

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Flyer for stage production of *Main Street*

MAIN STREET REVISITED

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Dramatic and film adaptations of Sinclair Lewis's novels founder or float on their ability to focus his often episodic narratives and to provide psychological depth to his vivid but sometimes caricatured characters. In other words, the qualities that make the novels memorable aren't easily translated to the demands of another genre. Happily, Craig Wright's adaptation of *Main Street*, produced earlier this year

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MAIN STREET AT THE GREAT AMERICAN HISTORY THEATRE IN ST. PAUL: A REVIEW

George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

The Great American History Theatre production of *Main Street*, which ran in St. Paul April 5 to May 18, conveyed Carol Kennicott's story as she might have wanted it conveyed—with "unembittered laughter." Writer Craig Wright, who adapted the novel for the stage, and director Ron Peluso together found the fun in the story. You left the theater pleased, feeling as if the performance had provided a fresh view.

The Carol of the book, of course, does not learn until the end that the best defense is "unembittered laughter." But except for a few harsh moments, the play had a tone of pleasant comedy throughout.

The play minimized bitterness by giving Carol strength. Part of this strength came from actor Carolyn Pool who played the role with vigor, with a big voice and an unstoppable smile. The character gained further force from a duplicated climax scene emphasizing the point that her experience resulted from choice, not inertia. At the opening and three-fourths of the way through the play, this repeated scene led to husband Will Kennicott's observation that nobody had forced Carol to live in Gopher Prairie. Both times she agreed, recognizing it had been her choice. The corresponding passage in the novel (in chapter 36) does not make this point.

The play's Carol seemed the kind of person who chooses to be a dreamer. As a young single woman,

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HELP US CELEBRATE THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF SINCLAIR LEWIS WINNING THE NOBEL PRIZE

The Sinclair Lewis Society is planning to hold a conference in mid-July 2005 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Sinclair Lewis winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first American ever to be so honored.

The conference will likely be held in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, Lewis's hometown, to coincide with Sinclair Lewis Days. Planned events include academic panels on various aspects of Lewis's writing, a visit to the Boyhood Home, films based on some of Lewis's short stories and novels, and possibly a dramatic reading.

The conference is still in the planning stages. Please send suggestions for panels, papers, or activities to Sally Parry, Executive Director, Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University 61790-4240. E-mail her at separry@ilstu.edu. You may also send suggestions to Fred Betz at fbetz@siu.edu.



The Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home

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MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS ON SINCLAIR LEWIS: GLIMPSES TOO BRIEF

Rodger L. Tarr
Illinois State University, Emeritus

There are few greater testimonies to a writer's respect for another writer than when one sits in a restaurant struck by the presence of the other. A small but significant testimony to such presence is the following from Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings—at this time one of Scribner's most important writers—when she saw Sinclair Lewis sitting in a New York restaurant.¹ In an unpublished letter (17 February 1943), to her husband Norton Baskin, Rawlings writes about her chance meeting with Lewis in the Gotham Hotel grill in New York City:

Recognized George Carger² in a corner—and in a moment in came Sinclair Lewis and another man and sat almost opposite. I sent notes to both of them, and am sure the waiter thought I was shamelessly drumming up trade. George came over and chatted a few minutes and sent his regards to you. Sinclair Lewis and his friend, a doctor, joined us after our dinners—and we talked about an hour. He still looks like something abandoned to the vultures in the Libyan desert, but is so nice.³

Rawlings had met Lewis two years earlier at the University of Wisconsin, and briefly described that meeting to her close friend Bee McNeill on 24 June 1941, "I met Sinclair Lewis and the artist Curry and altogether had the most wonderful week of my whole life" (*Selected Letters* 203).

Interestingly, it was a short time after the meeting at the Gotham Hotel that Rawlings was asked by Henry Seidel Canby to evaluate candidates for the Gold Medal of the Institute for Fiction. In a letter to Canby (26 October 1943), Rawlings eliminated Ernest Hemingway from contention because he was "still a young man" and Theodore Dreiser because his work did not "stand the test of time." She was then left with Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, and Lewis. Reluctantly, Rawlings then eliminated Lewis:

I should now eliminate Mr. Lewis, though the mass of his work is impressive and has had a great influence on our time, and for the reason that I consider him more the satirist than the creative writer of fiction.

Rawlings then chose Glasgow over Cather because of the "almost classically, high standard" of her work (*Selected Letters* 244).

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she easily sidestepped the unsexed Stewart Snyder but warmed to Will Kennicott's charming down-home authenticity, in the same way youngsters in 1970 warmed to the idea of gardening, bread-making, and no electricity. It was done with a confident idealism, something we can now regard with nostalgic amusement. The play presented Carol's original choice of Will and village-improvement in a similar light.



The marquee at the Great American History Theatre

Later, as the choice began to yield painful consequences, the Carol of the play still seemed in no danger of being crushed. She directed Gopher Prairie's production of *The Girl from Kankakee* with a sure hand. There was no self-doubt or indecision. She bore down on Guy Pollock to force physical expression out of his performance and was surprised only by the way small-town decorum forbade sultry body language. Unlike the Carol of the novel, the Carol of the play made no unsettling discoveries about her own inadequacies as actor and director.

A self-assured Carol was fun to see. She energized the scene and saved us from having to watch an enactment of whiny depression, which might have been the effect in a stage adaptation crafted by people of lesser skill.

Part of the humor in the production came from the Will Kennicott role. Actor Brian Goranson gave Will the Minnesota-nice manner that gained notoriety in the movie *Fargo*. Even when Will was angry, he sounded nice. Trying to shift a rancorous interchange with Carol into something more constructive, he said, "Now we've both been cranky," a line Goranson delivered with the wholesomeness of a kindergarten

teacher.

Vida Sherwin had the same quality. In instructing Carol how to survive small-town life, she was polite and indirect. The strongest criticism she could bring herself to make was: "You're an...an...impossibilist!" This line got a big laugh from the audience.

The play's method of showing the range of small-town characters whom Carol must face increased the humor. There were only five actors. One played Carol, one played Will, and a third (Josh Foldy) played Erik Valborg. All other characters were played by the remaining two actors, Nancy Marvy and Stephen D'Ambrose, who jumped from role to role as fast as a series of skitlike episodes can be made to unfold. One minute Marvy was Aunt Bessie; the next she was Vida Sherwin. D'Ambrose shifted from being Sam Clark to Luke Dawson to Guy Pollock to Uncle Whittier to the voice of Carol's squawking baby. The fast shifts lent a cartoon-like humor to the text.

The play had its serious moments. By the time Erik Valborg appeared, Carol had become so trapped in Gopher Prairie that her efforts to encourage him to leave and pursue his dream were quite touching.

The serious opening scene, a flashforward to the argument precipitating her escape to Washington D.C., seemed for a while even more raw, more strident, than anything in the novel. It was the scene in which Will denounces the Non-Partisan League and the inadequately patriotic German farmers. Believing in tolerance, the Carol on stage responded with outrage.

But soon the atmosphere settled, and comedy became the dominant mood. Anger subsided when Carol agreed she was in Gopher Prairie by choice, and the play flashed back to the beginning of the story, when Carol was amusingly idealistic. By the time the action built to the climax again, the argument had less virulence. She then went off to Washington, made some hastily summarized discoveries (just as in the novel), and returned to make her peace with the small town. The final scene showed much of the dramatic tension resolved.

