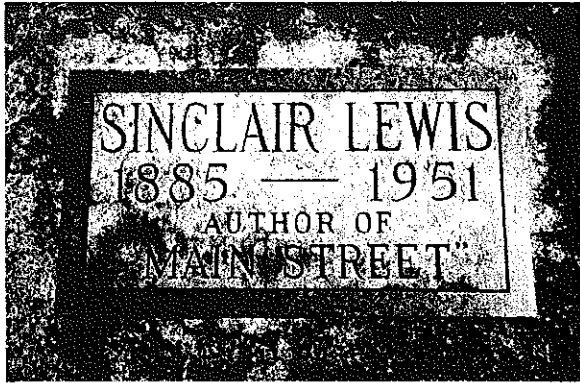


The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME THIRTEEN, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2004



Sinclair Lewis's Grave Site

MEMORIES OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS MEMORIAL SERVICE

John Kleinschmidt

[Mr. Kleinschmidt attended the presentation on Lewis that I gave at Iowa State University in March. He very kindly sent his memories of the memorial service for Lewis in 1951 in Sauk Centre.]

I did see Mr. Lewis when he made his last visit to Sauk Centre in 1947. His time, as I recall, was spent largely with those who knew him during his youth and with the editor of the local paper, *The Herald*. Any rancor or ill feelings about how his writing portrayed Sauk Centre and its citizens that might have existed at the time he wrote *Main Street* had pretty well disappeared. He was now accepted as a celebrity.

I did attend the memorial service conducted in the high school auditorium in January 1951. The day was indeed bitterly cold. It dawned at about minus 34 degrees and by early afternoon when the service began, it reached a high of just 22 degrees below zero. After the local dignitaries offered their brief statements about Mr. Lewis, a colleague of Lewis's, Feike Feikema, delivered the eulogy. I was struck by the physical size of Mr. Feikema. At

somewhere in the 6 foot 9 inch range, he was a most imposing figure.

At the conclusion of the memorial service, I joined the procession of cars that headed to the cemetery for the burial of his ashes. The cars drove slowly east on Third Street, later to be named Sinclair Lewis Avenue, crossed a small bridge over Sauk River, and passed Bunker Hill on the left where every youngster (including Sinclair Lewis) at one time or another had gone sledding and skiing. The graveside service was kept mercifully short because of the extreme cold and raw wind. A hole had been chiselled out of the frozen ground and in the process of depositing the ashes in the ground, a gust of wind blew a portion of them everywhere but in the hole.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society will hold a conference July 13-15, 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 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 novels including two different versions of *Dodsworth*, and a dramatic reading of the play version of *It Can't Happen Here*.

Papers will be considered on a variety of topics related to Lewis. Proposals for panel discussions, abstracts of papers, and suggestions for activities are due May 15, 2005, but are welcomed much earlier. Please send them to Sally Parry, Executive Director, Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University 61790-4240 or e-mail her at separry@ilstu.edu. You may also send them to Fred Betz, President, Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901, or e-mail him at fbetz@siu.edu.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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These people include Rusty Allred, Fred Betz, Martin Bucco, Dana Cook, Dan Griffin, James Hutchisson, John Kleinschmidt, Jacqueline Koenig, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Tom Raynor, Stephen L. Tanner, Madeline Walker, and Ingrid Wilson.

FAY WRAY, LEWIS'S THEATRICAL COLLABORATOR, DIES

Fay Wray, best known for her role in *King Kong*, died August 8, 2004, at the age of 96. She had quite a connection with Sinclair Lewis, first appearing opposite him in a production of *It Can't Happen Here* in Cohasset, Massachusetts, in August 1938. Lewis played Doremus Jessup and although the two got on well together, it was clear to her that Lewis was a better writer than an actor. She and Lewis collaborated on *Angela Is Twenty-Two* in New York that winter. As Mark Schorer describes it, "she did no writing, and he did not always listen to her suggestions, but he nevertheless insisted that she have equal credit as author with him" (641).

Wray, born in 1907 in Canada, achieved her most lasting fame for appearing in the 1933 film *King Kong*. There were times when she resented that her fame was directly linked to the giant ape, but in her 1988 autobiography, *On the Other Hand*, she said that she had not only accepted it, but enjoyed the attention connected with having been in a classic film.

She made dozens of other films, starting with bit

— Fay Wray continued on page 5



Fay Wray in *King Kong*

"OUR LITERARY DIOGENES"

Frederick Betz
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Review of Sinclair Lewis as Reader and Critic.
By Martin Bucco, Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2004.

It would not be inappropriate to call the author of this study of "our literary Diogenes" (ii) the Nestor of Sinclair Lewis scholarship, for Martin Bucco has been reading, researching, and writing about Lewis for more than forty years and is therefore probably more intimately familiar with Lewis's life and work than anyone else today. Moreover, Bucco's numerous scholarly contributions on Lewis's critical and literary reception of other authors, on his views on reading, writing, and reviewing, and on the literary dimension of Lewis's fiction and characters, have all found their way into *Sinclair Lewis as Reader and Critic*.

In his Introduction, Bucco provides a brief biographical overview of Lewis as "Man of Letters," with appropriate focus more on the reader and critic than on the writer, and in which Bucco evokes especially the "Boy of Letters" and "Young Man Friday" (1908-1919) in often incisive and vivid language, for example: "If Lewis the satirist reduced the size of the family library, Lewis the sentimentalist enlarged it" (3). "Deciding at age eleven to become a great writer, Lewis, by no means a model student, devoured Sauk Centre's Bryant Public Library" (4). "During the six months in 1902-1903 that Harry Lewis piously prepared for Yale, he concentrated on the Bible" (5). In these years, Lewis also "savored," "imbibed," or "relished" other authors such as Dickens, Scott, and Shaw (5-7). "Young Lewis learned that novelists like Balzac and Dickens could recreate the commonplace, but not until he read Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* [1891] did the young literary aspirant realize that he could write about a place as common as Sauk Centre" (8).

In Chapter 1, Bucco presents Lewis as literary "Drummer for Readership" who, "long before the days of TV, computers, CDs, camcorders, VCRs, and the rest," warned about such emerging "En-

— "Our Literary Diogenes" continued on page 7

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter

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Next year the Minnesota Historical Society Press will publish *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, edited by Sally E. Parry. This volume brings together many stories that have not seen print since they were originally published, including four pieces that Lewis set in Gopher Prairie: the stories "A Rose for Little Eva" and "A Woman by Candle-Light," as well as "Main Street's Been Paved!" and "Main Street Goes to War," a radio script by Lewis that has never been published. The stories range from the very early "A Theory of Values" (1906) to "Nobody to Write About" (1943) which was inspired by his teaching of creative writing. Look for a display at next year's Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre.

SINCLAIR LEWIS AT THE ALA CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Society sponsored a panel at the American Literature Association Conference on Sunday, May 30, 2004, chaired by James Nagel. The Society is pleased to present abstracts of the presentations for the benefit of the membership.

Sinclair Lewis and Americans Abroad

Stephen L. Tanner

Brigham Young University

It was natural, perhaps inevitable, that Sinclair Lewis would be attracted by Europe. Born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885, he grew up in a time and place in which Europe was imagined not so much as a complex of nations, a location on the map, as an idea or generalized image. This idea or image, based as much on fancy, fiction, and myth as on reality, was of a Europe as a fascinating opposite. It was past to America's present, civilized to America's primitive and pristine, poetic to America's practicality, decadent to America's promise, experienced, even corrupt, to America's innocence. As a Midwestern youth with bookish habits and literary aspirations, Lewis took the first opportunity to cross the Atlantic, working his way on a cattleboat while a student at Yale. This was the first of a series of visits to Europe, ending with his death in Italy in 1951. His first novel, *Our Mr. Wrenn* (1914); a major mid-career novel, *Dodsworth* (1929); and his final novel, *World So Wide* (1951); all derive from his experience in Europe.

This persistent fascination with Europe has prompted considerable scholarly attention. Articles by Dick Wagenaar, Sally E. Parry, and Robert Fleming are particularly useful in illuminating the transatlantic dimension of Lewis's fiction. What has not been adequately recognized, however, is that Lewis's focus in these three novels is not so much on European people, places, and customs as on American behavior in the context of those people, places, and customs. Moreover, it is a particular aspect of that behavior that most interests him. The heart of his literary vision is satiric portrayals of Americans, and he uses a habitual idiom in these portrayals. The same slangy joshing, bragging, pontificating dialogue pervades his fiction. It is a distinctive stylistic characteristic. There is a parallel sameness or uniformity in his treatment of

Americans abroad, that is, in the personalities and situations that seemed to fascinate him, from his first novel to his last. My paper delineates these personalities and situations and speculates on why his interest in them extended over a novelistic career of thirty-seven years.

From the Cultural Margin: Sinclair Lewis's Quest for Symbolic Goods

Madeline Walker

University of Victoria, British Columbia

The publication of *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922) brought overwhelming commercial success to Sinclair Lewis. While he enjoyed this achievement, at the same time Lewis felt anxious about how it might affect his attainment of cultural capital. Cultural capital—the non-economic, intangible riches accruing to artists, including the canonization of their work and the praise of other artists and critics—is usually accumulated in inverse proportion to economic capital; thus low sales may signal a hefty deposit of cultural capital. Lewis privately apologized for the success of *Main Street*, suggesting both that the high sales were “accidental,” and that they were the result of inferior work (Lingeman 163). Lewis's comments imply that he worried that his long-term consecration as an artist was jeopardized by commercial success; he was anxious to accrue some of this intangible capital by *correcting* his accumulation of financial wealth and public acclaim through semi-conscious strategizing around the acceptance of prizes. During the period 1919–1937 Lewis responded to prizes and memberships in various, sometimes contradictory ways: he yearned for the Pulitzer in 1919 only to refuse it in 1926 for *Arrowsmith*, and he repeated this pattern toward membership in the prestigious National Institute of Arts and Letters, refusing in 1922 and accepting in 1935. In the midst of these hesitations, Lewis accepted the Nobel Prize in 1930. Why did he vacillate so dramatically in his attitude toward symbolic goods?

In this paper, I will use Pierre Bourdieu's useful model of the field of cultural production to explore Lewis's quest for symbolic goods. Bourdieu never reduces the

— Sinclair Lewis at the ALA Conference *continued on page 6*

JAPANESE ADVENTURES WITH SINCLAIR LEWIS

Rusty Allred

Previously in this newsletter I praised the quality of a recent Japanese translation of *Arrowsmith*, while bemoaning its drastic abridgement. In a footnote of that Spring 2003 article I wrote, "I assume that there was a contemporary Japanese translation, but have not been able to find a copy. *Main Street* was translated, but that is also unavailable currently."

Since then I have enjoyed adventures in finding copies of full Japanese translations of both *Arrowsmith* and *Main Street*, and have analyzed both. In addition, I have discovered interesting historical context regarding *Arrowsmith*.

Currently it is possible to buy new Japanese copies of the following Lewis works: the abridgement of *Arrowsmith*; a collection of short stories entitled *Go East, Young Man • The Hack Driver*, which is six of the thirteen stories in *Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*; and the full translation of *Main Street*. Through Internet searching I have found used copies of *Main Street*, one of which I acquired during a period when it was unavailable new from the publisher, and now a full translation of *Arrowsmith*. I have also seen copies of *Elmer Gantry* for sale but have so far been unsuccessful in acquiring one on my infrequent and brief visits to Japan. (Most Japanese dealers of used and rare books are helpful and friendly, but unwilling to ship outside of their country.)

Main Street was the first of the two books I purchased. It is a three-volume paperback set containing a complete translation. I carefully analyzed the translations of each of

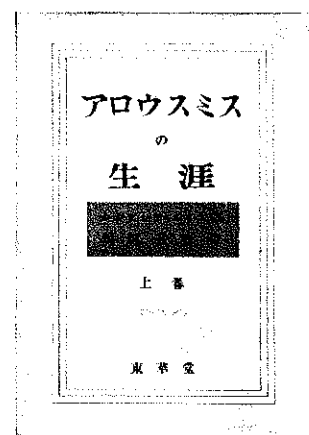
the quotes¹ I had previously selected from the original version. I found this to be a masterful translation; both concepts and language patterns are rendered very accurately. Had my intent been to find fault, I would have failed miserably in spite of extensive effort invested in the analysis. My intent, however, is to understand the picture of Lewis that is available to the Japanese reader, and that, happily, is a very accurate one.

As for the quotes I compared, there are only a few mistakes, and one of these appears to be typographical:

She alternately detested herself for not appreciating the kindly women, and detested them for their advice: lugubrious hints as to how much she would suffer in labor, details of baby-hygiene based on long experience and total misunderstanding... (234)

The translation contains all elements of the original, but the sentence itself is not grammatical Japanese. I was unable to identify the exact linguistic problem and enlisted the help of a native speaker who concurred that something is amiss but who was equally unable to identify exactly what. This error seems to be bad luck somewhere along the path of producing the book.

