division. I was able to obtain a certificate of proficiency in the French Language from Grenoble University in 1946 before returning to the United States.

Upon finishing my undergraduate studies at Stanford University in 1947, I worked for a commercial radio station in San Francisco for a short time before accepting my first overseas assignment in international radio as program director for Studio Vienna of the Austrian National Network. In 1949 I returned to Ohio State University to begin graduate work in English, and was awarded a master's degree in 1950. In 1951, while studying for the Ph.D. in English, I was offered a position with Radio Free Europe. From this work in Munich I went to Manila to serve as program director for Radio Free Asia. At the conclusion of this assignment in 1952, I went on a trip around the world starting from the Far East. In 1954 I returned to Japan to serve as script editor for Psychological Warfare, a broadcasting arm of the

Department of the Army. In 1956 I came back to America and entered the Graduate School of The Ohio State University in order to finish my doctorate in radio and television. After completing the residence requirements, I went to Toronto for one year, where I served as a writer-producer with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

In 1959 I joined the faculty of Boston University as an Assistant Professor of Broadcasting and taught there for four years.

In 1964, however, I joined the faculty of the Languages and Literature Division of Lowell Technological Institute in Lowell, Massachusetts. At the present, I continue to teach courses in English and American Literature and to serve as Travel Editor for Station WHDH, Boston.