Though the costumes and set suggested nothing anachronistic, you could see the production had been influenced by post-1960s ideas of womanhood and

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THE LEWIS—HEMINGWAY CONNECTION—AGAIN

Martin Bucco
Colorado State University

Although he did not write to the celebrated Sinclair Lewis, young Ernest Hemingway—his boyhood Midwestern, his father a doctor, his mother culture-minded—read *Main Street* carefully. As a *Toronto Star* reporter, Hemingway once alluded to Lewis's "equestrian ineptitude" (Baker 94) and later surprised his wife, Hadley, when he remarked that Mencken's white-haired boy was making his literary reputation by exploiting the "much-abused American scene" (Baker 161). Hemingway and Hadley knew, of course, about Lewis's low opinion of attic-and-café expatriates and of the Left Bank's low opinion of Lewis—a literary Babbitt, an advertising man who made money, wrote a novel on the side, and then made more money. In 1927, Lewis, Hemingway, and Hemingway's second wife had dinner in Berlin. During the late 1920s Lewis spoke highly of Hemingway's stories and of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)—this last a novel that the Corps burn in *It Can't Happen Here* (269).

On his way to Stockholm in November 1930, Lewis optimistically predicted that in perhaps ten years Hemingway would win the Nobel Prize, which, of course, he did—twenty-four years later. In his Nobel Prize Lecture, Lewis alluded to Hemingway as "a bitter youth educated by the most intense experience, disciplined by his own high standards, an authentic artist whose home is in the whole of life" ("The American Fear of Literature" 16-17). Later, however, Lewis questioned the height of those standards. Digressing in *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) from big-game hunting to literary matters, Kodinsky says, "Tell me what is Joyce like? I have not the money to buy it. Sinclair Lewis is nothing, I bought it" (8). So disdainful of Hemingway's book was Lewis that he dreamed up a bit of critical verse, "Lines to a College Professor," which, in satiric conclusion, advises the priggish academic to follow Hemingway's lead: "Speak up, man! Be bravely heard/ Bawling the four-letter word!/ And wear your mind décolleté/ Like Mr. Ernest

Hemingway" ("Rambling Thoughts..." 197).

In his book column in *Newsweek*, Lewis grumbled that instead of writing in the tradition of the "rich and exhilarating *A Farewell to Arms*," Hemingway in *To Have and Have Not* (1937) continued the tradition of "puerile slaughter and senile weariness" established in *Green Hills of Africa*. "Thinly connected" tough tales about seafaring off the Florida Keys and tough drinking on them, *To Have and Have Not* struck Lewis as not only barbaric, neurotic, and obscene, but as "irritatingly dull." Lewis rejected Hemingway's depiction of all the "excellently educated" characters as bores and cowards and all the "unlettered" as wise and good. For the virile and hairy Hemingway, declared Lewis, "no real man ever thinks of anything save adultery, alcohol, and fighting." But fighting with a submachine gun and buckets of blood do not result, thought Lewis, in "nice exhilarating killings...four in a row become pretty dull." Still, declared Lewis, if Hemingway came to know just one man not restricted to "boozing and womanizing," and if he tried to save himself instead of Spain, he might yet become the greatest novelist in America ("Glorious Dirt" 34). Ironically, during this period Hemingway wrote one of his best stories, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," and Spain, of course, gave him material for *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

While laboring over this long novel, Hemingway in 1940 told his editor, Maxwell Perkins, that he could write 5000 words a day if he wrote as sloppily as Lewis



Ernest Hemingway

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female heroism. Not only was Carol's life in Gopher Prairie remote and rural but it had been chosen by a woman with the power to make such an idealistic choice. The strongest emotion she allowed us to see, instead of being the stifled romantic's cry for help, was the righteous anger of a citizen espousing tolerance and freedom. The end of the play put more emphasis than the book does on the idea that Carol's baby daughter will be a *bomb* to blow up the old order and usher in new freedom. This Carol was a revolutionary, and the audience, looking back at her from 2003, could see her revolution would be accomplished.

A conspicuous feature of the mostly bare set, designed by Nayna Ramey, was a white curving ramp starting at floor level in center stage and spiraling up

and back, like a stairway to the stars. The players sometimes went up it a few paces but never very far. Still, it looked bright and happy, and by the end you knew it meant that dreams such as Carol's can bless the present and improve the future.

If the text and production had any flaws, one might be the harshness of the opening scene, which led you to expect a more hard-edged drama than the play that followed. On the other hand, the scene got your attention, and it established immediately the forcefulness in Carol's character—a hallmark of the show.

Lewis fans should remember this script by Craig Wright. It would be worth doing again. The text plays fast. It is energized by a friendly satirical humor. And the Carol Kennicott role has a lively appeal. ✍

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by the Great American History Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, manages to gather the novel's sprawl into a contained, character-driven focus, all the while retaining and showing the relevance of Lewis's social critique.

Wright has chosen to focus the play on the relationship of Carol and Will Kennicott. (Indeed, the program notes explain that the story is about "the complex relationship of marriage"—wait! I thought that was *Cass Timberlane*!) The play begins with a scene showing Carol and Will in a tempestuous fight: he thinks her never-ending criticism of Gopher Prairie is treasonous in wartime; she thinks World War I

provides an easy excuse for Will and the town fathers to label as unpatriotic any idea that threatens the status quo (they could be having the same argument now). Carol stands by the window, wondering how she came to this pass, and the play takes us into the past to show us a younger Carol dreaming ambitious dreams in college, becoming mildly disappointed in her librarian job, meeting Will, and being gradually seduced by his vision of all she could do in Gopher Prairie. As Carol, Carolyn Pool embodied the many sides of the character: her idealism, her naïveté, her condescension, and her frustration as she becomes increasingly aware of the trap she's been caught in. Likewise, as Will, Brian Goranson portrayed a man who can simultaneously believe that Gopher Prairie is the second coming of ancient Athens and negotiate the petty small-town politics that are always just beneath the surface. Goranson's Will was usually a placid lump for whom the status quo is just fine, but when necessary—in proposing to Carol or in trying to convince her to leave Washington, D.C., and return to Gopher Prairie—he could transform into a smooth and irresistible salesman.

In choosing to put the focus on Carol and Will's relationship, the play only gestures toward the many



Sally Parry at the play of Main Street

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MORE ON THE THOREAU CONNECTION

George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

Consider Sinclair Lewis's situation in spring 1944. He had already told a *Time* reporter in 1943 that a reading of Thoreau would explain his return to Minnesota ("People"). Now he was in Duluth, a well-heralded celebrity, settling into a neo-Tudor mansion with servants, looking down on one of the largest lakes in the world from the wealthy east-end hillside. How could he have a Thoreauvian experience here?

One need not look far to find reasons for Lewis's choices. At age 59, his health was not the best, unlike Henry David Thoreau who went to Walden Pond while still in his twenties. Among other ailments, Lewis now had a tremor in his hands, one of the reasons he employed a chauffeur instead of driving himself (Greve). Lewis's lifelong calling, moreover, was to write novels of social realism. He needed to meet Duluth's country-club set before he could fill in the surface details for both *Cass Timberlane* and *Kingsblood Royal*. Thoreau had no such need.