————— Japanese Adventures continued on page 8



Front cover of Vol. 1 of *Arrowsmith* in Japanese

Fay Wray continued from page 2

parts in silent pictures, and appearing in a featured role in Erich von Stroheim's *The Wedding March* in 1928. Among the films she made in the 1930s were *The Four Feathers* with William Powell, *Viva Villa!* with Wallace Beery, *One Sunday Afternoon* with Gary Cooper, and *The Unholy Garden* with Ronald Colman. She also appeared on stage in the 1940s. Her second husband was Robert Riskin, screenwriter for such

films as *Lost Horizon* and *It Happened One Night*. After Riskin's death, she returned to films in 1953 with roles in movies such as *Small Town Girl* and *Tammy and the Bachelor*, as well as appearing opposite Henry Fonda in the 1979 television movie *Gideon's Trumpet*. See <http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/Movies/08/09/obit.wray.ap/index.html> for a more detailed obituary. ☞

BABBITT'S MYSTERIOUS INSCRIPTION

Ingrid Wilson recently contacted the Sinclair Lewis Society through our website after having read *Babbitt*.

She wrote to us a particularly compelling explanation for the mysterious inscription in Chapter 1. "The inscription in Chapter One, D.S.S.D.M.Y.P.D.F., was still puzzling me after I finished the book and I was surprised to learn that Lewis apparently never deciphered it. I read the explanation offered by IGNOTO but did not think that it remotely sounded like Babbitt.

"I think I may have deciphered the inscription and, while it may be incorrect, it is at least true to Babbitt's mind-set and way of speaking. It is also more plau-

sible in light of the sentence following the inscription: 'But he had no cigarette case.'

"I believe the inscription stands for 'Don't smoke so damn much. You promised. Don't forget.'

"Just my two cents worth. Thank you for taking the time to create such an informative web page."



Did Babbitt smoke this brand of cigarettes?

Sinclair Lewis at the ALA Conference *continued from page 4*

behavior of artists to a mechanical series of reactions; rather, he predicts their actions as resulting from a complex combination of disposition and position. Bourdieu's theory helps us to assess how Lewis's *disposition*—middle-class, insecure, Midwestern writer—and his *position*—critical realist writing during the emergence of both middlebrow *and* modernist culture in the American 1920s—combined to produce Lewis's interesting two-step around commercial success and cultural capital.

I hope to chart the trajectory of Lewis's position as marginal cultural producer during the 1920s and 1930s when the pejorative term middlebrow was first emerging in American culture, and was used in contrast to high cultural products. Initially Lewis coveted the public acclaim of the Pulitzer, only to later fight for "highbrow" legitimacy by refusing the honor ostensibly accorded by prizes and memberships. Some may regard as cynical the view that Lewis's rejection of the Pulitzer was worth more in publicity than the \$1,000 prize; in fact his refusal may well have been a semi-conscious strategy to disavow the middlebrow commercial success of *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, to strengthen his standing with intellectuals and artists (particularly H. L. Mencken), and to bank some cultural capital. Lewis's refusal of membership in NIAL in 1922 brought approval from Mencken, and signalled

that Lewis was above the judgment of academies.

As his career deteriorated with a series of lesser novels, Lewis may have recognized that the rarefied cultural capital that comes of producing high art would never be his. His best novels, *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, were entrenched in the critical realist aesthetic of the 1920s, and were not likely to maintain the kind of shelf life of *The Great Gatsby* or *The Sun Also Rises*, nor did they offer the cultural cachet of contemporary modernist works, such as *The Sound and the Fury*. Lewis therefore decided to grab hold of the goods of this world rather than hope for any long-term consecration, and his 1930 acceptance of the Nobel and its large cash prize, followed by the 1935 acceptance of NIAL membership, and 1937 inclusion in the Institute's elite membership, dramatically demonstrate his changed attitude. He seemed finally to recognize his own "middlebrow" fate and accepted these tangible assets with gratitude.

There is a bittersweet parallel between Lewis's own settling for less (if it can be called that), and his characters Carol Kennicott and George F. Babbitt's submission—after their bursts of idealism—to society's expectations. In his portrayal of these characters, Lewis poignantly demonstrates his understanding of the difficulty of holding out for the intangible idea of autonomy, and the very humanness of capitulating to conformity. ✍

LEWIS AND THE LITERARY IMMORTALITY POLLS OF 1936 AND 1948

Frederick Betz

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

At the end of Chapter 4 in Part Five of his monumental biography of Sinclair Lewis, Mark Schorer notes that in 1936 "the *Colophon* conducted a poll among its readers: 'What ten American authors now living do you think have the best chances of being considered "classics" by the reading public in the year 2000, ranked in the order of their chances of permanence?'" (626). Considering how critical Schorer was, especially of Lewis's novels following the Nobel Prize in 1930—Part Five is entitled, significantly, "Decline"—it is not surprising that Schorer was not particularly impressed with the results of this poll, as reflected in his perfunctory comment: "Sinclair Lewis easily led the list," and footnote: "In 1948, when *Colophon* repeated its question, he was still high on the list, only two votes behind the leader, Eugene O'Neill" (626).

Schorer's conclusion that Lewis "was one of the worst writers in American literature" (813) presaged anything but literary immortality for Lewis, and, indeed, his

reputation declined steadily for a quarter century following Schorer's biography. But Schorer (1908-1977) did not live to witness the modern Lewis revival, which began in 1985 with the New York Grolier Club's Sinclair Lewis Exhibition, organized by Daniel D. Chabris; the "Sinclair Lewis at 100" Conference at St. Cloud, Minnesota; and the special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to Lewis, edited by Martin Light. This revival has continued into the new century, producing a new biography by Richard Lingeman, capable of challenging Schorer's negative treatment (Betz, "To the Editor" 9). In light of this renaissance, the *Colophon's* literary immortality polls deserve more attention than Schorer's passing mention.

In Autumn 1936, the *Colophon* announced the results of a poll taken among its readers, mainly "bookmen" or book collectors, in spring of that year. Announcement of the poll itself did not actually appear in the spring issue of the journal, and therefore it is likely that the poll was distributed to readers as an insert, as is suggested in

————— Literary Immortality Polls *continued on page 12*

"Our Literary Diogenes" *continued from page 3*

emies of the Book" (1936) in his time as "vaudeville, photography, radio, the movies, [and] automobiles," and relentlessly promoted the "joys of reading" both in his journalism and his fiction (29). While many of his characters from Mr. Wrenn (1914) to Hayden Chart (1951) experience the "pleasures of reading" (30-32), Lewis also illustrates in his novels the "perils of reading," such as "withdrawing from enchantment," using reading "as a narcotic," reading "in isolation" from personal experience in the real world, and reading that can "shatter illusion" (32-34). Lewis identified two audiences in America: "one for truth, the other for lies," or to "put it in primary colors, the first stood for life, vigor, originality—the second for death, stuffiness, provinciality" (35). Lewis "decried the audience for lies," but declared (in 1925) that "for good or ill [...] the Average American rules the output of books" (35-36). From the beginning, Lewis "liked to impale literary pretension," and

therefore he portrayed not only "impassioned readers who also like to discuss books," but also "pseudo-readers with the gift of gab" (36-37), e.g., Eddie Schwartz (*The Job*), Lowell Schmaltz (*The Man Who Knew Coolidge*), Gideon Planish, or Juliet Zago (*Cass Timberlane*). Lewis felt, however, that "the world at large is indifferent or hostile to serious literature" (40), as illustrated by such characters as "Yale-educated Sam in *Dodsworth*," "unstudious collegian Howard Cornplow" in *The Prodigal Parents*, or "the distinguished aging actress Nile Sanderac" in *Bethel Merriday*, or by "would-be readers" like Raymie Wutherspoon (*Main Street*), "the uneducated Reverend Mr. Clyde Tippey" (*Elmer Gantry*), or "windy Lowell Schmaltz," who "insist that life's necessities (and trivial pursuits) rob them of time to read" (40). Rounding out the typology of readers in Lewis's fiction are the "anti-readers," i.e., "friends of family"

————— "Our Literary Diogenes" *continued on page 9*

Japanese Adventures *continued from page 5*

One of the errors is comical. Recall that classic quote about the Widow Bogart's outhouse:

the outhouse was so overmodestly masked with vines and lattice that it was not concealed at all.... (180)

Apparently the translator understood the word *overmodestly* to mean that the masking was insufficient, as opposed to being excessive. My translation of the Japanese follows:

The outhouse was hidden with latticework and grape vines, but hidden so incompletely that it was in plain view. (v. 2, p. 85, Translation)

Not only do I not think Lewis would have used the word *overmodestly* in that way, but this interpretation misses the classic humor of the original. Nonetheless, this is a minor error in a near perfect translation.

Finally, there are a few small errors in this passage, which is otherwise excellent:

"Once she kidnapped me and drug me to the Methodist Church. I goes in, pious as Widow Bogart, and sits still and never cracks a smile while the preacher is favoring us with his misinformation on evolution. But afterwards, when the old stalwarts were pumphandling everybody at the door and calling 'em 'Brother' and 'Sister,' they let me sail right by with nary a clinch." (307)

Here the *old stalwarts* became *stubborn old folks*, and the word used for *clinch* is a catch-all term that would usually be taken to mean *hug*. It can also mean *acknowledgment* which might be closer to the desired meaning.

Another interesting aspect of this translation is its extensive use of notes. Several terms from the following passage are explained either in endnotes or parenthetically.² *Chaldean*, *lamb*, and *scalloped potatoes* are explained in notes, while *Shamsherai*, *testimony*, and *sisters* are explained parenthetically.

The doctor asserted, "Sure, religion is a fine influence—got to have it to keep the lower classes in order—fact, it's the only thing that appeals to a lot of those fellows and makes 'em respect the rights of property. And I guess this theology is O.K.; lot of wise old coots figured it all out, and they knew more about it than we do." He believed in the Christian religion, and never thought about it; he believed in the church, and

seldom went near it; he was shocked by Carol's lack of faith, and wasn't quite sure what was the nature of the faith that she lacked.

Carol herself was an uneasy and dodging agnostic.

When she ventured to Sunday School and heard the teachers droning that the genealogy of Shamsherai was a valuable ethical problem for children to think about; when she experimented with the Wednesday prayer-meeting and listened to store-keeping elders giving unvarying weekly testimony in primitive erotic symbols and such gory Chaldean phrases as "washed in the blood of the lamb" and "a vengeful God" then Carol was dismayed to find the Christian religion, in America, in the twentieth century, as abnormal as Zoroastrianism—without the splendor. But when she went to church suppers and felt the friendliness, saw the gaiety with which the sisters served cold ham and scalloped potatoes; when Mrs. Champ Perry cried to her, on an afternoon call, "My dear, if you just knew how happy it makes you to come into abiding grace," then Carol found the humanness behind the sanguinary and alien theology. (316-17)

After finding *Main Street*, I was fortunate to find a full translation of *Arrowsmith*. In this case, the translation can be compared not only with the original, but also with the recent abridgement. Before opening the books I had many questions: Is the abridgement a new translation, or merely an abridgement of this earlier translation? Or, even if essentially a new translation, did the new translator rely heavily upon the previous work?

When I opened the books, I found yet another line of questions. The version of *Arrowsmith* I had finally found is a three volume hardcover set that clearly shows its age. (The dealer had warned me of this prior to shipping the books to my Tokyo hotel.) I opened the books and found that the first of the three volumes was published in October of the year Showa 17, the 17th year of the reign of Emperor Hirohito. Showa 17 is 1942 on the western calendar; this volume was published ten months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The second volume was published in February 1943, at the time of the Japanese evacuation from Guadalcanal. The final volume was published in July 1943, two years prior to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Surely there is a story behind the publication of these books at this time. The forward to the first volume, written by Tokyo Professor Isamu Satoh, provides one clue. Satoh says that he encouraged the translator, Chouju Ugai,

————— Japanese Adventures *continued on page 13*

MEETING SINCLAIR LEWIS: FIRST ENCOUNTERS & INITIAL IMPRESSIONS, PART I

Compiled by Dana Cook

H. L. Mencken, journalist, editor, and critic
Masterpiece by a "jackass"

We knew all save one of the guests [at the dinner party], who was introduced as Sinclair Lewis. Lewis had published nothing, up to that time, save a few light novels that had been *Saturday Evening Post* serials, and I had never reviewed any of them, nor read them. He was, as always in society, far gone in liquor, and when he fastened upon me with a drunkard's zeal, declaring that he had lately finished a novel of vast and singular merits worthy of my most careful critical attention, I tried hard to shake him off. But shaking off Lewis when he was in his cups was no easy task, and long before the usual time for departing I got hold of Nathan [*Smart Set* co-editor George Nathan] and proposed to him that we clear out. He agreed readily, and we were soon on Broadway, walking downtown.

"Can you imagine such a jackass," I said, "writing a book worth reading?"

Nathan couldn't imagine it.