Given these constraints, Lewis had to devise his own methods for making an honest connection with the land. One method, as we already know, was to keep a special journal, titled a "Minnesota Diary," in which he made notes on the weather and described natural scenery. Another method was to explore Minnesota by automobile, to gain a full sense of its varied landscapes.

He had yet another means for communing with the land—a special arrangement to take undisturbed walks on a large farm outside Duluth. The source for this discovery is Mrs. Lois Mann, who phoned me right after the *Duluth Budgeteer* published a feature story on the "Minnesota Diary" editing project (Eller).

Lois Mann grew up on the University of Minnesota Northeast Agricultural Experiment Station. This was a 280-acre farm on the outskirts of Duluth,

about four and half miles from Lewis's house. Mrs. Mann's father, Herman Landre, was the foreman. The Landres' house had a commanding view of many acres. In spring 1944, young



Northeast Experiment Station
in the 1950s

Lois Landre graduated from high school and then spent the summer at home. In summer 1945, when Lewis was again in Duluth, she had a job, but she was still some of the time at home.

She remembers seeing Lewis on many summer evenings walking the lanes between fields by himself. The word came down from Superintendent Mark Thompson that Lewis was not to be disturbed. He wanted solitude. So the staff and family members left him alone. Mrs. Mann recalls that he stayed mainly on the field roads, he did not come out on public roads, and the area where he walked was a quiet and private part of the farm.

The Northeast Experiment Station is not mentioned in "A Minnesota Diary," but Lewis's vest-pocket appointment books, in the Yale collection, mention a Mark Thompson in summer 1945.

Lois Mann's memory has significance because the usual memory of Lewis from this time emphasizes his loneliness, not his desire for solitude. Though he treated friends badly and took offense easily, he is usually portrayed as one who sought companionship (Greve; Koblas 134-36, 139-40; Lingeman 501-02). The private walks on the farm are a clear example of the way his Thoreauvian mission could counteract the more conspicuous patterns in his behavior during the Duluth period.

— More on the Thoreau Connection continued on page 11

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 3*

Whether Rawlings met Lewis again is not known, but these brief glimpses indicate the esteem with which he was held by the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist of *The Yearling*.

Notes

¹ Rawlings was inclined to approach writers whom she did not know or did not know well. The most famous instance is when she spotted Ernest Hemingway in a restaurant. As the story goes, she sent him a note, saying "If you are Ernest Hemingway, I would like to buy you a drink." Hemingway is said to have responded, "If you are Marjorie Rawlings, I accept." Later Hemingway, with his then wife Martha Gellhorn, accepted Rawlings's invitation, with her then guest Julia Scribner, to continue libations at her cottage on Crescent Beach, where the Hemingways stayed "much later than was wise for them" (*Max and Marjorie* 469).

² George Carger, the American artist. The MS of the letter is at the University of Florida and is reprinted with the permission of the Rawlings Trust.

³ Rawlings anticipates Hemingway's more brutal description in

Across the River and into the Trees (1950), where Lewis, through the lens of Robert Cantwell, is described as looking like a "weasel or ferret," whose face is "as pock-marked and as blemished as the mountains of the moon" (87). The stark difference is that Rawlings thought Lewis "so nice"; Hemingway's Cantwell thought him a "son of a bitch."



Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

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The Lewis-Hemingway Connection *continued from page 5*

(Baker 347). A chance meeting with Hemingway in Key West in 1940 brightened Lewis's dim view of Hemingway's writing (Baker 355). As chairman of the Limited Editions Club editorial committee (which included Clifton Fadiman and Sterling North), Lewis was instrumental in awarding the Club's triennial Gold Medal in 1940 to Hemingway for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Lewis not only composed what Hemingway described as "a damn nice letter" (Baker 369), but he made the presentation speech at the November 26 ceremony in New York. Though Hemingway declined to attend, he telegraphed Charles Scribner's Sons to send a stenographer over to record Lewis's address, wherein Lewis ranked Hemingway with "that foggy giant Dreiser, with Cather, that cool grey genius, with Maugham, Wells, and Jules Romans" (Schorer 680). Maxwell Perkins accepted the medal for Hemingway, but Hemingway's publisher failed to send a stenographer, an oversight which enraged Hemingway (Baker 370). Lewis's foreword to the Limited Editions *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a slightly more formal version of Lewis's New York speech. He describes Hemingway as "a lone scarred tree for the lightning of living has hit him" (x). Lewis goes on to praise the novel's love

story, its stirring adventures, and Robert Jordan's willingness to die for a cause.

In *Bethel Merriday*, Lewis at one point has his acting apprentices lying around the theater grounds studying their lines and reading, among others, Hemingway (115). On the road later, Zed Wintergeist aggressively dives into the novels of Hemingway (302). As dean of Kinnikinick College in 1926, Planish's Gideon no longer has to pretend that, along with Wharton and Cather, he has read this "new fellow" Hemingway (124). After all the Planish's efforts to send their daughter to a fashionable school, Carrie wants to attend public school and talk about what the purblind Gideon calls "a lot of nonsense"—biology, mechanical drawing, Ernest Hemingway and James T. Farrell (327).

Interestingly, the *Saturday Review of Literature* (27 August 1944) voted *Arrowsmith* America's outstanding novel and Hemingway America's leading novelist (61). In *Cass Timberlane*, Jinny and Cass send serviceman Eino Roskinen, somewhere in the south Pacific, a Christmas box in which one of the gifts is a thin-paper edition of *A Farewell to Arms*

—The Lewis-Hemingway Connection *continued on page 10*

MAIN STREET INVITES INTERPRETATIONS: THEATER REVIEW

Carolyn Petrie

Special to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and reprinted with permission

Two great writers for the price of one—that's the treat you can discover onstage at the Great American History Theatre. As adapted by the ultra-talented Craig Wright, Sinclair Lewis's classic Midwestern novel *Main Street* comes across as a fascinating, complicated study of the American dream, just as it did when it first hit bookstores in 1920.

Set in the deceptively simple town of Gopher Prairie (modeled closely on Lewis's childhood home, Sauk Centre, Minn.), *Main Street* tells the story of Carol Kennicott, a spunky "big city" gal from St. Paul who moves to Gopher Prairie for her new husband, a town doctor. Carol is book smart, snobbish, well-intentioned, and totally clueless, often all at the same time, and winds up alienating her new neighbors by aiming to pretty up the town and bring some culture to its unrefined core.

The novel, which won Lewis acclaim as the conscience of his generation, is best remembered for its gutsy, unvarnished indictment of small-town gossip and complacency.

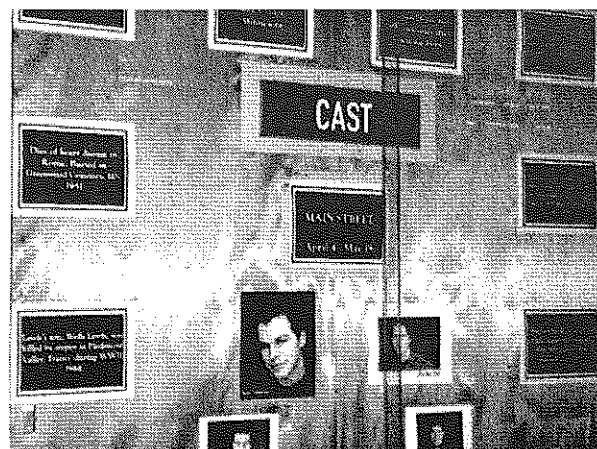
In Wright's hands, the stage adaptation retains the edge of Lewis's small-town satire, but ultimately focuses on Carol herself: how she reconciles the dashed dreams of her youth, how she and her husband, Will, navigate their difficult marriage, and whether she can carve out a happy life for herself.

More than a few times, actress Carolyn Pool's layered characterization of Carol brings to mind Nora in *A Doll's House*, another classically conflicted woman of the stage. Like Lewis's book (and Ibsen's play before it), *Main Street* poses universal problems and encourages us to look inward for the answers. It's a smart, subtle play that invites a world of different reactions and interpretations.

Director Ron Peluso and a fine company deserve credit for bringing Gopher Prairie to life so seamlessly.

Set and lighting designer Nayna Ramey, one of the Twin Cities' most gifted artists, evokes the town through a series of old-fashioned leaded glass windows, all standing alongside a stylized road curving back into the distance. Peluso has staged the play with an elegant hand, subtly lighting the offstage characters, who silently watch Will and Carol like jurors in a courtroom.

Brian Goranson evokes real sympathy as hardworking Will, a practical counterpart to Pool's lovely, flawed dreamer. In several supporting roles, the talented Stephen D'Ambrose and Nancy Marvy are as malleable as Silly Putty and as solid as concrete.



Cast of St. Paul production of *Main Street*

Together, Lewis, Wright, Pool, and Peluso have painted such a detailed, poignant portrait of this young woman that she might well serve as a stand-in for any of us, young or old, male or female. Ultimately, her fate could be viewed as a triumph of maturity or a crushing, compromising defeat—it's all in the eye of the beholder. For me, that's a sure sign of great theater.

Here's a show that will make you care about its characters, and may well stay on your mind long after the trip home.

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other Gopher Prairie denizens and the novel's many subplots. Yet scenic designer Nayna Ramey and director Ron Peluso found ways to conjure up the Gopher Prairie context in which Carol and Will move. The set for this production was marked by several windows suspended at various heights around the stage, as if to suggest the surveillance by small-town eyes under which Carol must always act. Center stage was a curved ramp that visually suggested a road rising into the distance, but that practically—given the limitations of the actual stage—went nowhere.

With the exception of Erik Valborg, like Carol, an outsider, who was played by Josh Foldy, the citizens of Gopher Prairie were all portrayed by the versatile Stephen D'Ambrose and Nancy Marvy. One of the highlights of this production was the party welcoming Carol to Gopher Prairie: each time Marvy and especially D'Ambrose walked or danced near Carol,

they were, with a slight change of bearing or voice, new, completely distinct characters. At the same time, however, having all of Gopher Prairie acted by only two people reinforced the idea of conformity that is part of the community's creed. Moreover, even in scenes where they didn't appear, director Peluso positioned D'Ambrose and Marvy on the periphery, watching, always watching.

Lewis's novel sought to explode the myth of small-town American life. In 2003 that myth is long since discredited. Nevertheless, Wright's adaptation reveals how much of Lewis's critique remains relevant: the difficulty of maintaining one's idealism; the entrenchment of the status quo; the techniques by which conformity is enforced; the constricting social roles women can be asked to play. Wright's *Main Street* is a smart, funny, and thoughtful adaptation of a classic novel. It will, I hope, have a continued life in America's theaters. ✍

The Lewis-Hemingway Connection continued from page 8

(253). In 1949, both Lewis and Hemingway happened to be staying at the Gritti in Venice. Hemingway, angered by his wife's report that for three hours Lewis had lectured her about her husband's niggardly production and ungenerosity, remarked to the waiter that Lewis was not only a "Baedeker-bearing bastard," but that his complexion resembled "the mountains of the moon" (Baker 471). Thus Hemingway in *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950) has Colonel Robert Cantwell speak to the "son of a bitch" at a nearby table. A man with a face like a "weasel or ferret," "pock-marked and as blemished as the mountains of the moon seen through a cheap telescope... like Goebbels' face if Herr Goebbels had ever been in a plane that burned." His hair "seemed to have no connection with the human race. A little spit ran out of the corner of his mouth as he spoke... a caricature of an American who has been run one half way through a meat chopper and then been boiled, slightly, in oil." The Colonel thinks the American looks "as though he had forgotten to change his wig as he grew older." When the barman informs the colonel that the man "drinks three or four highballs, and then writes vastly and fluently far into the night," Cantwell replies, "I dare say that makes marvelous reading" (87-90). In

Lewis's last novel, Lewis informs us that after college Hayden Chart, the searching hero of *World So Wide*, followed the novels of Ernest Hemingway (29).

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More on the Thoreau Connection *continued from page 7*

The Northeast Experiment Station, which began its work in 1913, ceased to exist as such in the 1970s. Today many soccer fields and baseball fields occupy land where crops once grew. In its time the Experiment Station had projects in developing wheat, oats, barley, various kinds of hay, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and livestock (Thompson, *First Twenty-Five, First Forty*). Until 1966, it had a herd of purebred Guernsey cows, all descended from three imported heifers that arrived at the Station in 1914.

A reason to establish an experimental farm here was to learn how to make agriculture successful on wet, stony soil filled with clay in an unusually chilly climate. Could crops grow on swampy northern-forest land? There were some noteworthy successes. The staff was especially proud of the rutabagas they developed. Lois Mann remembers marvelous strawberries and raspberries. She also remembers her father's excitement when the farm finally succeeded in growing field corn on which the ears reached full maturity—a considerable feat in this climate.

In summer 1945, Lewis may have had a further motive for walking the lanes of this farm. He was about to review for the October 1945 *Esquire* the book *Pleasant Valley*, which Louis Bromfield wrote about his experimental farm Malabar in Ohio. This book annoyed Lewis who thought Bromfield boasted too much of his European experience and social connections. Lewis had all summer to think about the book. It had come out early enough in the year so that several reviews had already been published in April. He eventually wrote:

He [Bromfield] loves the land, the streams, the shadowed hills, the fresh springs, the small creatures of the woods. There is a zealot's joy in his discussions of farming, and even an incorrigible city man can enjoy his essays on mulching, fertilizing, contour plowing, and the soil-robbery of the pioneers. And just there is the tragedy: that, with the enthusiasm and perhaps with the power to make an enduring book, a true *Walden*, he should have cluttered and botched it with all the pert vanities of the money-grabbing, socially-climbing, Paris-Broadway-Hollywood literary gent. He did not listen to the quiet of his own fields and of his own heart. (79)

I have quoted this passage before (222). It is worth repeating because it helps explain Lewis's purpose. Very likely, he walked the farm lanes at the Experimental Station in 1945, not only to commune with the land in solitude, but also to try to sense how a true Thoreauvian experimentalist might experience a concentrated effort to grow food. Lewis thus might intuit what Bromfield should have written.

Lois Mann says the Experimental Station was a great place to spend a childhood. My guess is that Lewis found it a great place too. He could listen happily here to the quiet of the fields.