The next day I returned to Baltimore, and before leaving the *Smart Set* office gathered up an armful of review books to examine on the train.... At Philadelphia I called a Western Union boy and sent a telegram to Nathan. I forget the exact text, but it read substantially: "That idiot has written a masterpiece." The book was *Main Street*. (New York, 1920)

Source: Mencken, H. L. *My Life as Author and Editor*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

Katharine Hepburn, actor *No athlete*

I can remember poor Sinclair Lewis, who lived in Hartford [CT] when he was working on *Arrowsmith* (it must have been the early 1920s), trying to shinny up a tree. He just couldn't. Anything athletic was beyond him.

Source: Hepburn, Katharine. *Me: Stories of My Life*. New York: Knopf, 1991.

George Seldes, journalist *Easy to befriend*

...of the great men of the literature of our time

————— Meeting Sinclair Lewis continued on page 15

"Our Literary Diogenes" continued from page 7

who "pooh-pooh honest readers" (42), e.g., Eddie Schwartz, the "anti-intellectual" Will Kennicott (*Main Street*), or Babbitt.

Most readers in Lewis's novels are "aware of the power of literary propaganda, the problem of obscenity, and the question of censorship" (44-48). Poetry is often dismissed by Lewis's anti-readers (49-52). Enemies of the Book are also enemies of drama (52-60). Film is another enemy of the Book, providing distraction from boredom and doing little to promote literacy (61-65). Although Lewis was an avid reader of detective fiction, he decried much popular literature, especially Westerns (65-69). After also considering the role of letters (70-71), magazines (70-79), newspapers (79-82), and libraries (82-89) in Lewis's novels, Bucco notes that although Lewis was a relentless "drummer for readership" and prolific book reviewer, he was not a book

collector himself, and that it is ironic that he is "a collectible" today (90). In light of Lewis's preoccupation with reading in his novels, it is odd, finally, that one finds elaborate "book" metaphors only in the first two post-Nobel Prize novels, *Ann Vickers* and *Work of Art* (91-92).

"The essentially chronological and comprehensive center of the book [Chapters 2-5] captures," as Bucco notes in his Foreword, "in literary-history form the encyclopedic sweep of his [Lewis's] allusions to writers and their work" (iii). In the numerous sub-headings of these core chapters, Bucco skillfully arranges what both Lewis's "auctorial voice" (cf., e.g., Doremus Jessup in *It Can't Happen Here* [1935]) and his reader-characters have to say about myths, legends, Biblical stories, and nearly 400 major and minor authors (and many more of

————— "Our Literary Diogenes" continued on page 10

"Our Literary Diogenes" continued from page 9

their works) from Homer to Shakespeare (Chapter 2), Milton to Henry James (Chapter 3), Garland to Wharton (Chapter 4), and Dreiser to Mailer (Chapter 5). "As a popular novelist, Lewis assumed that his readers were familiar enough with the hallowed King James Bible (or sufficiently immersed in the Judeo-Christian culture) to recognize his numerous Biblical allusions" (95 [cf. 113-28]). But of all writers, "it is Shakespeare upon whom the novelist expends most time, thought, and feeling" (95 [cf. 145-63]). The writer Lewis mentions most often among Victorian prose writers is Dickens (198-205), while of the writers in the late 19th and early 20th century, it is Shaw (284-93), followed by Kipling (299-305), Garland (257-59), and Wharton (328-30). Of the much larger number of 20th century authors, Cather (339-42), Sinclair (336-39), Hemingway (385-87), and Dreiser (332-33) stand out, but "the novelist who impressed the old trouper the most [in the 1940s] was an ex-rifleman named Norman Mailer" (332). Chapters 2-5 can be read in sequence, of course, but it is perhaps preferable to read the sub-headings selectively, as one would consult an entry in an encyclopedia, using the brief overview introduction to each chapter and the general (487-522) or character index (522-35) at the end of the volume as guides. In the absence of critical or annotated editions of most of Lewis's novels, Bucco's commentaries are all the more useful, as even scholars or serious readers today are less likely to be as familiar with so many of the major works of world literature and certainly not with the numerous popular late 19th and early 20th century works alluded to in Lewis's novels.

Since Lewis never wrote a systematic handbook on the "craft of fiction" à la Percy Lubbock (1921), Bucco pulls together in Chapter 6 Lewis's "lively remarks on authorship," which "exist as *obiter dicta* scattered in his novels, essays, reviews, memoirs, introductions, letters, interviews, and the like" (407). Lewis advised budding authors not to consult writing manuals, but rather to invest in a good encyclopedia as well as a Sears, Roebuck catalog (408). Writers could compose with pencil, pen, or typewriter, but in any case they had to use "The Notebook" for observations, thoughts, story plots, descriptions, characterizations, and drafts (408-09). Lewis believed that serious writers are born, not made, with the capacity to teach themselves (413) and to work unremittingly at composition and revision (414); hence, he delighted in "spoofing the creators of phantom literary productions" (410)

and resented "tyros who prated about composition as pep, punch, and jazz" (415). Young authors should write "about real people with real problems in real places" (415) and "get to the story as quickly as possible" (426). As Bucco notes, "*real*" is "the most belabored word in Lewis's critical vocabulary" (415). Bucco also sees "a pretty irony underlying anyone's red-hot vision of our American Diogenes flinging satiric barbs at today's preposterous factories of higher learning—most particularly at the glut of creative writing teachers teaching teachers of creative writing" (429), for "Lewis's haphazard, generous, and newsy gestures toward helping the young contributed to the boom in creative writing following World War II" (429). Indeed, Lewis even taught creative writing at the University of Minnesota for one semester in 1942! In this age of computer technology, Lewis's advice to budding authors sounds somewhat quaint, and the writer's tools of his time seem almost obsolete.

In the final chapter, Bucco reviews Lewis's criticism of book reviewers, professors of literature, and literary critics, but also of himself as author. Lewis denounced, on the one hand, "mossback reviewers" who could not accept the new and, on the other, "*à la mode* critics" who accepted the new all too readily (432). He disdained critics who missed a writer's "distinctive qualities" or who obviously did not bother to read the whole book under review (432). Lewis also dismissed "our American professors" (in his Nobel Prize lecture) for "liking their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead" (438), referring in particular to the New Humanists (Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More), whose sharp dualism of man and nature he could not accept (439). There were exceptions, however, such as Yale's William Lyon Phelps (442-43) or Columbia's Carl Van Doren (445-47). The literary critic Lewis perhaps admired most was "the acid-tongued iconoclast H. L. Mencken" (443-44), whose essay on "Puritanism as a Literary Force" (1917) "influenced Lewis mightily" (444). The literary critic Lewis perhaps detested most was Bernard DeVoto, and Lewis's "celebrated piece of tomahawking, 'Fools, Liars and Mr. DeVoto' [1944]" (449), Van Wyck Brooks called "a masterpiece of demolition" (451).

In appraising his own literary work, Lewis could be self-ironic or humorous, e.g., about *Main Street* in *Elmer Gantry* or about his novels being "almost unread" in "The

—————"Our Literary Diogenes" continued on page 11

VISITING BARNARD, VERMONT

Barnard, Vermont was mentioned in the April 2003 *Travel and Leisure* in the article "Small Town, U.S.A., Plus 10 Towns You'll Want to Make Your Own" (220-37). Here's the lowdown on one of "10 Great American Towns" (227).

Barnard, Vermont

10 miles from Woodstock, Vermont

Population: 918

Claim to fame: Twin Farms (802-234-9999; www.twinfarms.com), 235 acres of meadows, streams, and barns, bought by novelist Sinclair Lewis and his wife, journalist Dorothy Thompson, in 1928, now a very expensive inn (rooms start at \$900).

Who lives there: Third-generation hay farmers, retired CEOs.

Who visits: Baby boomers escaping Manhattan and Boston who find comfort in the tightly knit community. Recently the entire town threw a surprise 90th-birthday party for Bucky Joy, who still works at the general store.

Best place to stay: Twin Farms, of course, but also the new Fan House (Rte. 12; 802-234-9096;

www.thefanhouse.com; doubles from \$100) with pine floors, brushed-steel bedsteads, and Provençal fabrics.

Best place to eat: Barnard Inn Restaurant (5518 Rte. 12; 802-234-9961; dinner for two \$90). Foie gras, veal sweetbreads, and seasonal produce.

Don't miss: The 1832 Barnard General Store (6432 Rte 12; 802-234-9688) has everything from live bait to the owner's chili. On Monday nights, the store becomes a restaurant that seats 25; the food is prepared by a cadre of rotating local chefs.

[For all Lewis Society members who are planning to stay at Twin Farms, please note that prices have gone up since the article was published! The cheapest room is "Red's Room," for \$950 a night—two night stay minimum. "Dorothy's Room," also in the main house, is \$1100, and the most expensive cottage on the site is "The Chalet" for \$2600. If you don't think you'll ever be able to afford to stay there, do check out the pictures on the website. The pictures for Dorothy's Room include one that allows you to see a 360° animation.]

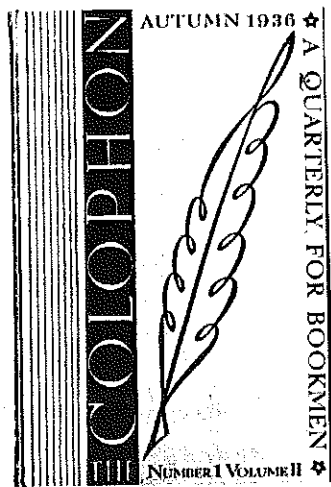
"Our Literary Diogenes" continued from page 10

Death of Arrowsmith" (1941). But he thought (in 1941) that his great novels of the 1920s were "familiar to all sociologists and historians for their pictures of the priggish and naive first half of this century" (454). Of all his characters, Lewis named Dr. Gustaf Sondelius (*Arrowsmith*) as his "favorite"; of all his opening sentences, Lewis liked best the blunt "Elmer Gantry was drunk" (454). Lewis could also be quite wrong about his work, however, for example, when he, as Bucco notes, "unfortunately" alleged that *The God-Seeker* was not only his most serious work, but "maybe the best book I have ever written" (455), or when he claimed that "Noble Experiment" and "Bongo" were two of his best stories, to which Bucco bluntly adds: "Schorer correctly names them among his worst" (455). Unlike other celebrated contemporary writers (especially Hemingway), Lewis "seems to have affected but little the work of younger writers of fiction," as Lewis also noted about himself in "The Death of Arrowsmith." Yet, Lewis thought, and Bucco obviously agrees (457), "that he had influenced American literature for good," for "he

had contributed words to the English vocabulary" (cf. Schorer 796) and his "derision of dullness and formalism, his use of American lingo and humorous exaggeration" had been "healthful" ("The Death of Arrowsmith").

Writing about the "literary attitudes" of "this satiric realist" and the "literary dimension" of his works has been for Bucco a source of "enormous pleasure," but he has not aimed to "glorify" Lewis (iii), and, indeed, he points out, whenever necessary or appropriate, Lewis's own deficiencies, prejudices, or inconsistencies. Bucco writes, like Lewis himself, with obvious conviction, but also with a sense of irony or humor, and an engaging style ranging from the scholarly or literary to idiom or slang. Bucco trusts that literary scholars and interested readers will find his book both "readable" and "illuminating" (iii), and no doubt they will. They will also find that it represents a significant contribution to modern Lewis scholarship, complementing such major books in recent years as James M. Hutchisson's *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920-1930* (1996) and Richard Lingeman's biography, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* (2002). ❧

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Colophon cover

2000" (139-41) in the regular column "The Crow's Nest" written by Frederick B. Adams, Jr., who had graduated from Yale in 1932 and been named one of the four editors of the quarterly in 1936.

Adams prefaces the results of the poll with remarks that reveal a man of both culture and humor. "It is dodging the issue," he begins, "to say that no American author living today will be considered a 'classic' by the reading public sixty-four years hence, unless the artful cynic means to imply that nobody will be reading books in the year 2000" (139). Quipping that "generally speaking, the cynic is as much fun to have around as a dead dahlia," Adams estimates that "approximately ten percent of *The Colophon's* voting public are cynics, or they are hiding behind a camouflage definition of 'classic'" (139). After making comparisons in hindsight with American authors in 1836, Adams notes that "fortunately, the other voters are good sports," and comments:

They realize there is no spectacle more laughable than an author's contemporaries trying to judge the verdict of posterity, and by popular ballot at that. The Mencken of the year 2001 will get a sure-fire laugh out of his readers by passing on the results of this contest, provided he is diligent enough to discover them. The editors are not in the least ashamed of sponsoring this self-exposure of our critical readers; who knows, they might be right? (139-40)

How exactly the results of the poll were tabulated is unclear, as reference is made to both votes and point scores, without any indication of how votes were converted to points. In any case, the top ten living American

the *New Colophon* for July 1948, where it was recalled "that twelve years ago the editors [had] distributed a Claim to Fame Ballot [...]" (Adams). The *Colophon* had been established in 1929 and appeared as a quarterly from 1930 to 1935, when it was supplanted by the *New Series* (circulation: 4500). In Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1936) of the *New Series*, the results of the first poll appeared under the title "In the Year

authors (i.e., novelists, dramatists, poets, historians, philosophers, critics), "in the order of their chances of permanence," turned out to be (by score points): 1. Sinclair Lewis (332), 2. Willa Cather (304), 3. Eugene O'Neill (292), 4. Edna St. Vincent Millay (205), 5. Robert Frost (180), 6. Theodore Dreiser (149), 7. James Truslow Adams (115), 8. George Santayana (113), 9. Stephen Vincent Benét (91), 10. James Branch Cabell (90). Twenty more authors received "more than five votes each," and "in the order of descending immortality," they were: 11. Thomas Wolfe, 12. H. L. Mencken, 13. Ernest Hemingway, 14. Hervey Allen, 15. John Dos Passos, 16. Edith Wharton, 17. Carl Sandburg, 18. Robinson Jeffers, 19. Booth Tarkington, 20. T. S. Eliot, 21. Christopher Morley, 22. John Dewey, 23. Charles & Mary Beard, 24. Ellen Glasgow, 25. Donald C. Peattie, 26. Sherwood Anderson, 27. William Faulkner, 28. Van Wyck Brooks, 29. Thornton Wilder, 30. Robert Nathan. Adams goes on to note that "almost every voter had his pet dark horse, and probably very good reasons for backing him to win," and mentions numerous authors who received votes, noting also authors who, surprisingly, received few (e.g., F. Scott Fitzgerald) or no votes (e.g., John Steinbeck).

It goes beyond the purpose here to comment on these rankings, selections, and non-selections. As the first and, as of mid-1936, only American winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, it is probably not surprising that Lewis "led the list." His first post-Nobel novels were clearly not of the quality of his great novels of the 1920s, but they still sold well. However, his latest novel, *It Can't Happen Here* (October 1935), had been a sensational best-seller, fueled as well by the controversy over M.G.M.'s decision in early 1936 not to produce the film version, the *New York Post's* unabridged serialization that summer, and the Federal Theatre Project's play version in the fall (Betts, "Here is the Story"). Six other authors in the top ten (Cather, O'Neill, Millay, Frost, Adams, Benét) were Pulitzer Prize winners. O'Neill was soon to be selected for the Nobel Prize in November 1936, while Eliot would be selected in 1948, Faulkner in 1949, and Hemingway in 1954.

At the end of his "Crow's Nest" column, Adams announced that "ten years from now, we'll do it again" (141). Twelve years later, Adams, still one of the four editors of

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CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION SPEAKS UP FOR AMERICAN REALISM

Past president of the Sinclair Lewis Society James Hutchisson was quoted in the July 30, 2004, issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on American realism. In "Keeping It Real," writer Scott McLemee argues that although "Strip mined by historians and abandoned by literary scholars, American literary realism deserves another look" (A11). McLemee mentions a number of realists who he thinks have fallen out of academic favor including Theodore Dreiser, James T. Farrell, Upton Sinclair, and Sinclair Lewis.

McLemee quotes Shawn Gillen of Beloit College who "says he still feels that an interest in American realist literature goes against the cultural tide, at least in academe. 'Considering their importance in literary history,' he [Gillen] says, 'there's relatively little scholarship being done on realist authors.' ...

"Postmodern suspicion of any claim to be able to represent reality is only part of the problem. 'Realist works tend to be forthright and explicit,' says Mr. Gillen, 'so there's less of an overt challenge for scholars to "crack" them.' Nor is it that easy to get students to crack the novels. 'The realists tended to write long books, sometimes whole series of novels. Committing an undergraduate class to Theodore Dreiser or to *Studs Lonigan* takes more optimism than I necessarily have in me.' He recalls reading Sinclair Lewis's novels *Babbitt* and *Main Street* in literature courses during the 1980s. 'But if I see them on a

syllabus now,' he continues, 'it's more likely to be in a sociology or history course.'" ...

"However ambivalent literary scholars may be about realism in general, specific realist authors have lodged themselves so deeply in the culture as to have virtually defined it. The title character in *Babbitt* (1922), Sinclair Lewis's portrait of a small-minded businessman, lent his name to an entire social subspecies. While Richard Wright is often studied as an African-American writer, his early fiction, especially *Native Son* (1940), belongs unmistakably within the realist school known as naturalism, which emphasizes the determining influence of environment and family on personality.

"Interest in particular realist authors ebbs and flows with time,' says James M. Hutchisson, a professor of English at the Citadel, whose book *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920-1930* was published by Penn State University Press in 1996. 'Dreiser has never really gone away, but there's definitely a renewal of scholarship on him. You saw that with Sinclair Lewis in the 1980s, when there were new editions of his works.'

"But the work of preparing biographies and editions is one thing, and the production of critical analysis is another. 'The neglect is odd,' says Mr. Hutchisson. 'These novelists were looking at social issues of the kind that interest literary scholars now. It's surprising that they don't pay more attention to realism.'"

Japanese Adventures *continued from page 8*

to translate this title. The reason, he says, is not that the author was a Nobel laureate, but that an American novel, and this novel in particular, is a good way to understand modern American life. An afterword in Volume 2 provides additional insight.

It can be said that, in order to beat one's enemy, it is necessary to know him... Through the mirror of literature, this book elucidates the nature of the people of our enemy America. (Afterword to v. 2, p. 306, Translation)

The Japanese language has changed significantly

since World War II. The Japanese society is quick to adopt new ideas, including new words and usages, and is masterful at *kaizen*, or continued improvement. This concept is clear from their written language, which has been continually simplified without losing its essence. This translation of *Arrowsmith* is written using characters that are no longer in common use, or that have now been simplified. While an educated Japanese person could read this book with reasonable comfort, were it to be reprinted, the language would surely be updated.

————— Japanese Adventures *continued on page 16*

Literary Immortality Polls *continued from page 12*

the *New Colophon* (circulation: 2500), but now also the newly elected President of the Grolier Club and newly appointed Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library (a position he held until 1969), announced in the July 1948 issue a repeat of the Immortality Poll of 1936. Noting that "the fateful millennial mark is still fifty-two years away, a distance sufficient to lend both enchantment and terror to any crystal-gazing we may be inclined to do," that "furthermore, three of the ten top-ranking authors of 1936 are dead," and that "the other seven cannot be expected to enhance their reputations from here on out," Adams felt it was "an opportune time to repeat the performance of our tosspot days and invite each subscriber to join the fun."

The results of the new "Immortality Poll" (102-04) appeared in the *New Colophon* for January 1949. The new top ten authors, "in the order of their chances of permanence," turned out to be (again by point scores): 1. Eugene O'Neill (346), 2. Sinclair Lewis (344), 3. Robert Frost (329), 4. Ernest Hemingway (293), 5. Carl Sandburg (275), 6. John Steinbeck (249), 7. T. S. Eliot (152), 8. H. L. Mencken (150), 9. George Santayana (145), 10. Edna St. Vincent Millay (136). "Just as a matter of interest," the next ten are also listed, "again in order of decreasing immortality," but with no point scores: 11. Thornton Wilder, 12. Hervey Allen, 13. Van Wyck Brooks, 14. William Faulkner, 15. Albert Einstein, 16. Thomas Mann, 17. John Dos Passos, 18. Christopher Morley, 19. Douglas Southall Freeman, 20. Robinson Jeffers and Upton Sinclair. Adams notes that "twelve years have brought little change in our readers' estimates of O'Neill, Lewis, and Frost," and that "their positions seem secure enough, if none ever writes another line." Not even mentioned on any ballot in 1936, Steinbeck's "stalwart sixth" ranking is "a remarkable achievement" (and, indeed, Steinbeck would win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962). Einstein (Nobel Prize for Physics, 1921) and Mann (Nobel Prize for Literature, 1929) "quite naturally were absent from the 1936 list, because they had yet to adopt the United States and be adopted by us." The reputations of Eliot, Wilder, Brooks, and Faulkner were also "slowly and surely growing," and "few could be found to dispute these upgradings." Adams might have also mentioned the upgrading of Hemingway and Mencken.

It is remarkable that in spite of his "long decline" (Schorer 813) Lewis slipped only to second place in the

"Immortality Poll" of 1948. However, almost all his novels of the 1930s and '40s had sold well, and his latest two novels, *Cass Timberlane* (1945) and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), were significant and (especially the latter) controversial best-sellers. Lewis's reputation rested, of course, on the "endurable core" of his *oeuvre*, the "five solid works" (Schorer 813) of the 1920s, but it is interesting to note a parallel between the publication of Lewis's darkest visions of America (Parry 16, 18), *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), and his rankings in the literary immortality polls of 1936 and 1948. Both novels, along with the great novels of the 1920s, remain in print to this day. The Random House Modern Library paperback edition of *Kingsblood Royal* appeared in 2001, the year in which the "renowned bibliophile" Frederick B. Adams, Jr., died. One would like to think that Adams would have been impressed with Lewis's reputation "in the year 2000." Had he also lived that long, Schorer might have been impressed, too. ✍

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SINCLAIR LEWIS AND PEARL BUCK

Sinclair Lewis is mentioned several times in *Pearl Buck: A Cultural Biography* by Peter Conn (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996). Their publishing and personal paths crossed for over twenty years. When her publisher wanted to bring out her new novel *The Mother* in early 1934, they both made sure that it wouldn't conflict with the new Sinclair Lewis novel *Work of Art*. Buck's later novel, *Other Gods* (1940), is akin to *It Can't Happen Here* since it focuses on a charismatic American (similar to Charles Lindbergh) who enjoys the adoration of the crowds and the power that accompanies it. A 1945 novel, *The Townsman*, was a sentimental novel of Kansas pioneer life which looked at a small Midwestern community, but did not seem to be at all affected by the Revolt from the Village authors like Anderson and Lewis. The FBI also made connections between Buck and Lewis as well as many other famous authors with progressive politics, investigating everyone from John Dos Passos and Langston Hughes to Jack London, Edith Wharton, and William Dean Howells (even after the last three were dead!).

Lewis congratulated Buck when she won the Nobel Prize and advised her, "Don't let anyone minimize for you the receiving of the Nobel Prize. It is a tremendous event, the greatest of a writer's life. Enjoy every moment of it, for it will be your finest memory" (209). Conn adds "Lewis's camaraderie was noticeably defensive: the salute of one underappreciated Nobel laureate to another" (209).

Buck was considered outspoken in terms of civil and political rights. "If people knew more about each other, she felt, they would treat each other with more tolerance—a doubtful but noble conception. She believed that literature could promote understanding, and in the spring [1942]

she wrote to several dozen critics, asking them to name the ten books that would 'tell an Asiatic reader the most about the American people.' She gave her own, slightly eccentric choices as examples: Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, journalist Mark Sullivan's six-volume series, *Our Times*, and Ruth Suckow's *The Folks*" (266).

Buck was also friendly with Dorothy Thompson, presiding over a dinner in her honor in 1939. Like Buck, Thompson was sympathetic to the plight of war refugees and the dinner served as a fundraiser for refugees. They both spoke out against the warmongering in the world, with Buck writing to Thompson on December 3, 1942, that war was "fast becoming a tool in the hands of those who want neither freedom nor equality in the world" (269). Later though, when Buck spoke out against the Korean War and told an interviewer in Japan that she thought U.S. foreign policy was "immature," she was charged with disloyalty to the U.S. by many, including Dorothy Thompson. Buck insisted that she was anti-Communist, but that American power had propped up Chiang and his corrupt cronies in such a way that it made "Communist aggression possible" (323). Thompson and Buck seem to have shared similar views on world peace and later exchanged more letters. Thompson apologized to Buck and wrote, "Drunk, apparently with power or with fear, we are pursuing a course which cannot fail to alienate all Asia and the Middle East" (442).

In 1953 Buck and her second husband made an extended trip through the American West. She included Sauk Centre on her itinerary, "calling her journey there a pilgrimage to repay the long friendship of Sinclair Lewis, the fellow Nobel laureate who had died just a couple of years before" (332).

Meeting Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 9*

Sinclair Lewis was the one easy to become friendly with; and when my wife and I were his neighbors in Vermont we became good friends even before we had the chance, not once but several times, to save him from delirium tremens, perhaps even to save his life. He became so good a friend he could in sober as well as alcoholic moments confess the most intimate details of his life

and still remain a friend.

I met him first in Paris in the 1920s with his friend and guide, Ramon Guthrie, when they returned from a walking trip in the Dordogne, the most beautiful part of France, totally unknown to tourists; and again in 1927, when Dorothy Thompson persuaded him to go with her

————— Meeting Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 20*

Japanese Adventures *continued from page 13*

Since there are now three versions of *Arrowsmith* to discuss—the original English, as penned by Lewis, the old translation, by Mr. Ugai, and the new abridged Japanese version, by Mr. Uchino—I shall refer to them respectively as the original, the old translation, and the abridgement.

As for comparison of the two translations, I found no evidence that the abridgement relied upon the old translation. The sentence structures and word choices are different enough that it does not seem reasonable that Uchino was merely modernizing and simplifying the old translation. Indeed, there is no evidence of similar deviation in the old translation, in those areas where the abridgement showed some deviation in nuance from the original.

It would seem reasonable that Uchino would have read the older translation, but clearly his translation and abridgement are fresh from the original.