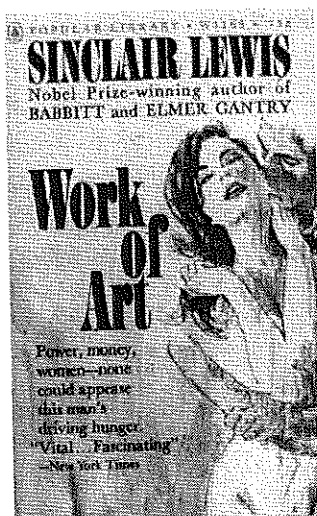
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LEWIS AS PORNOGRAPHY

Sally E. Parry
 Illinois State University

The eye-catching title to this essay was inspired by an article in the *Journal of American and Comparative Culture* (24.3/24.4 (2001): 153-60), "Paperback Pornography: Mass Market Novels and Censorship in Post-War America."



Popular Library, 1962

of a form of communication that was available to the masses and which contained "suggestive cover art and titillating stories" (153).

Paperbacks had provided a certain kind of democratizing influence on American society in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but in the post World War II, cold war conservatism of the early 1950s, many states felt that the paperback industry had gone too far in challenging "traditional notions of sexual propriety" (154). Their evidence was the lurid covers of many paperbacks which seemed to emphasize sex, violence, and sadism. Michigan led states in censorship efforts, and they were joined by organizations such as the National Organization for Decent Literature. Critics felt that, because of the low price, easy availability, and the appearance of obscenity, the morals of minors (and others) were being threatened.

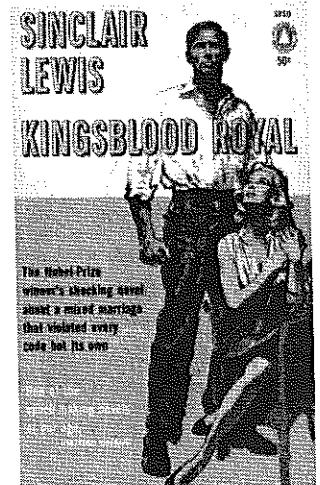
The committee recommended that Congress strengthen existing obscenity laws and asked that paperback book publishers tone down their covers. Their criterion for evaluating literary works was that if "sexual or violent content was the controlling theme of a work, then it was obscene. If, however, graphic or explicit scenes contributed to plot or character development and if the work had overall literary merit [my class would argue about what this means], it was not considered obscene. Certain subjects were likely to place a work in the questionable, if not obscene category. Among the themes that the committee found most disturbing were violence, lust, drug use, juvenile delinquency, homosexuality, and other sexual 'perversions' (i.e., nymphomania, sadomasochism)" (155).

Amusingly enough, Speer notes that the novels the committee found most objectionable "actually championed traditional notions of propriety and morality" (155). What is further ironic is that in the 1950s many novels with suggestive covers were actually "literary" books that the publishers dressed up to sell to a somewhat jaded public. Henry James is still Henry James regardless of what cover his novels wear.

I took a look at the cover art for Lewis's late novels, *Work of Art*, *Cass Timberlane*, *Kingsblood Royal*, *The God-Seeker*, and *World So Wide*. Although there isn't publication information available on the copyright page for each of these editions, they all date from the early 1950s to the early 1960s. What is most striking

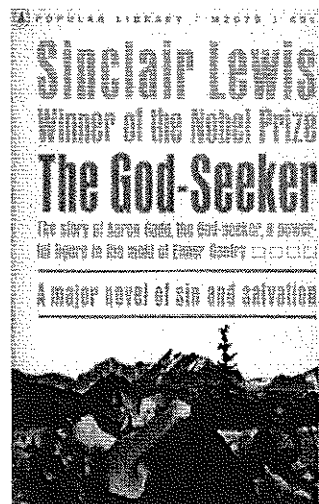


Bantam Books, 1951



Popular Library, 1959

ing about them is the positioning of women on the covers, set against a male presence and usually in some sort of sexually suggestive pose. Note too that in the pictures of *Cass Timberlane*, *Work of Art*, and *Kingsblood Royal* the cleavage of the women is very

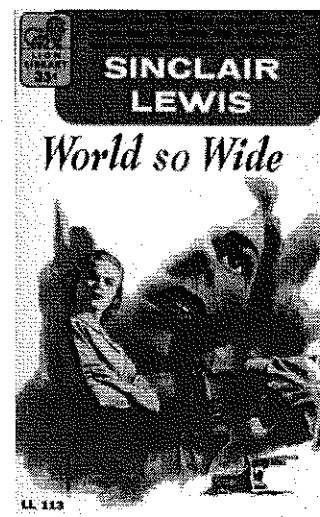


Popular Library, 1949

evident. Jinny Timberlane is sitting on a bed giving, I assume Cass, what used to be called a “come hither” look. The embrace on the *Work of Art* cover may be Myron Weagel and the Wild Widow or Effie May, who became his wife, or more possibly Ora and the tragic African-American Tansy Quill whom he seduces and abandons. Neil Kingsblood is a sturdy masculine figure set against his blonde wife Vestal who seems to find him quite sexually attractive. Aaron Gadd of *The God-Seeker* is in the midst of a passionate embrace somewhere in the great outdoors of the west and is being carefully observed by a Native American woman. Only Hayden Chart seems an-

noyed rather than seduced by the women on the cover. His women represent polar opposites—the sophisticated professor and Europhile Dr. Olivia Lomond and the pert American Roxanna Eldritch.

The language of the covers is also very suggestive: *Cass Timberlane* is “A Novel of a Middle-Aged Husband and *His Fiery Young Wife*” (italics on the cover), while *Kingsblood Royal* is “about a mixed marriage that violated every code but its own.” *The God-Seeker* is a “major novel of sin and salvation,” while *Work of Art* quotes the *New York Times*, “Power, money, women—none could appease this man’s driving hunger.” *World So Wide* quotes Alfred Kazin on the “significant terror” in Lewis’s novels, similar to Faulkner or hard-boiled novelists.



Lion Library, 1956

Read these novels again with the covers in mind and see whether they become the titillating stories that the covers promise!

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be sponsoring a panel at the American Literature Association Annual Conference to be held May 27-30, 2004 at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco, 5 Embarcadero Center, San Francisco, California. The Society is interested in papers on any aspect of Lewis’s life and work, including his connections with other authors. Please send an abstract by January 15, 2004 to Fred Betz, President, Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901, e-mail fbetz@siu.edu.

For more information on the American Literature Association, visit their website, www.americanliterature.org.



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www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/quiz.html

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Tracy Bernstein, Executive Editor of Penguin Group, wrote that Penguin has scheduled a reissue of *It Can't Happen Here* for March 2004. In addition to a new cover, they are thinking of commissioning a new introduction.

———— SLSN ————

Jim Hutchisson reports that the Lewis session at the American Literature Association Conference went well although the turnout was small. “We had a small (4 or 5) but warm and interested audience, including Jerry Loving, author of a new Dreiser bio, and Mike Lemmon, founder of the new Mailer Society, who clued me in to Mailer’s appreciation of SL—a note there, somewhere, perhaps. This also made me think that there is a good longer essay, perhaps, to be written on Lewis’s influence on later writers—somewhere, someday, too, perhaps.

“I ended up changing my paper. I gave an abbreviated version of my review essay on Lingeman that’s supposed to come out, or already is out, in *Review* this year, an annual published by Virginia: ‘Sinclair Lewis: A Rebel Reclaimed.’ The ALA was pretty well attended, although not by presses—only a few in evidence (luckily, both Georgia and Mississippi, who have published some of my books were there, and LSU. Seemed mainly southern presses, which is odd). Alas, the weather was cool, windy, and rainy, so no one was kicking around Boston much. But the hotel was fine and the opening and closing parties very nice get-togethers. I feel like the society columnist for the Gopher Prairie newspaper, so I’ll stop now.”