As for the quality of the old translation itself, comparing again to the pre-selected quotes,³ it is very nicely done, although in some ways not quite as impressive as the translation of *Main Street* discussed above. This is not a function of the older language, but more that there are areas where brute force constructions were used:

There was much conversation, most of which sounded like the rest of it. (141, Original)

There was a long exchange of words but the major portion of it was much the same as this conversation. (v. 1, p. 308, Old Translation)

It is one of the major tragedies that nothing is more discomforting than the hearty affection of the Old Friends who never were friends. (203, Original)

It is one of the major tragedies that there is nothing so unsettling as the affection of old friends who were not exceptionally close. (v. 2, p. 131, Old Translation)

One wonders if the translator did not trust his reader to pick up on Lewis's humor and, therefore, rendered these passages in this blunt, humorless fashion, or if, perhaps, he himself was a little unsettled by the humor and therefore translated some passages mechanically. Still, most of the translation seems to represent Lewis quite well.

I did find one blatant error in the translation:

She had called Martin a "lie-hunter," a "truth-seeker."
(260, Original)

She came to call Martin names such as "liar" and "truth seeker." (v. 2, p. 261, Old Translation)

There is a slight change in nuance, but the blatant error is in the use of *liar* versus *lie-hunter*. I cannot imagine that a translator this good would have missed something so simple, so I suspect he encountered bad luck.

I can imagine Mr. Ugai translating this book in 1942. Until the advent of word processing, typing Japanese was an arduous task relegated only to a corps of typists specially trained for the task. Ugai would not have been a typist, so he probably translated by writing out the Japanese long-hand. This might have been sent to a typist before going to the printer, or perhaps the type was set from the handwritten document. In any case, I suspect this error was the result of someone other than Ugai substituting the common word, *liar*, for a possibly-illegible, uncommon one, *lie-hunter*. It is an unfortunate error, since it detracts from the message of a classic passage, but certainly not a catastrophe.

Overall, regarding two versions of *Arrowsmith* and one of *Main Street*, I am pleased with the availability in Japanese of some of Lewis's work, and with the quality of the translations available. Hopefully the publisher will continue to reprint *Main Street* from time to time, and I can only hope that a publisher will decide to release a modernized full translation of *Arrowsmith*. ✍

Notes

1. See <http://www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/mainstreet.html>.
2. The text is columnar from right to left. The parenthetical explanations are inserted using double columns of half-sized characters.
3. See <http://www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/arrowsmith.html>.

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CALL FOR PAPERS FOR STEINBECK AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES CONFERENCE

The *New Steinbeck Society of America* and the Editorial Board of *The Steinbeck Review* present Steinbeck and His Contemporaries, March 22-25, 2006, Sun Valley Resort, Sun Valley, Idaho 83353.

This first conference of The *New Steinbeck Society of America* (NSSA) invites Steinbeck critics, members of other author societies, and American and world literature scholars in general to offer a critical view on John Steinbeck in relation to any of his contemporaries—Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Cather, Anderson, Wright, Dos Passos, Miller, Stegner, Hurston, Bellow, Pound, Hughes, O'Connor, Lewis, London, and others. Comparative studies are also invited on select authors who have had a direct literary influence on Steinbeck—Mallory, Shakespeare, Twain—as well as on contemporary writers who share common thematic and stylistic elements—Ray Carver, Barry Lopez, Charles Johnson, Terry Tempest Williams, and others. The conference's aim is for a better appreciation of all authors as well as of Steinbeck's particular standing among his literary peers today, with a range of comparative perspectives—aes-

thetic, philosophical, biographical, etc.—invited.

Conference highlights include the following:

*Keynote address on Steinbeck and Richard Wright by Charles Johnson, 1990 National Book Award Winner for *Middle Passage*, with a book signing to follow the banquet.

*Addresses by John Ditsky, President of the NSSA, and Stephen Tanner, Ralph A. Britsch Humanities Professor of English at Brigham Young University.

*Saturday tours of Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound landmarks and historical sites.

*Art galleries, entertainment, dining, and skiing at the nation's premier vacation resort.

Please send a letter of intent, one-page abstract (in triplicate), and vita by September 1, 2005 to:

Dr. Stephen K. George

English Department

Brigham Young University-Idaho

Rexburg, ID 83460-0820

Fax: (208) 496-1944

Please direct inquiries to GeorgeS@byui.edu.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE, THE PLAY

My apologies to all whom I told that *It Can't Happen Here*, the play, wasn't in print. Dan Griffin, one of the Lewis Society members, e-mailed me that Dramatists Play Service carries it. Their website is <http://www.dramatists.com>

The description follows: *It Can't Happen Here*

Sinclair Lewis and John C. Moffitt, adapted from Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here*

Drama, Full length

Cast: 13 men, 3 women: 16 total

Setting: INTERIORS

Should this country fall into the hands of a Fascist dictator, what would happen? How would Americans react?

Book/Item: *It Can't Happen Here* (Moffitt)

Price: \$15.00

FEE: \$40 per performance. MS.

Available only in photocopied manuscript.

THE STORY:

The play shows, in a series of trenchant scenes in a small Vermont town, how a fascist movement begins, spreads and captures our free American institutions, and drives the few courageous and intelligent members of the community into a revolt which in the end we feel will prove successful. This is a fresh, forthright document, indignant, theatrical, human, occasionally humorous, setting forth clearly the idea that if the members of a democracy really care about liberty, they will guard it at the cost of their lives.

ISBN/Code: 990343

[The manuscript is delivered promptly and varies quite a bit from the novel, especially the ending. Parts of the play will be performed at the Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre in July 2005.]

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Wells Lewis, the son of Sinclair Lewis and Grace Hegger, was mentioned in *And If I Perish: Frontline U.S. Army Nurses in World War II* by Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee (New York: Knopf, 2003). This excellent and brutally frank depiction of nurses on the battlefields of the European theater follows a number of nurses and surgical units from Operation Torch through the Battle of Rhineland and the German surrender. Nurse Ruthie Hindman recalled for the authors her encounter with Wells while she was in Sorrento for some R&R during the Allied invasion of Italy. "Hindman met a handsome young captain while waiting to enter the dining room for lunch. The young man introduced himself and asked if Ruthie would like to attend a movie with him after lunch. The theater was next door and Ruthie gladly accepted the invitation. After the movie, they returned to the hotel for dinner. While they waited for the dining-room doors to open, several male officers began talking to them about books. One of the officers asked Ruthie's date, Captain Lewis, if his father happened to be Sinclair Lewis, the author. 'I was totally surprised,' Ruthie recalled, 'when my date answered yes, and the conversation turned to his father's books. I'm sure that if that lieutenant hadn't asked, my captain would never have mentioned that fact. You just never knew who you were going to meet, and they were all the nicest people' (222).

SLSN

In his *New York Times Book Review* essay on *William Sloane Coffin, Jr.: A Holy Impatience* by Warren Goldstein (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), Richard Lingeman notes that Coffin is, at least superficially, a bit like Elmer Gantry. "But Gantry was corrupt, a rank hypocrite, and William Sloane Coffin was and is far from that.... Coffin was a passionate advocate for social justice. He tested in the political arena a faith based on the 'neo-orthodox Christianity' of Reinhold Niebuhr combined with the Gandhian social gospel of Martin Luther King Jr." (May 9, 2004: 16).

SLSN

Good Morning, Mr. Zip, Zip, Zip: Movies, Memory, and World War II by film critic Richard Schickel (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003) uses Lewis as a touchstone in several ways. Schickel spent his childhood in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee, and writes, "Sinclair Lewis just two decades earlier had described an old-fashioned American main street as 'the climax of civilization,' and something of that sense of unimprovable completion had now passed to suburbs like ours" (7). And of his father, he writes, "He was not a booster, not a Sinclair Lewis character" (160). Schickel enjoyed his childhood for the most part. "And our small towns—the occasional *Kings Row* or Sinclair Lewis novel to the contrary notwithstanding—remained, in popular culture, permanent bastions against the false glamour and slippery values of the big cities" (200).

SLSN

Classic Images, a monthly journal which focuses on Hollywood films, especially those prior to 1950, reviewed *Your Uncle Dudley*, a 1935 film starring Edward Everett Horton. He's described as "a civic do-gooder being played for a patsy by both his fellow Babbitts (who get rich while he gets trophies of appreciation) and his grasping sister-in-law" (August 2004:16).

SLSN

The Society of Cinephiles paid tribute to the actress Jean Simmons at Cinecon 39, according to the December 2003 *Classic Images*. Best known to Sinclair Lewis fans for playing Sharon Falconer in *Elmer Gantry*, Ms. Simmons also starred in such films as *The Robe*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Hamlet* with Laurence Olivier, and *The Actress*, playing a part based on the life of Ruth Gordon. Last year she was also honored by Queen Elizabeth and made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for her acting.

SLSN

Several actors connected with *Dodsworth* were featured in *Classic Images* June 2003. Herb Gafen's "Irene Manning: The Incomparable Diva" (6-11) discusses the woman who played Mrs. Dodsworth in the television movie opposite Walter Abel as Sam Dodsworth. Lionel Wilson, who was in the Broadway production of *Dodsworth*, died April 30, 2003. He later became the voice of the cartoon character Tom Terrific.

SLSN

The 1942 film *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.*, which asserts quite strongly that there were many Japanese fifth column activities in California prior to the beginning of World War II, makes reference to one of Lewis's novels. The film notes that "it is presented as a service to 'self-styled' patriots whose beguiling theme was it can't happen here." Needless to say the ring of Japanese spies is exposed and the film ends with actual footage of Japanese-Americans being rounded up to be sent to internment camps.

SLSN

A reference to *Babbitt* provides the opening for an article by Arthur S. Meyers entitled "'A Sturdy Core of Thinking, Fact Seeking Citizens': The Open Forum Movement and Public Learning in Terre Haute and Hammond, Indiana, in the 1920s" (*Indiana Magazine of History* 99 (2003): 353-59). "In Sinclair Lewis's fictional Zenith, Ohio [*sic*], in 1920, George Babbitt complained to his wife that their daughter and her beau were 'trudging off to lectures by authors and Hindu philosophers and Swedish lieutenants.' Lewis was describing an actual phenomenon taking place in several hundred industrial cities, including at least four in Indiana. The Open Forum lecture movement was remarkable: a locally planned, non-partisan, non-sectarian initiative in public learning, reaching thousands of people around the country. Expanding beyond the Chautauqua lecture movement in topics and locale, it brought a wide range of people together to discuss the vital concerns and intellectual advances of the day and to consider the core beliefs and values in their lives" (353).

SLSN

Laura Miller, in her *New York Times Book Review* column, "The Last Word," critiqued self-help books in anticipation of the reissue of the trade paperback of Thomas A. Harris's *I'm O.K.—You're O.K.* (20 June 2004: 23). She writes, "whoever Harris imagined as the readers for *I'm O.K.—You're O.K.* were a worldly bunch, energetic, curious and literate. He recaps scenes from Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* without stopping to explain the source and favors us with disquisitions on the subject of free will and the need for a secular concept of 'an objective moral order'—all inconceivable in a contemporary work of pop psychology." [Sounds like smart writing by Lowell Schmalz.]

SLSN

The *New York Times Magazine*, on February 8, 2004, featured an article on a Midwestern power plant that bought up a town and emptied it to make sure that residents weren't hurt by their pollutants. In "Something in the Air" (38-47), author Adam Goodheart writes a requiem to small towns. "When Sinclair Lewis published *Main Street* in 1920, there were living, thriving settlements that are now no more than a few churned bricks and rusty nails somewhere out on the prairie. Those towns gave way to forces larger than themselves...." (47).

SLSN

For those who found the article "The Fountain of Youth: Scandal and *Black Oxen*" in the spring 2004 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* interesting, there is another article that has recently been published on the same novel. In the June 2004 issue of *American Literature*, Julie Prebel has an article entitled "Engineering Womanhood: The Politics of Rejuvenation in Gertrude Atherton's *Black Oxen*" (76 (2004): 307-37). She examines theories of rejuvenation therapy in the 1920s, connecting it both to the hot topic of eugenics and to the "collaboration between literature and science that both registered and shaped American attitudes toward science as a means of restoring the individual and the nation to health" (308). She sees the rejuvenation as a sort of conversion narrative that connects to both the politics of

science and social hygiene as well as the sexual politics of rejuvenated womanhood.

—SLSN—

Charles E. Gould, Jr., an antiquarian bookseller and teacher at the Kent School in England, writes in *Book*

Source Magazine (May/June 2004) that “Sinclair Lewis will eventually emerge as a foremost, vital novelist of 20th Century America” (33). His essay, “Lifetime Sentences” (28-34), discusses different ways that he has taught literature to get students excited. He likes to teach *Babbitt* against John Updike’s *Rabbit Is Rich* because they both approach the same sorts of themes in American society, although separated by nearly 60 years.

Meet Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 15*

in her hired airplane to Vienna—where I had had a world scoop on a revolutionary uprising.

Source: Seldes, George. *Witness to a Century*. New York: Ballantine, 1987.