———— SLSN ————

In “Initiating Mission—Critical Jargon Reduction” (*New York Times*, August 3, 2003 Week in Review) Geoffrey Nunberg talks about a business consulting firm that has created a program called “BullFighter” which flags egregious uses of jargon and doublespeak. “True, complaints about the language of business aren’t new. Critics have long griped about the use of ‘contact’ as a verb. Back in 1931, a Western Union vice president

called the verb ‘a hideous vulgarism’ and banned it from company documents, and H. L. Mencken described it in 1936 as one of the ‘counter words’ of the heyday of Babbitry” (5).

———— SLSN ————

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum notes in their membership quarterly (2.2 [Summer 2002]) that they are holding a special exhibition, “Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings,” through October 2003. The exhibit examines how “book burnings became a potent symbol during World War II in America’s battle against Nazism and concludes by investigating their continued impact on public discourse.

“Covered widely in the media, the Nazi book burnings provoked impassioned responses in the United States from writers, artists, scholars, journalists, librarians, labor unions, clergy, political figures, and others. With remarkable prescience, editorials and political cartoons denounced the ‘holocaust’ (*Newsweek*) or ‘bibliocaust’ (*TIME*). American writers, including Helen Keller, Lewis Mumford, and Sinclair Lewis—some of whose books had been consigned to the flames—wrote open letters condemning the book burnings.”

The exhibit explores ways in which the book burnings have continued to be evoked in more recent politics, literature, and popular culture, including episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, *The Waltons*, and *M*A*S*H*, as well as a public burning of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series.

———— SLSN ————

The *Chicago Tribune* ran an article (April 12, 2003: 13:1+) on the Moody Bible Institute, one of the major schools for turning out Christian missionaries today. In “For a Better World, Grads of Moody Bible Soldier On,” author Patrick Kampert quotes Moody president Joseph Stowell about the problems of perception that the school faces. “‘Unfortunately, it’s like the Elmer Gantry syndrome,’ he said, referring to author Sinclair Lewis’s fictional womanizing, hard-drinking evangelist. ‘Is every

missionary a colonialist who's living in the really nice house while he's ripping money off the nationals or sleeping with their wives? From all my life working in this enterprise of the Gospel, I have rarely seen that" (1).

— SLSN —

Richard Brooks, the writer and director of the 1960 film *Elmer Gantry*, earlier in his career was a sports writer for the *Philadelphia Record* as well as a writer of screenplays for B films and radio scripts. During World War II, he was a technical sergeant in the Marine Corps. In 1945 he also wrote a novel, *The Brick Foxhole* (New York: Harper), about the murderous frustration of soldiers who never served overseas. In 1947 it was turned into the film *Crossfire*. In the novel, Brooks shows early signs of being interested in the writings of Sinclair Lewis: "The American may be called, with some degree of accuracy, a lousy lover, a money-grubber, a sentimentalist, an overdressed, overstuffed Babbitt, a bleating Elmer Gantry, a pushover for a racket, a larcenous dreamer, and many other things, but he can never be accused of being a stodgy cardplayer" (150).

— SLSN —

Kurt Steel's *Crooked Shadow* is a 1939 mystery-thriller that posits a fifth column of Nazis on Long Island planning race riots in order to destabilize the United States government. Toward the end of the novel, one of the good guys says that there are Americans ready to fight fascism: "All Americans who know what threat we face expect that. We're ready to fight it—are fighting it: people like Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis and Hemingway and Broun and Archibald MacLeish and thousands of other intelligent Americans" (235).

— SLSN —

Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his memoir, *A Life in the 20th Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917-1950* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), mentions Sinclair Lewis quite often. He notes that his father was a member of the Iowa City Lions Club, "a booster organization straight out of Sinclair Lewis" (29). He discusses the beneficiaries of the "banned in Boston" label on books in the 1920s, singling out "Dreiser, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair (who said, 'Boston is our advertising department')" (40). His father, also a histo-

rian, was concerned about individual liberty: "Mencken's journalism and Sinclair Lewis's novels portrayed a land in which freedom of thought was under siege by the community's insistence on orthodoxy and conformity" (48). This concern is one that continues to be all too prescient.

When writing of his time at Harvard, Schlesinger mentions many great writers of the 1920s whom he enjoyed, and then laments, "Of those once dazzling writers, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and, to some degree, Dreiser survive; Hemingway hangs on, barely; Wharton has had a revival, and Cather is still there in a minor key; Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson are forgotten" (133). He remembers the Warner Brothers film versions of *Babbitt* and *Main Street (I Married a Doctor)* but found them only "adequate" (149).

In the 1930s, writers who had been critical of America and its past changed as the "rise of fascism and communism in Europe made American democracy look a little better. . . . Sinclair Lewis in *It Can't Happen Here* and *The Prodigal Parents* exalted the middle-class America he had once scorned" (160). Schlesinger remembers how shocked he was "when Sinclair Lewis introduced lesbianism into *Ann Vickers*" (166). He also recalls a friend from Harvard, Peter Viereck, who was the great-grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm I. Viereck noted that he "talked to me of his interest in *dernier cri* U.S. lit. He did this by mixing up Sinclair Lewis with Upton Sinclair. No wonder he lost the war" (239).

THE SINCLAIR LEWIS
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
WELCOMES CONTRIBUTORS

The *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* welcomes short contributions about Sinclair Lewis's work, life, and times. We also welcome essays about teaching Lewis's novels and short stories. Send books for review, notices of upcoming conferences, reports on presentations and publications relating to Lewis, discoveries of materials (correspondence, manuscripts, etc.), descriptions of collections in libraries, and all other items to:

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SAUK CENTRE NEWS

Roberta Olson, president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, reports that the Lewis Boyhood Home repairs are now complete: new roof installed, siding replaced, primed and painted, wallpaper replaced inside, painted inside, the carriage house painted, and new doors built and installed. All that's left is to replace the carriage house roof. She says that the house is beautiful.

Because of loss of funding, the Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference for October 2003 was cancelled. The Foundation hopes to do a fund-raiser this winter which would benefit the conference for next year.

———— SLSN ————

Joyce Lyng has sent in information on the 33rd annual Sinclair Lewis Days that took place July 14-20, 2003. Among the activities were a craft show and flea market, the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus, a dance, fireworks, and a pie social. P. J. Wanderscheid was this year's grand marshal of the Lewis Days parade. Although only 19, he is a two-time World Snowmobile Racing Champion and was named "Racer of the Year" by *Snow Week* magazine. The Miss Sauk Centre Pageant this year had 10 entrants with Amanda Gruber being named Queen, and Caitlin Deters and Sheena Leukam as princesses. Other participants, all of whom were sponsored by local businesses, included Mary Zimmermann, Megan Wessel, Kayla Ann Quade, Rebecca Woida, Amber Stone, Andrea Weishair, and Melanie Schmiesing. Awards were given for talent, congeniality, interview, and evening gown. Ms. Gruber also won the talent portion with her short comedy skit, "How to Build Strong Muscles." Ron Schwegel won the \$100 chamber bucks for finding the treasure for the treasure hunt.