Matthew Josephson, biographer and author of *The Robber Barons* “*Millionaire novelist*”

The only literary figure in Katonah [NY], so far as I knew, proved to be the long-legged, red-haired Sinclair Lewis, who rented out one of the large estates in the neighborhood during the summer of 1925. With Malcolm Cowley, who was visiting me at the time, I went over to call on Lewis one evening, and found him with his wife and two guests. The house was a big, overstuffed Victorian mansion. They were sitting at dinner on stiff-backed Italian Renaissance chairs, Lewis looking almost feverish with discomfort, but very cordial and evidently happy to see Malcolm and me.

In truth, “Red” Lewis was drunk, as oftentimes happened.... After a while the master rose unsteadily to his feet, brusquely made his excuses to others and asked Malcolm and me to accompany him to his room upstairs. There, still in his dinner jacket and with his shoes on, he flung himself upon his sumptuous bed and ordered a servant to bring us some whisky.

Lewis had been a nonconformist in earlier life, and even a Socialist for a while. Now that he was America’s “millionaire novelist” his wife would have liked him to behave with the decorum of other members of the high-income class into which he had risen...

...although he was very impetuous and contrasuggestive by nature, Lewis had a lively intelligence and showed a warm interest in other writers....

Source: Josephson, Matthew. *Life among the Surrealists*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962.

Gordon Sinclair, journalist and broadcaster
Silent loner

I had one assignment with another Nobel Prize winner who seemed like a frightened zombie. For some obscure reason a syndicate sent Sinclair Lewis to Toronto to cover the convention of the American Federation of Labor on one of the few times that that convention was held outside the U.S.A.

The [Toronto] *Star* had one guy doing think pieces about it and another writing whatever spot news came along. I drew the latter assignment a few times and the chair next to Lewis.

He always looked as if he was about to wet his pants. He had this drawn-in face with bad skin and eyes that seemed to stare all the time. He’d already written *Babbitt*, *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith*, all of which I’d enjoyed, but in the long dull sessions of the labour unions I could never get him to talk about them.

Usually he was late getting to the meetings but he always stuck it out to the end and even when there was a recess and delegates slid off to their rooms to get a drink...Toronto had no bars at this time...Lewis sat there in silence, rebuffing anybody who came to speak to him and reading nothing. I never saw him even glance at any of the newspapers that were scattered around. I’d heard he was a pretty fair hand with a jug of rye but so far as I could see the man was a silent loner, sober as a vice president of A.A.

Once I tried to get him talking about clan Sinclair; you Sinclair, me Sinclair. He just looked straight ahead as if I was one of the chairs. So much for namesakes! (mid-1920s)

Source: Sinclair, Gordon. *Will Gordon Sinclair Please Sit Down*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975. ✍

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

The 34th celebration of Sinclair Lewis Days took place July 12-18, 2004 in Sauk Centre. Among the events were a craft show and flea market, a street dance, fireworks, and the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade. The grand marshal this year was Mel Ehlert who has participated in many volunteer activities within the community, including being a Catholic Aid field representative, serving on the hospital board of St. Michael's, the Sauk Centre City Council, and the Riverview Manor board, as well as being active in the Lions Club and a charter member of both the Knights of Columbus and the Eagles Club.

And of course, there was the annual Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. The participants were Crystal Edblom, Amanda Holman, Rochelle Jansen, Shantell Kuhlmann, Allison McDonald, Amanda Peterson, Dipali Patel, Anna Schumacher, Ashley Welle, and Kristine Winters. Named as queen was Anna Schumacher and princesses were Amanda Holman and Ashley Welle. Holman and Schumacher were also named Miss Congeniality. Kristine Winters was the winner of the talent competition for her rendition of the country hit "Redneck Woman." Schumacher dribbled two basketballs to the beat of music for her talent, a propitious choice since she is co-captain and a point guard on the high school basketball team, as well as having earned letters in track and tennis.

(Many thanks to Joyce Lyng for providing this information.)

THE SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION REINSTITUTES ANNUAL WRITERS' CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference was held this year on October 9, 2004. The lineup of speakers this year was especially strong, with Thomas Pope looking at films made from Lewis's novels, Frederick Manfred's daughter Freya speaking about poetry, and presentations on mystery writing and travel writing.

The keynote speaker was Thomas Pope who spoke on "Novels to Screen: How Sinclair Lewis's Books Translate to Film." By using film clips and brief readings from Lewis's books, Pope examined the films of *Elmer Gantry*, *Dodsworth*, and *Arrowsmith* and how they

compare to the novels. Pope has been a screenwriter for 33 years and his films include *Fraternity Row*, *Lords of Discipline*, *F/X*, *Someone to Watch over Me*, and *Bad Boys*.

The poet Freya Manfred, author of the poetry collections *A Goldenrod Will Grow*, *Yellow Squash Woman*, *American Roads*, *Flesh and Blood*, and *My Only Home*, spoke on how poets "play" by juxtaposing words and images and read from her latest collection, *My Only Home*. She was the conference keynote speaker in 1998 and her father was the keynote speaker at the first writers' conference in 1990.

Ron Lovell, a retired teacher and journalist who has published three mystery novels, *Murder at Yaquina Head*, *Dead Whales Tell No Tales*, and *Lights, Camera...Murder*, spoke on his strategies for planning, starting and completing mystery novels. Jim Umhoefer, the organizer and facilitator of the Sinclair Lewis Writers' conferences, spoke on how to turn vacations into travel stories for publication. His stories have been published in magazines such as *Country*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Motorhome*, *Odyssey*, and *Minnesota Monthly*.

NEW MEMBERS

A hearty welcome to these new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the spring 2004 issue.

Felicia Nimue Ackerman
Brown University
Providence, RI

Lorne Mook
Upland, IN

Jeff Farell
Wheatfield, MI

Dave Rowe
Asheville, NC

Department of Rare Books
Houghton Library
Harvard University

Donna M. Uphus
Sauk Centre, MN

Paul-Vincent McInnes
Chiba-Ken, Japan
formerly Glasgow, Scotland

LEWIS AND THE WEB

Over 20,000 people have accessed the Sinclair Lewis website in the year since the website was revamped. We have heard from people in Italy, Mexico, China, Portugal, and Scotland. Here are some of the questions that have been received recently.

I'm an expert on travel literature and I'm at the moment writing a book about travellers in Viareggio (Italy). I know Sinclair Lewis was in Viareggio and he liked the Carnival; do you know any text written by Lewis about this travel? [Although I don't know whether Lewis wrote about the Carnival in particular, he did love Italy (and even died there). Two novels, *Dodsworth* and *World So Wide*, are set in Italy and might be most useful to your search.]

Thank you very much for the info and I'll check there (and I'll let you know what I'll find. I think they also have materials in the Viareggio archive and definitely he wrote about Carnival for an American magazine). [In doing a little more research, I found that Lewis wrote a series of 10 articles for the *New York Journal American* in 1949. Hopefully the Viareggio archive would have the material. The articles are dated between January 2 and March 6 and have such titles as "Sinclair Lewis Finds Italy Tourist Haven" and "Sinclair Lewis Writes of His Travels in Italy." I haven't seen the articles but they are referred to in the biography of Lewis by Mark Schorer.]

————— SLSN —————

I have come across a reference to an article by Sinclair Lewis on fiction writing that was commissioned by Franklin Meine of *Nelson's Encyclopedia* in 1946. I am unable to find whether or not the piece was ever published. Would you have any knowledge of this? Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find a copy of Pastore's bibliography in any of the libraries close to me. Thank you for any help that you may offer. [The piece I think you're referring to is "No Flight to Olympus" which was published in the *American People's Encyclopedia* in 1948. It was reprinted in *A Sinclair Lewis Reader: The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings*,

1904-1950, edited by Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (NY: Random House, 1953): 185-89. Lewis calls this his "surly remarks" for he is trying to debunk the idea that anyone can write and that all writers will become famous and rich.]

————— SLSN —————

Years ago I read Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. I was telling my children about it, and my daughter (a high school junior) was very interested in reading it. So we went down to our local bookstore to buy a copy—and discovered that it is out-of-print. Went home, tried the internet for a used copy—and found, that these, too, are quite few and far between. Of all things to have out-of-print, especially now! Can you tell me if there are any plans anywhere to re-publish the title? Can you suggest a source for purchasing a copy?

————— SLSN —————

Gee...I checked amazon.com... evidently this book [*It Can't Happen Here*] is "out of print" and therefore is selling at a premium (i.e., more than \$10.00 for a paperback).

While that's OK for me (a good book is a bargain at any price), some of the book group "guys" like to read only paperback books at a reasonable cost—they may "resist."

Can this be true ?????— a major American author— some of his works are allowed to fall "out of print"... YIKES

————— SLSN —————

Do you know if ANYONE has plans to republish *It Can't Happen Here*?

[Signet plans to republish it in March 2005. I had hoped that it would be available before the election (I'm teaching it this semester), but no luck. A student of mine just discovered the novel as an e-text, kind of a pain to read, but all there. Go to <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/l/lewis/sinclair/happen/>]

 SLSN

You've done a nice job on the Sinclair Lewis website.

Our book club is reading *Main Street* and we are planning a trip to Sauk Centre on July 17th for the Sinclair Lewis Days.

My question is: do you know of any way to view the old silent movie of *Main Street*? I've looked for the movie on DVD and VHS as well as in libraries and can't seem to locate it. Any ideas how we might be able to view that movie, made in the 1920s? [Unfortunately neither the silent nor the sound version of *Main Street (I Married a Doctor)* is currently available.]

 SLSN

I am writing a book about a strike at Marion N.C. in 1929. Lewis published a small pamphlet called "Cheap and Contented Labor" in Nov. 1929 based on articles he wrote for Scripps-Howard News. I am trying to discover where the photos in the pamphlet came from and if it might be possible to get permission to use them. [Go to <http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/> and type in Sinclair Lewis. They have a whole bunch of pictures that one can use for a small fee.]

 SLSN

Can you please confirm if the following is a quote from *Elmer Gantry*?:

"Thirty second sound bites from the Bible followed by pure divinely inspired insight."

If so, do you happen to have a page reference? I appreciate your assistance as I am unable to locate a Search engine to scan the book. [No luck with this search.]

"Flipping from the Old Testament to the New Testament to create an aura of authority. Picking and choosing a sentence here, a proverb there."

Does any of this sound familiar?

Thanks for your help....

 SLSN

Somewhere Sinclair Lewis wrote "All they got to do is join us." The speaker was a fundamentalist preacher talking about reconciling Christian sects. I can't find it in

Elmer Gantry; I want to quote it, but I can't remember where I saw it many years ago. I should be most grateful if someone would be kind enough to help me. [No luck here either.]

 SLSN

I'm just a middle-mind guy (not an intellectual), but I'm very interested in "Babbitts" as, it seems, they make up 75% of the people in our country. Even if you know sources that describe this type person that don't call it by the name of "Babbitt" I'd be very interested. [You're right; the world is full of Babbitts. You might want to start with Sinclair Lewis's novel, *Babbitt*, which, although written in 1922, still gets at the heart of the middle-class, middle-aged businessman who drives so much of American capitalism. What's interesting about the novel is that the first half is very much a critique of American business practices, and the second half shows George Babbitt thinking (and having a mid-life crisis about) what brought him to this state in life. Lewis certainly influenced more contemporary writers including John Updike and Tom Wolfe.]

 SLSN

A friend has recommended *The Jungle* by Sinclair Lewis but I can find no trace of it anywhere. Can you help, please ?.....[no comment]

 SLSN

I have a question on Sinclair Lewis and was wondering if you could answer it for me:

"Although I am a minister, Sinclair Lewis uses my character to stand for insincerity and using publicity to gain power."

 SLSN

As someone who now is totally caught up in *Elmer Gantry* my curiosity is piqued—what sort of religion—if any—did Mr. Lewis partake of? If you can clue me in, I would deeply appreciate it. [At best, Lewis was probably an agnostic. He did have a fascination for religion and when he was attending Oberlin College (right before he entered Yale), he briefly considered becoming a missionary. I don't think during his adult life he actually belonged

to a particular religious faith although he attended church off and on all his life. He has a late novel, *The God-Seeker*, which deals with American missionaries in the midwest in the mid 1800s.]

SLSN

I have been researching our family history. My mother-in-law has never known much about her mother's side of the family, mostly due to a controlling and manipulative father. One bit she had heard is that her mother's mother worked as a cook for Sinclair Lewis, and that they had a fire in the manor; she jumped out a window and subsequently died. We aren't even sure of her name, it could have been Leone Leneau/Lenau, as her maiden name, or married surname Fichtenberg or some derivation thereof. She would have left a daughter behind, Telsie Fichtenberg. Does any of this ring any bells? Do you know if in fact there was a fire, where it may have occurred so that I can try to follow this up? [I checked in a couple of biographies of Lewis and didn't find either name in the index. Do you know where she might have worked for Lewis? He lived in many places in Minnesota and on the east coast, including Washington, New York City, and Vermont. There was a fire in one of the Vermont homes, Twin Farms, but that was in the 1960s, long after Lewis died in 1951.]