———— SLSN ————

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation held its annual meeting on February 7, 2003, the 118th anniversary of Lewis's birth. In her annual report, president Roberta Olson noted the renovation of the Boyhood Home (see above), the hiring of a new tour guide, the sponsoring

of the 14th Annual Writers Conference, and a unit at the Sinclair Lewis Days parade. Like most museums and attractions around the country, the Boyhood Home and Museum saw a significant decrease in attendance in 2002.

———— SLSN ————

Dave Simpkins writes in "Osakis: A Literary Capital" in the *Sauk Centre Herald* (February 25, 2003) that the nearby town of Osakis has worthy literary descendants to Sinclair Lewis in the contemporary authors Leif Enger and Diane Glancy. He writes, "Who needs *Main Street* when you have miracles, mystery and murder? Who needs Carol Kennicott, George Babbitt and Elmer Gantry when you have a man who heard the land? Sauk Centre has long been considered the literary capital of central Minnesota but Osakis is quickly stealing our thunder." Enger's last novel, *Peace Like a River*, takes place in a town much like Osakis. Set in the 1960s, it focuses on a boy whose brother commits a crime of passion. Glancy, a newcomer to Minnesota, sets her novel, *The Man Who Heard the Land*, in Osakis, Morris, and Moorhead. The nameless main character is a Native American man raised by a Lutheran pastor and his wife. "While Lewis depicted the hypocrisies of small town America, these two authors depict a broader slice of life on the rugged prairies, and the relationships, faith and psychology of its people. What many of us see as commonplace, can really be the backdrop of great story telling. Sinclair Lewis, John Hassler and Garrison Keillor have certainly proved that. We see it every week in many of the people and the stories we cover for the *Sauk Centre Herald*. An editor I once knew said a reporter must find the human drama in every story. Enger and Glancy take our human dramas to an artistic level."

A review of the St. Paul production of *Main Street* by Linda Simpkins in the *Sauk Centre Herald* praised the production and actually made the reviewer want to read the novel! In "Awakening to Main Street" (April 8, 2003), she admits that she did not expect much, and had "only made it halfway through *Main Street* my-

self, dropping the book shortly after Carol Kennicott went to a prominent couple in Gopher Prairie to suggest they give up their retirement fund to beautify the town. I wasn't sure I liked her enough to agonize with her over the aftermath she was bound to suffer from such obtuseness. And I haven't really been much inspired to try the book again, although I have on several other occasions found going back to a book a pleasant surprise.... I've thought perhaps I could be persuaded to try *Main Street* again, but nobody's taken on the job of persuading me. In fact, evidence in town of genuine interest in Sinclair Lewis or the book that made Sauk Centre famous hasn't exactly leapt out at me. True, we've named an annual festival after our famous author, complete with a craft fair and a parade.

"The only people who seem to know about Lewis's novels, however, are the dozen members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and developers who name streets and neighborhoods after people and places Lewis wrote about. Lewis was the first American to win a Nobel Prize for literature...yet I heard the local high school doesn't require students to read any one of them. Well, I thought, why should they? Perhaps

poor Lewis was just a pathetic person. After all, he died alone of alcoholism. Perhaps his work is so regional, so dated, that it couldn't really be called relevant anymore. Why should we care that he came from here? Kids can't be expected to read anything that's not relevant; why should I want too, either? Friday night I found a reason. Craig Wright's adaptation of Lewis's *Main Street* kept me so alert I stopped yawning. In fact, the performance awakened me to Carol and Will Kennicott as a fascinating couple who challenged and shaped each other; to a man and a woman quintessentially American in their competing idealism; to a time when average citizens were facing war and the prejudices rising from global conflict, a time, frankly, like our own.... The acting is simply superb.... But I think Sinclair Lewis's version might also be worth another look."

Roberta Olson wrote to say that she and a bunch of other Sauk Centre people also went to see *Main Street*. "The play was very well done, with simple staging, and very unique dialogue and effects."

For reviews by George Killough and Robert McLaughlin, see page 1.

LEWIS AND THE WEB: INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

The Sinclair Lewis Society website has undergone a complete facelift, due to the efforts of Amanda Karvelaitis, an intern with the Publications Unit at Illinois State University. She has reorganized the site to make it more user-friendly and has updated the links. There is an index, by issue, of the major articles in the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, more pictures of past conferences, and a frequently asked questions section. Do take a look and let the editor know if there are additional ways that we can improve the website.

———— SLSN ————

I should be very grateful for any information about Sinclair Lewis's time spent in Florence (where he rented a villa at 123 Pian de' Giullari) and about his death in Rome. Is there a biography you can recommend which covers this period, or—more likely—are there any ar-

ticles in the specialist literature? [Both biographies were recommended as well as an article by Alexander Manson.]

———— SLSN ————

I think I vaguely remember *It Can't Happen Here* made into a movie, but it is not listed in the films. Do you have info regarding this? If not, I read that it was adapted into a play. Do you have info regarding the play? — author, title, publisher, etc. [*It Can't Happen Here* was optioned by MGM and Lionel Barrymore was cast. However, because of its overtly political message the project was shelved. The Federal Theatre Project seized on this compelling idea of homegrown fascism, commissioned J. C. Moffitt and Lewis to write a dramatic version, and on October 27, 1936, 23 productions of the play opened simultaneously in 18 cities. To the best of my knowledge the play has not been published.]

———— SLSN ————

I am reading the Bantam Classic version of *Babbitt*. I am puzzled, why is the book's opening "To Edith Wharton"? What is the relationship of the two? Is that an ironic dedication because of Wharton's 1921 Pulitzer winning? [Lewis read quite a bit and actually admired Wharton's writing very much. He exchanged a series of letters with her in the early 1920s and met her on the Riviera in the mid 1920s. She told him that she thought *Arrowsmith* was his best novel to date at that time. His novel *Dodsworth* certainly owes its style and subject matter to Wharton and James. When Wharton won the Pulitzer she wrote to Lewis praising *Main Street* and declared that he was the only American writer "with any guts." Lewis also was on good terms with Willa Cather who won the Pulitzer for *One of Ours* over *Babbitt*.]

———— SLSN ————

My name is Charles W. Drubel. My family, the Drubel name, is a very rare name, but it does appear in Mr. Lewis's novel, *Our Mr. Wrenn*, when it speaks of "Drubel's Eatery." I was wondering if the place in the book had any relevance to an actual place that Mr. Lewis knew of. If you have any information, please let me know. I am just curious, because of the obscurity of the reference to the name. It is not a name that we know of existing in the United States until around 1916 or 1917. [To the best of my knowledge Lewis did not know of an actual restaurant with that name. However, he was fascinated by unusual names and would often pour over telephone books of towns he was staying in, and visit cemeteries to find out what names were common and uncommon in various parts of the country.]

———— SLSN ————

Hello, I really enjoy Sinclair Lewis and knew very little about him. Thank you for the info. My, he was a good looking man wasn't he? I've read many of his books but my favorite one is *Babbitt* because I know a lot of Babbitts, and being of a rather liberal bent, I needed a sympathetic perspective about affluent, pretentious business people. I like George Babbitt and his family. Also, Paul, whom I wept for. Such brilliant writing. I also am quite partial to *Elmer Gantry* which shows the typical human, hopefully uncommon, in his most favorable and dishonorable lights. We are so lucky

to have come across Mr. Lewis, later in life, rather than high school. I can reread his characters and am living on Main Street, or in Zenith somewhere between Chicago and St. Paul.