Probably New York City. I also am looking into the possibility that it was a place established by Upton Sinclair, but visited by Sinclair Lewis, in Englewood, NJ called Helicon Home Colony which burned in March 1907. I know the daughter, Telsie was born in Newark, NJ in 1891, and her father operated a candy store, or confectionary, in NJ. [This is probably a better lead.]

SLSN

Sally, I'm Mexican, my mind thinks in Spanish, please forgive my bad English.

Well, you—and the Society are a very courageous people (persons?) (sorry again for my English), because for us your web page its like a light in the night...(maybe we only five fans of Mr. Lewis—between 100 millions of Mexicans ... Really!!!, it's no joke, for example I bought (buy?) (purchased?) the novel: *El Doctor Arrowsmith* in an old edition (1940), was the only book I found, why???... because they have many pages and the Spanish and Mexi-

can publishers don't want to waste money in the marvelous work by Mr. Lewis.

Please—you are Americans—and have money... (I'm some poor)... TRY TO PUBLISH (EDITAR) again SOME BOOKS IN SPANISH BY LEWIS, because if you (or other associations) do, the work by this great man would not get lost... in Spanish.... okey???

Welll,... sorry this tried to be a email with congratulations (felicitaciones) for your COURAGE, because sometimes if we said the name: "Sinclair Lewis" in some American places is like talk about the devil... I live 200 miles away from the south Mexican gulf.... please do a copy from this email to all the courage people who help you in support this (your) practical (easy?) (useful?) page.
Bye (adios)

STUDENT QUERIES

My English class is doing projects about American authors. I chose Sinclair Lewis, and I was wondering if you could send me a newsletter or any other helpful information about Sinclair Lewis that would help me to get the most accurate information I can get about him.

SLSN

Hi, I am 15 and am [doing] a report on him [Lewis] and I would like to know his mother and father's name and how many brothers or sisters he had, if he had any and their names.

SLSN

Did Lewis have any impacts on American economics? If so what were they? During those times it was an all out fight to survive. [Not that I know of. Lewis wrote from 1912 to 1951, but primarily as a critic of American society. He did write during the Depression although not specifically about it.]

SLSN

I am a Chinese student and I'm preparing for my master degree paper. I love Sinclair Lewis's works so much. The title of my paper is Meditation on Rebellion in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and *Babbitt* but I cannot find enough materials in my city. I wonder if you can

afford me more details on my paper. Would you mind sending me some latest information on the rebellion of Sinclair Lewis and his *Main Street, Babbitt*? How can I get the following materials?

1. Sherman, Stuart P. *The Significance of Sinclair Lewis*

2. Fisher, Joel. *Sinclair Lewis and the Diagnostic Novel: Main Street and Babbitt*

3. Love, Glen A. *New Pioneering on the Prairies: Nature, Progress and the Individual in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis*

4. Bucco, Martin. *Main Street: The Revolt of Carol Kennicott*. [The easiest places to find materials are at amazon.com (slightly pricey) and abebooks.com which has an enormous list of used books for sale and a site I highly recommend.

Both the Sherman and Bucco books are available at both sites, the other two are not. Glen Love wrote an essay not a book with that title and it was published in the

American Quarterly 24 (1973): 558-77. Joel Fisher's piece is also an essay, published in the *Journal of American Studies* 20 (1986): 421-33.]

SLSN

I have a paper due tomorrow and I hope that you can help me.

What would you consider to be the strongest influence on Sinclair Lewis's life and writing? Would it be his life as a boy in Minnesota, surrounded by books that his stepmother would read to him, his experience as a young man in the socialist colony of Upton Sinclair, or perhaps the culture of the roaring 20s? [Your first supposition is probably closest to the truth. He would return to Minnesota both literally and in his fiction throughout his life. His time at Helicon Hall was interesting but lasted less than 6 months. And by the time the 1920s started he was 35 and an established writer.]

JOHN KOBLAS AND JESSE JAMES

John Koblas, who wrote *Sinclair Lewis: Home at Last* (1981), has had a busy career since, writing both on another Minnesota author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and western outlaws such as Jesse James and Cole Younger.

His *Guide to F. Scott Fitzgerald's St. Paul* was published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press in August 2004 and *Bushwackers! Cole Younger and the Kansas-Missouri Border War* was published by North Star Press of St. Cloud in July 2004.

The Jesse James Northfield Raid: Confessions of the Ninth Man, published by North Star Press in 1999, has been made into a documentary which was shown on PBS. The DVD is available from ECM FILMS, Attention: Bob Chambers, 1810 Shore Drive, St. Augustine, Florida 32086. Another of his books, *Robbers of the Rails: The Sontag Boys of Minnesota*, is also being filmed. It's about the Sontag brothers from Mankato who were train robbers and is being directed by Hollywood director Amber Lee Olson, who has also directed a recent film starring Matt Dillon.

ABOUT OUR MEMBERS

We note with sadness the passing of Elmer Suderman, Professor Emeritus of English at Gustavus Adolphus College. He received the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature's MidAmerica Award for distinguished contributions to the study of Midwestern Literature in 2001. He also presented at the 1985 Centennial Conference on Sinclair Lewis in St. Cloud, Minnesota. A published version of his presentation, "The God-Seeker in Sinclair Lewis's Novels," appeared in *Sinclair Lewis at 100: Papers Presented at a Centennial Conference*.

Jerry Leath Mills, who wrote "Sinclair Lewis, Jack London, and the 'Bo-Teaser'" for the fall 2002 issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* was mentioned in a *New York Times Book Review* essay on *The Darkest Child* by Delores Phillips. The reviewer, Lizzie Skurnick, starts the essay "In the fall of 1996, Jerry Leath Mills published an essay in *The Southern Literary Journal* asserting that the sole characteristic linking all Southern literature—the signifier, in academic parlance—was a dead mule" (March 28, 2004:11).

—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

Ralph Sipper, the book dealer, has just purchased a comprehensive Sinclair Lewis collection which may be of interest to our readers. There are over 60 books on the list and not catalogued yet are the Lewis letters and manuscripts that are part of the collection. Anyone interested in a list of the items may contact him at Ralph Sipper, Books Bought and Sold, 10 West Micheltorena, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, phone: (805) 962-2141, fax: (805) 966-5057, email: carolsipper@cox.net.

Among the featured items are *Hike and the Aeroplane* from 1912 preserved in a quarter-leather clamshell box for \$12,500; first edition of *Main Street* with the second issue dust jacket for \$10,000; a British edition of *Ann Vickers* inscribed "To Christina Foyle with the greetings of Sinclair Lewis & apologies for not being what Babbitt would call 'luncheon-minded'"; the screenplay to the unproduced movie of *It Can't Happen Here* for \$1,500; a British edition of *Cass Timberlane* inscribed to Marcella Powers for \$6,500; and the contract for the films rights to *Elmer Gantry* signed by Swifty Lazar and Burt Lancaster for \$2,250.

PBA Galleries

133 Kearny Street, San Francisco, CA
Preview & Auction Gallery, Fourth Floor
Thursday, May 27, 1:00 pm

FIRST ISSUE OF *BABBITT* IN DUST JACKET

125. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. Blue cloth lettered and stamped in orange, jacket. First Edition, First Issue. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922.

First issue, with "Purdy" in line 4, page 49 (later replaced by "Lyte"), and "my" in line 5, page 49 (later replaced by "any"). Jacket expertly restored with tiny chips and tears mended on verso and those spots with the colors retouched, all flap corners clipped with no printed price present, spine and portion of front cover a bit faded; volume spine slightly leaning and sunned, mild soiling, top edge dusty; hinges cracking; very good in a very good or better jacket. (900/1200) Sold for \$950.

126. —. *Babbitt*. Blue cloth lettered and stamped in orange, Grosset & Dunlap reprint jacket. First Edition, First Issue. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922.

Jacket is from the Grosset & Dunlap reprint edition. Light edge wear and rubbing to jacket; soiling and shelf wear to volume, top edge dusty; front hinge cracking; else very good in like jacket. (300/500) Sold for \$150.

ELMER GANTRY IN JACKET

127. —. *Elmer Gantry*. Blue cloth lettered and stamped in orange, jacket, housed in a custom clear plexiglass slipcase. First Edition, First Binding. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.

First binding, with the "G" in "Gantry" on the spine strongly resembling a "C." All jacket flap corners evenly clipped with the publisher's printed "\$2.50" price at the end of the front flap text. From the Library of Arthur W. Stone. Faint dampstains to slightly darkened jacket spine, short tears and tiny chips with light creases to edges, mild rubbing; shelf wear, 2" discoloration spot to rear board; hinges cracking; very good in a very good jacket—still an attractively clean and bright copy. (1000/1500) Sold for \$850.

128. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. Blue cloth stamped and lettered in orange. First Edition, later issue. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.

Later issue with page number imperfect on p. 54 and the "y" in "may" on line 42, p. 387 is imperfect. Joints and extremities rubbed, soiling, dark spots and fading to spine; slight offsetting to free endpapers, occasional foxing; else very good. (800/1200) This lot went unsold.

SIGNED BY SINCLAIR LEWIS

129. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. Blue cloth stamped in orange, with a pictorial (Grosset & Dunlap) jacket. Later printing. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921.

Inscribed presentation copy, signed in black ink by Sinclair Lewis on the front free endpaper "To Charles H. Ayers, who b

much more to do with the success of this slight pamphlet than—Sinclair Lewis, June 16, 1922, N.Y.C.” This copy published approximately one year after the first printing. The jacket is from the Grosset & Dunlap issue. Chips and tears with light creases to jacket edges, large circular dampstain on rear panel, couple small tape repairs on verso; volume spine a bit faded, light shelf wear and soiling; front hinge cracked, mild foxing chiefly to endpapers and page edges; else very good in about very good jacket. (1000/1500) This lot went unsold.

Peter L. Stern & Co., Inc.

55 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111
Phone: (617) 542-2376 Fax: (617) 542-3263
Email: psbook@aol.com

MARCH 2004

127. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. First Edition.

Offsetting on the title page and the opposite page listing the author's previous books, else a near fine copy in a jacket with some chipping. \$350.00

JUNE 2004

A PRE-TELEVANGELIST

116. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.

First Edition; first binding. A fine copy in a dust jacket with some small chips and tears and very minor soiling and wear. \$3500.00

Gerard A.J. Stodolski, Inc.

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555 Canal Street, Manchester, NH 03101
Phone: (603) 647-0716 Fax: (603) 623-3585
www.gajs.com

CATALOGUE 103

3. Lewis, Sinclair. Typed Letter Signed, “Sinclair Lewis,” on imprinted The Lombardy, 111 East 56th Street, New York City letterhead. One page, octavo. New York, May 10, 1939.

Excellent condition. To “Mr. Ralph D. Hartman, 1106 East 111th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.” Lewis writes:

“Dear Mr. Hartman: If you will send me one of my books with stamped and self-addressed wrapper enclosed, I will try to autograph it for you. Yours sincerely, Sinclair Lewis.” \$650.00

Biblioctopus

120 South Crescent Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212
Phone: (310) 271-2173
www.biblioctopus.com

LIST 78

PRESENTATION COPY IN UNREPAIRED JACKET

50. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922.

1st edition. A classic by the first American author to win the Nobel Prize. **Contemporary signed presentation copy**. Fine in an unrestored jacket with little chips to the spine tips and 1 corner. \$8,500.

51. —. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925.

1st edition. **One of 500 signed copies**, being the entire 1st edition, and the state in which to own *Arrowsmith*, as the trade edition was identified as the “second printing” on the copyright page. The book's fine, the glassine jacket's near fine and so is the slipcase. \$5,000.

Between the Covers Rare Books, Inc.

35 W Maple Ave, Merchantville NJ 08109
Phone: (856) 665-2284 Fax: (856) 665-3639
Email: mail@betweenthecovers.com
www.betweenthecovers.com

CATALOGUE 108

113. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1000.

First edition, first issue with “Gantry” spelled “Cantry” on the spine. Fine in a bright, very good dustwrapper with several shallow chips and tears. A flawed but pleasing copy, basis for the memorable film with Burt Lancaster and Shirley Jones, who both won Oscars, as did the screenplay of director Richard Brooks.

114. —. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$4500.

First edition. Fine in an exceptionally bright and fine, second issue dustwrapper. Basis for the excellent 1936 William Wyler film featuring Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, Mary Astor, David Niven, and Maria Ouspenskaya. A superb copy.

LIST 46: THE RIGHT STUFF

165. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge: Being the Soul of Lowell Schmalz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928.

First edition. Fine in fine dustwrapper. A beautiful copy. \$1250.

166. —. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933.

First edition. Fine in fine, white dustwrapper with a faint smudge on the front panel. The first edition was limited to 2350 copies printed on rag paper. A beautiful copy. \$650.

167. —. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1935.

First edition. Fine in fine, silver foil-type dustwrapper. An unusually nice copy of this increasingly uncommon title. A novel about America under a dictatorship, precipitated by the spate of demagogues of the Huey Long/Father Coughlin stripe then current. \$750.

LIST 41 NEW ARRIVALS

209. Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1935.

First edition. Spine gilt a little tarnished else fine in an attractive, very good silver dustwrapper that is a bit rubbed and has two very small chips. A novel about America under a dictatorship, precipitated by the demagoguery of the middle 1930s. \$175.

210. —. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, 1949.

First edition. Fine in near fine, lightly worn dustwrapper. A nice copy of this novel about the Minnesota frontier. \$200.

LIST 48: MORE FROM THE PRODIGAL LIBRARY; OR BACK FROM THE DEAD, PART TWO—LITERATURE

176. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929.

Reprint edition. Modest wear to the spinal extremities, a sound, about very good copy lacking the dustwrapper. Inscribed by the author: "To Mrs. Rose Sinclair from Sinclair Lewis—Love! N.Y. March 30, 1934." \$375.

177. —. *Bethel Merriday*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1940.

First edition. Small owner label else fine in near fine dustwrapper with light wear at the extremities. A better than usual copy of a relatively common title. \$125.

178. —. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943.

First edition. Fine in a lightly worn, very good dustwrapper with some rubbing and short tears. \$75.

Ken Lopez Bookseller

51 Huntington Rd., Hadley, MA 01035
Phone: (413) 584-4827 Fax: (413) 584-2045
Email: klopez@well.com
www.lopezbooks.com

CATALOG 132

153. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Job*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917.

The first issue of his third book under his own name and his first attempt, he later said, to write a serious novel. *The Job* was controversial in its time for its realistic depiction of a woman in the workplace and laid the groundwork for Lewis's great novels of social realism in the 1920s. Offsetting to endpages from dust jacket flaps; near fine in a good dust jacket, spine-sunned and modestly damp-stained with several very small chips and one larger chip affecting the spine title, with some attempts at internal tape-mending. An extremely scarce book in any dust jacket, and an important title in the Lewis canon. \$9500.

Robert Dagg Rare Books

2087 Union Street, Suite 1, San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 474-7368 Fax: (415) 474-7382
Email: daggbooks@worldnet.att.net

MARCH MISCELLANY 2004

125. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$450.

First Edition. *Advance copy with publisher's rubber-stamp on front flyleaf giving publication date.* A fine clean copy lacking the very rare dust jacket. Pulitzer Prize.

126. —. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1750.

First Edition. First issue binding with G resembling a C on spine. Near fine copy in a bright unfaded dust jacket with some minor restoration at top and bottom of spine panel.

127. —. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1934. \$150.

First Edition. A fine bright copy in dust jacket (neatly price clipped).

128. —. *Main Street*. With a Special Introduction by the Author. Illustrations by Grant Wood. Chicago: Printed for the Members of the Limited Editions Club at the

Lakeside Press, 1937. \$750.

First Illustrated Edition. *One of 1500 numbered copies signed by the illustrator.* A lovely fine copy in the original glassine dust jacket and publisher's box (spine label slightly faded, minutely nicked at edges). It is very unusual to find the slipcase undamaged. Beautifully illustrated edition of this classic.

AUGUST MISCELLANY 2004

141. [Lewis, Sinclair]. *History of the Class of 1907.* Yale College. Vol. II. Edited by Thomas A. Tully. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor Press, 1913. \$150.

First Edition. Contains on pp. 180-81 a 31-line autobiographical statement by Lewis, who at that time was employed by the New York publishing house of Frederick Stokes. Lewis ends by saying, "Stokes will publish a boy's book of adventure [*Hike and the Aeroplane*] by me in the fall, but it is not written under my name; concerns aeroplanes. Still have the same desire to do the "Great American Novel"—realistic and high-brow." Some light wear and spotting to cloth. Otherwise a very good copy.

142. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Trail of the Hawk.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915. \$350.

First Edition. With "Published September, 1915/H-P" at bottom of copyright page. A fine fresh copy, lacking the rare jacket.

143. —. *The Trail of the Hawk. A Comedy of the Seriousness of Life.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1923. \$850.

First English Edition. Rubber-stamped "Colonial Edition" on half-title page and bottom of front jacket flap. Some mottling to blue cloth as well as some limited fading at edges. Prior owner signature partially bleached out on flyleaf. A very good copy in a dust jacket missing a few small chips (one just grazing the first "T" in the title at top of spine) but still 90% complete. This is the earliest British edition of Lewis that we have seen in dust jacket (British editions of *Main Street* and *Babbitt* were published in 1921 and 1922 respectively).

144. —. *The Innocents. A Story for Lovers.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$350.

First Edition. With "Published October, 1917/F-R" at bottom of copyright page. A very fine fresh copy, lacking the rare jacket.

145. —. *The Job.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$350.

First Edition. With "Published February, 1917/B-R" at bottom of copyright page. Minor bump to bottom edge of front cover, else a particularly fine fresh copy of this early novel, lacking the rare jacket.

146. —. *The Job.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$750.

First English Edition. Some very faint spotting to page edges, but otherwise a fine copy, with blue cloth particularly bright, in the scarce dust jacket which is minutely worn at corners with a few tiny stains (small spots) to spine panel. Very scarce in jacket.

147. —. *Free Air.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919. \$250.

First Edition. Fine copy lacking the scarce jacket.

148. —. *Main Street.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. \$350.

First Edition. First issue with perfect folio on page 54. A solid, near fine copy, lacking the rare jacket.

150. —. *Babbitt.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$2750.

First Edition. First issue. A fine copy in an unusually bright, clean dust jacket, completely unfaded, with some restoration at flap folds and base of spine (not affecting any lettering). Particularly attractive copy of this highspot.

151. —. *Babbitt.* With an Introduction by Hugh Walpole. London: Jonathan Cape, 1922. \$250.

First English Edition. Possibly a colonial issue in slightly reduced-size format. Blue cloth stamped in black on spine and front cover. A very good clean copy with spine significantly faded. Lacking the dust jacket.

152. —. *Arrowsmith.* Toronto: George J. McLeod, Limited, 1925. \$100.

First Canadian Edition. Boards very slightly damp-marked at leading edges of front and rear boards. Otherwise a very good clean copy, lacking the scarce jacket.

153. —. *Mantrap.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$350.

First English Edition. A near fine copy in a dust jacket which is slightly tanned at spine panel with some very minor wear at top of spine.

154. —. *Elmer Gantry.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1750.

First Edition. First issue. A fine clean copy in a bright unfaded dust jacket with a few minor closed tears and a small triangular chip at bottom edge of rear panel.

155. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1928. \$150.

First English Edition. Neat owner inscription on flyleaf.

Else a fine clean copy in a bright crisp dust jacket missing chips from top and bottom of spine panel (just removing the final two letters in the author's first name at head of spine).

156. —. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$500.

First Edition. *One of 500 copies bound up in orange cloth, stamped in black on spine, with front and rear covers blank, top edges stained black, and with printed statement on flyleaf: "This is a special edition presented to the trade in advance of publication and is not for sale." A clean, near fine copy. Probably not issued in printed jacket.*

157. —. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933. \$250.

First Edition. The first printing of this novel was limited to 2350 copies. A fine copy with none of the usual fading to the spine of the book, in a near fine dust jacket, very slightly tanned at spine panel with a two-inch closed tear at bottom of front flap fold, but virtually no loss.

158. —. *Ann Vickers*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1933. \$250.

First English Edition. A fine copy in an exceptionally bright, crisp dust jacket, virtually unworn but with two short closed tears and some mottling to the red portions of the front panel.

160. —. *Work of Art*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1934. \$150.

First English Edition. A fine copy (particularly tight and clean, with no foxing whatsoever) in dust jacket with some fading to the spine panel.

161. —. *It Can't Happen Here*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1935. \$175.

First English Edition. Some light foxing to page edges. Else fine in a fine dust jacket.

162. —. *It Can't Happen Here*. A new version, by Sinclair Lewis, of the play by John C. Moffitt and Sinclair Lewis from the Lewis novel. [New York]: Dramatists Play Service, 1938. \$150.

First Edition. Stated "First Edition" on copyright page. A fine copy in wrappers (slightly tanned at spine).

163. —. *Selected Short Stories*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1935. \$375.

First Edition. Fine copy in a near fine dust jacket with some very minor chipping (primarily at base of spine, one small chip at top edge). The first collection of Lewis's short stories. Uncommon.

164. —. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1938. \$150.

First Edition. Fine copy in dust jacket with some minor restoration at head of spine panel.

165. —. *The Prodigal Parents*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1938. \$125.

First English Edition. Light foxing to page edges. Else fine in bright dust jacket (minor tears).

166. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$650.

First Edition. *One of an unknown number of copies signed by Lewis on a tipped-in leaf. A fine copy in a fine dust jacket with only some light rubbing at edges, but bright and crisp. This signed issue is scarce.*

167. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$150.

First Edition. Fine copy in bright unfaded dust jacket with some minor edgewear at spine ends.

168. —. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943. \$150.

First Edition. Fine in bright unfaded dust jacket missing a few small chips at top and bottom of flap folds.

169. —. *Gideon Planish*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1943. \$100.

First English Edition. A fine copy in a near fine dust jacket a little faded at spine with some minor wear at head of spine panel.

170. —. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. \$75.

First Edition. Fine copy in bright dust jacket (in the gre variant) which has been folded twice and so is creased at spine vertically, and horizontally at front and rear panels.

171. —. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. \$75.

First Edition. Fine copy in bright dust jacket (in the gre variant) which has some very minor wear at spine ends.

172. —. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House, 1947. \$500.

First Edition. *One of an unknown number of copies signed by Lewis on a specially printed bookplate issued by Kroch's B*

stores in Chicago. A fine copy in a nearly fine dust jacket.

173. —. *Kingsblood Royal*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1948. \$100.

First English Edition. Some light foxing to page edges. Else fine in a fine dust jacket, very slightly faded at spine.

174. —. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, 1949. \$150.

First Edition. Some light soiling to page edges. Otherwise fine in dust jacket.

175. —. *The God-Seeker*. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1949. \$100.

First English Edition. Fine copy in a very good, price-

clipped dust jacket, with several internal brown-paper tape repairs (and one scotch-tape repair which has bled through to the bottom of the front flap).

176. —. *Storm in the West*. By Sinclair Lewis and Dore Shary. Introduction by Dore Shary. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1964. \$75.

First English Edition. Fine copy in bright unfaded dust jacket (one closed tear, minor rubbing).

178. *They Still Say No*. By Wells Lewis. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939. \$175.

First Edition. *Inscribed on flyleaf by Grace Hegger Lewis, the author's mother, and dated 1939*. Very good copy in a dust jacket with some chipping at edges. A novel by Sinclair Lewis's son.

WHAT IF IT HAPPENED HERE?

Philip Roth's new novel, *The Plot Against America* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), seems to be channeling *It Can't Happen Here*. It also is set in the 1930s in a time of economic and social turmoil. Charles Lindbergh, American hero, anti-Semite, and admirer of Hitler, is elected president with serious results, especially for the Jewish family at the heart of the novel. As Paul Berman writes in his review of the novel in the *New York Times Book Review* of October 3, 2004, "There is a solid tradition in American letters of novels like this, phantasmagoric pictures of a United States whose every promise has been turned upside down—jeremiads about America's ability to transmute overnight into a fascist monstrosity. Jack London wrote the earliest example that anyone still reads today, I think—*The Iron Heel*, in 1908, from the period before the word 'fascism' even existed.... Nearly 30 years later Nathaniel West produced a variation of his own called *A Cool Million*, which the Library of America resurrected not long ago—a freaky picture of America taken over by right-wing screwballs. But the classic of classics has always been Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, from 1935. The very title of Lewis's novel entered long ago into the American language, a sardonic phrase, mocking the sweet naifs who persist in believing that evil dwells anywhere but at home.

"It is a bit odd to think of Philip Roth as a descendant of Sinclair Lewis, but when I reflect on some recent

appreciative essays on Lewis by John Updike and Gore Vidal, it occurs to me that half the writers in America may be Lewis's descendants. For what has Roth been doing during these past 45 years, except fulminating against the conformist oppressions and hypocrisies of bourgeois life, writing Lewis's *Babbitt* in versions all his own—sexual, generational, comic, anti-McCarthyite, anti-P.C., antipuritanical, academic, East Coast, Middle Western and Jewish? One of Roth's characters in *The Human Stain*, fuming over America's prissiness and the impeachment of Bill Clinton, wonders how the stupid public could have learned so little about human nature over the years. For hasn't anyone read *Babbitt*? And so, having dwelled over *Babbitt* for long enough, Roth has evidently decided to dwell over *It Can't Happen Here*, and has even found a clever way of setting his own tale of America-goes-fascist in the post-1935 era, exactly as Sinclair Lewis did—quite as if *The Plot Against America* and *It Can't Happen Here*, not to mention *A Cool Million*, were, all of them, contemporaries: nervous novels from the Age of Roosevelt" (14).

This review, as well as the one in the *Chicago Tribune* (October 3, 2004: 14:1), was very favorable. If any readers of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* read the novel over the holidays and want to write a response to it, that would be great. Please e-mail your comments to separry@ilstu.edu by January 30, 2005.

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