———— SLSN ————

Last summer I had visited the Sinclair Lewis historical site in Sauk Centre and I was told about a book recently published. I don't remember exactly what the title was, maybe airplane or something like that. [This correspondent is probably referring to the limited edition of *Hike and the Aeroplane* from YaleBooks, now out of print.]

———— SLSN ————

I'm doing an article on Sinclair Lewis's work as presented in media other than the novel. I've done fine with *Dodsworth* and *Elmer Gantry* but am having one helluva time getting my hands on or a look at the *Babbitt* adaptations (namely, the 1924 silent film, the 1934 talkie starring Guy Kibbee and the script of a musical called *Babbitt -The Marriage* which was staged relatively recently, in 2001, I think).

So I'm respectfully compelled to impose on you. I'd greatly appreciate your telling me where I might get a video copy of the 1934 *Babbitt* film—the Turner Classic Movies castle has a moat with no bridge across it—and/or a copy of its script. Ditto for a script of the musical or, in the least, the names of its creative team (book, music, lyrics).

———— SLSN ————

Regarding (9.2) Spring 2001 edition of the newsletter, is this the same Claude C[arlos] Washburn who is the author of *Opinions, Pages from the Book of Paris, The Prince and the Princess, A Florentine Comedy* and so forth, in the 1910s and '20s?

I am writing about the Tryon (North Carolina) colony of artists and writers and want to be sure I'm tracking the right fellow before I order the copy of your newsletter to read the article. We know that our Washburn was in Tryon before World War I, and that the Washburn family came from Duluth. If I'm barking up the right tree, any additional Claude Washburn leads are very welcome. He is not an easy author to track down biographical info about. [It is indeed the same author. Lewis thought highly of Washburn's writing.]

—Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently. [Thanks to Jacqueline Koenig for her contribution to this section.]

Collector's Corner

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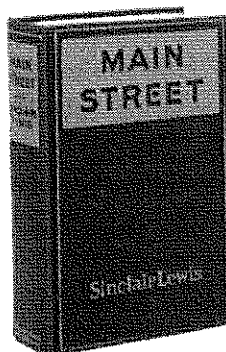
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12. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.

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CATALOG 126

234. Lewis, Sinclair. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House, 1947.

The second printing of one of his last books, a novel of race relations that anticipated some of the social issues of the 1950s and 60s. Inscribed by Lewis: "For Lee—/ from / Laura Z. Hobson/ N.Y. 1947/—Too bad you/ didn't edit this one!/ Sinclair Lewis." Hobson was the author of *Gentleman's Agreement*, a bestselling novel that was made into an Academy Award-winning movie in the year this was published and, like this book,

dealt with racial prejudice and, more particularly, "going undercover" to discover hidden truths about discrimination: Hobson's book was a study of anti-Semitism and *Kingsblood Royal* deals with the question of the racial identity of a light-skinned black man who can pass for white, which is based in part on the life of Walter White, a blond-haired, blue-eyed African-American who was head of the NAACP. An interesting and suggestive inscription. Sunning to spine ends; else fine in a very good, edgeworn dust jacket. \$200

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AUGUST 2003

190. Lewis, Sinclair. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1933.

First edition. A very good jacket that has light chipping to the extremities and wear to the spine. The book is tight, clean, and in excellent condition. This edition is limited to 2,350 copies, in which this edition has two dust jackets. Each dust jacket is in good shape. A nice collectable first edition with all the first state points. \$275

191. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922.

First edition. This copy is inscribed by the author "To Dr. and Mrs. Hugh Baldwin, my hosts, with love and thanks. Sinclair Lewis, Columbus, Feb 18, 1939." It appears that this original inscription page was tipped into this book. Nevertheless, any inscribed Sinclair Lewis is rare, and to have it in a popular book is even rarer. As for the book, there is light staining to the bottom

pages of 4 through 12. Otherwise, the book is tight, and the rest of the pages look pretty clean, with a few small stains here and there. There is no writing or bookplates in the book. Overall, a very good copy for a book that was published in 1922, by Harcourt, Brace, and Company. Copies of this same title, signed by the author, and with a dust jacket sell for \$8000 and up. Here's a chance to own a rare first edition, with some flaws, but signed by Sinclair Lewis. \$1,250

192. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922.

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193. Lewis Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950.

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194. Lewis Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929.

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195. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.

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196. Lewis Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.

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197. Lewis Sinclair. *Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1938.

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112. Lewis, Sinclair. *Launcelot*. n.p.: Harvard Press, 1932.

First edition; publisher's wrappers. One of 100 numbered copies signed by the publisher. \$375

JULY & AUGUST 2003

THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

170. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.

First Edition; first binding. Bookplate; some offsetting to the endpapers; minor foxing, else a near fine copy in a dust jacket with some small, shallow edge chips and tiny tears, and very minor wear. \$3,000

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112. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.

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restoration along top edge. Burt Lancaster and Shirley Jones both won Oscars for their roles in the 1960 film. \$1750

113. Lewis, Sinclair. *Selected Stories*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935.

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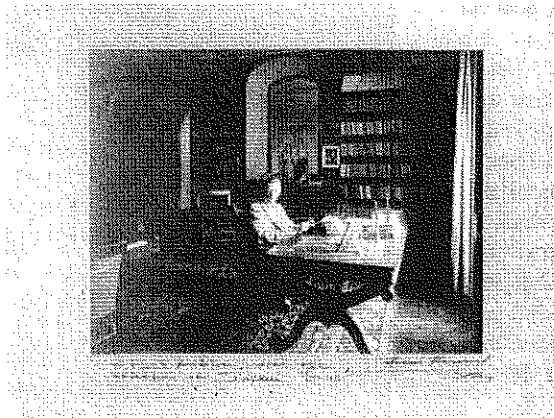
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386. Lewis, Sinclair.

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Mitchell J. Freedman's new novel, *A Disturbance of Fate*, about Robert Kennedy living past 1968, was published by Seven Locks Press in May. It received a starred review in *Publishers Weekly*. One on-line reviewer for amazon.com wrote: "For anyone who either lived through the 60's or is fascinated by this era as I am, this book *A Disturbance of Fate* is a must read. Mr. Freedman subtly blends the fiction of 'what if' with the hard facts as they actually happened. The end result is a thoroughly provocative book that is difficult to put down. The author's imagination and flair are astounding. Also recommended for political junkies and anyone who just enjoys a good story."

The 25th Annual Syracuse Press Club Professional Recognition Awards gave two of our members deserved recognition. Maureen Roen was recognized for "Best

Non-Daily Human Interest Feature" for "An American Life: Joseph I. Lubin" for *SUManagement* magazine, Tom Raynor for "Best Non-Daily News Feature" for "A Stunning Reversal of Fortune: Ray Halbritter and the Revival of the Oneida Nation," for *SUManagement* magazine, and both Maureen Roen and Tom Raynor received "Special Mention-Newsletter" for the *Orange Accounting News*. Maureen and Tom are also working toward getting Dorothy Thompson admitted to the Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

Richard Lingeman's *Don't You Know There's a War On?: The American Home Front, 1941-1945* has been reprinted by Thunder's Mouth/Nation. Originally published in 1970, the book is a cultural and social history of life in America during the war and is fascinating reading.

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